

Question #4

Q: How and why did God create us?

A: God created us male and female in His own image to know Him, love Him, live with Him, and glorify Him. And it is right that we who were created by God should live to His glory.

I. God created us in His own Image

We have already seen that the triune God is the Creator of everything.¹ However, as we move from the snapshot perspective of God's creation of all things in Genesis chapter 1, Moses slows down in chapter 2 to focus on the apex and pinnacle of creation: humanity.

This is an extremely relevant truth in our nihilistic day and age where we are constantly told that nothing or nobody really matters. The Bible says that nothing could be further from the truth. God knowingly, intentionally, personally, and lovingly created us. And, because we're made in His image, we – and every other human being every created – have an intrinsic worth and dignity. Moreover, because we are made in God's image, we have inalienable, God-given rights that no other human can take from us.

As our previous three questions all began in the creation account, so also does our study this morning.

Whereas the rest of creation was created *ex nihilo* – “out of nothing” – by the powerful and effectual Word of God², we are told that mankind – ‘*adam*’ – was created in a different manner:

Then God said, “Let us make man (‘adam’) in Our image, after Our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the

¹ When Moses says that God created “the heavens and the earth,” he means that God created everything (this is the literary device known as a *merism*).

² Hebrews 11:3 – “By faith we understand that the universe was created by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things that are visible.”

heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.”

*So God created man in His own image,
in the image of God He created him;
male and female He created them.*

And God blessed them. And God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth.” (Genesis 1:26-28)

And,

*Then the LORD God formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living creature.
(Genesis 2:7)*

The animals were made “according to their kinds,” that is, according to the pattern prescribed by God. But man is made after the pattern of God Himself.³

Theologians have long puzzled over what exactly the image of God is, and what it consists of. Gentry⁴ offers the most common interpretations:

- a. The terms “image” and “likeness” are distinct aspects of man’s nature (from Irenaeus, c. AD 180 onwards). The “image” denotes the natural qualities in man (personality, reason, etc.) that make him resemble God, while the “likeness” refers to the supernatural (i.e. ethical) graces that make the redeemed godlike.
 - Lexical analysis of “image” and “likeness” shows that this distinction is foreign to Genesis.
- b. The divine image refers to the mental and spiritual qualities that man shares with his Creator.
 - Though this is the traditional and majority view that Christians have held throughout the centuries, the fact that many commentators

³ John Frame, *Systematic Theology*, (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2013), 784.

⁴ Peter Gentry and Stephen Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 183-85.

cannot agree in identifying these qualities in Scripture makes this approach suspect.

- c. The image consists of a physical resemblance. The word *tselem* (“image”) often refers to a physical image or statue, and in 5:3 Adam is described as fathering Seth “in his image,” which most likely refers to physical appearance.
 - The OT, however, emphasizes the incorporeality and invisibility of God (Deut. 4:12). Moreover, in the ANE, to be in the image of the gods referred to the function of the king and not to his appearance.
- d. The divine image makes man God’s representative on earth.
 - Careful exegesis indicates that the ruling function is a *result* of being made in the divine image and *not the image itself*.
- e. The image is a capacity to relate to God. The divine image means that God can enter into personal relationships with man, speak to him, and make covenants with him.
- f. To be made in God’s image means that humans uniquely have been endowed with ethical qualities that reflect God Himself (for example, knowledge, righteousness, and holiness).⁵
- g. To be made in God’s image consists in God creating humanity to be His stewards over the rest of creation.

Though there is certainly truthfulness in all these suggestions, the context of Genesis 1 and 2 seems to favor the last understanding, namely that God – *the Lord* – has equipped⁶ mankind to be lord⁷ of the world, under the Lordship of Yahweh. In the words of Gentry, humanity is described as a servant-king.⁸

⁵ See Ephesians 4:24; Colossians 3:10.

⁶ In v.26, the ESV translates the second phrase, “And let them have dominion over...”. In Hebrew the ׀ (*waw*) can certainly be translated “and” when between verbs. However, it can also be – and often is – translated as a purpose clause. Thus, v.26 could also be translated, “Let us make man in Our image, after our likeness, so that they may have dominion over...”.

⁷ Gentry: “To sum up, the term “image of god” in the culture and language of the ANE in the fifteenth century BC would have communicated two main ideas: (1) rulership and (2) sonship. The king is the image of god because he has a relationship to the deity as the son of god and relationship to the world as ruler for the god. In *Kingdom through Covenant*, 192. Cf. pp. 189ff.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 195.

That is, there is not only an ontological component to “image,” but also a functional one as well.⁹ As Frame notes, “So the image of God consists of those qualities that equip man to be lord of the world, under God.”¹⁰

As Gentry notes:

Man *is* the divine image. As servant king and son of Gd mankind will mediate God’s rule to creation in the context of a covenant relationship with God on the one hand and the earth on the other...No wonder the Mosaic covenant...can be summarized as providing divine direction concerning (1) a right relationship to God, (2) how to treat each other in genuinely human ways, and (3) how to be good stewards of the earth’s resources.¹¹

This is extremely practical. Again, Frame is helpful:

Man’s responsibility to fill and subdue the earth is sometimes called the *cultural mandate*. That language brings out the fact that man’s task is one of turning the earth into a habitat for man, one suited to the needs and purposes of man. This task involves not only the cultivation of crops for food, but also the arts, sciences, and literature, by which human life becomes more than mere subsistence. And at the deepest level, man’s labor has the goal of bringing praise and glory to God. So he is to structure his life and culture according to God’s standards.¹²

Moreover, when we look at the NT, we see just how important man being created in God’s image is with regards to our redemption and sanctification.¹³

- Ephesians 4:24 (NLT) – “Put on your new nature, created to be like God – truly righteous and holy.”
- Colossians 3:10 (NLT) – “ Put on your new nature, and be renewed as you learn to know your Creator and become like Him.”

⁹ Cf. Gordon Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*. Word Biblical Commentary (Waco, TX: Word), 31.

¹⁰ Frame, *Systematic Theology*, 786.

¹¹ Gentry, *KTC*, 201.

¹² Frame, *Systematic Theology*, 787.

¹³ For a biblical theology of this, see J. Gary Millar, *Changed Into His Likeness: A Biblical Theology of Personal Transformation* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2021).

The restoration of God's "image" was so important to God that the second member of the Trinity – the Son – became a human (through the incarnation) and lived for the entirety of His life as a (or better, *the*) true son/human/image-bearer of God as our representative.

This is especially seen in Paul's argument in Romans 5:

Therefore, as one trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one act of righteousness leads to justification for all men. For as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous. (vv.18-19)

Adam – the image of God – ruined that image through his rebellious transgression of God's command. The second Adam – Jesus the true image of God – restores this image for "the many" through His faithful obedience to God's command.¹⁴

Thus, it is only through our identification with, and union to, Jesus Christ that we can actually live as God intended us to live. In Christ, and by the power of the Holy Spirit, we are able to:

1. Live rightly with our Creator
2. Live rightly with our neighbor
3. Live rightly in our world

Moreover, God's commission for Adam and Eve to replicate and multiply God's image – through His [human] image-bearers – throughout the world, is also transformed through Christ and the gospel. That is, "be fruitful and multiply" takes on an entirely new meaning, as it is only "in Christ" that God's image is restored, and that one is united to Christ only through faith in the gospel.¹⁵

- 2 Corinthians 5:17 – "So then, if anyone [is] in Christ, new creation! The old things passed away. Behold, new things have come!"¹⁶

¹⁴ Most scholars see the "one act of righteousness" as His death on the cross, which is but the culmination and fullest expression of a life of total and perfect obedience to all of God's commands for Him.

¹⁵ This is Paul's line of reasoning in Romans 10:14-17 for why he needs support as a gospel missionary.

¹⁶ This is my own literal translation of the Greek. I do like the the NIV's translation of the first clause ("...the new creation has come") and the NET's translation of the second clause ("See, what is new has come!").

II. Male and Female

Again, we see just how practical theology is. Until only recently, one would have never thought that we would have to battle against the satanic lie that “gender is a social construct” created by evil tyrants as a means to control and manipulate the masses.¹⁷

To the contrary, the Bible teaches that gender is something that is beautiful and to be celebrated, for it is part of God’s good and orderly creation and will for us.

This is why things like chauvinism, feminism, and egalitarianism¹⁸ are so ugly, both in culture as well as the church.

The Bible clearly teaches that both male and female are equally “the image of God,” though this image is expressed differently on an individual level:

*So God created man [singular] in His own image,
in the image of God He created him [singular];
male and female He created them [plural].*

And God blessed them. And God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it.” (Genesis 1:27-28a)

That is, the fulfillment of God’s mission and mandate for His image bearers – “man” – requires the fullness of “man” – *both* male *and* female to work together and in harmony, in the home, the church, and the culture.

There are strengths that God has uniquely and graciously given to men, and there are strengths that God has uniquely and graciously given to women. *Both* are to use these strengths “for the common good.”¹⁹

¹⁷ According to Romans 1:18ff., gender confusion is evidence of God’s judgment upon a people/nation. An “unfit” (LSB) mind is the consequence of continued rejection of God’s glory.

¹⁸ Egalitarianism teaches that men and women are equal in every way, and that there are not specific gender ‘roles’ assigned to each. Complementarianism teaches that men and women are indeed equal in value, worth, and dignity, but that God has given each unique strengths to complement each other for the betterment of the house, the church, and the society.

¹⁹ I’m borrowing, not eisogeting, from Paul’s words in 1 Corinthians 12, which emphasize the triune God’s wisdom in assigning different roles and gifts to the various ‘parts’ of the body [here, the church] for its health and growth.

- Cf. Ephesians 5:21-32; Colossians 3:18-19; 1 Timothy 2:8-15; 3:2; Titus 1:6; 2:1-6; 1 Peter 3:7.

Let us forever rid ourselves of the culture's definition of a successful man or successful woman, as if our worth and dignity are dependent upon a degree or big salary.

Finally, contrary to the teachings and assertions of 'evangelical'²⁰ feminism, redemption in Christ does not remove the gender distinctions that God created before mankind's fall into sin.²¹

III. To Glorify Him

As the Westminster Shorter Catechism [rightly] begins, "The chief end of man is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever."

For everything comes from Him and exists by His power and is intended for His glory. All glory to Him forever! (Romans 11:36, NLT²²)

God created us for His glory. And when we live in light of this, our lives will make sense, for we are living in harmony with the very purpose of our existence.

On the contrary, it is when we live as glory thieves that life becomes bitter and miserable and unfulfilling.²³ In the words of Jeremiah²⁴, we exchange the living

²⁰ The scare quotes indicate that the words 'evangelical' and 'feminism' do not belong together and are an oxymoron.

²¹ Their favorite proof text is Galatians 3:28, which says, "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus." The ESV Study Bible provides a helpful and concise explanation: "There is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female does not imply that there are no distinctions in how these groups should act, for Paul elsewhere commands slaves ("bondservants," esv footnote) and masters differently (Eph. 6:5-9), and husbands and wives differently (Eph. 5:22-33). Paul clearly is not advocating the elimination of all distinctions nor the acceptability of same-sex marriage or homosexual relations (see Rom. 1:26-27). Rather, he teaches that old divisions and wrongful attitudes of superiority and inferiority are abolished, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. He does not take away the distinction between men and women but says they are "united," joined together in "one" body, the church. The verse teaches unity within diversity but not sameness." ESV Study Bible (Kindle Locations 302856-302862). Crossway. Kindle Edition.

²² The NLT beautifully paraphrases the three prepositions Paul uses: *ek*, ("from"), *dia*, ("through"), and *eis* ("unto").

²³ Again, this is Paul's argument in Romans 1. According to 1:21, when humans – in their pride and hubris – deny God what is rightfully His – namely, His glory – chaos (i.e. insanity, idolatry, and futility) is the logical and inevitable result (v.22) and exchange (v.23). Tragically, apart from sovereign grace, we gladly choose what condemns us and never satisfies us. This is why Paul is so indebted and eager to preach the gospel to others (1:16-18).

²⁴ The insanity of our "free will" to choose folly [idolatry] over the true and living God is highlighted by God calling the heavens and earth to be appalled as they witness this exchange. See Jeremiah 2:11-13. Because Israel's heart "loves" idols and trusting in foreigners for safety (2:25), a major message in Jeremiah is the necessity of God circumcising their wicked hearts by inaugurating a new covenant (4:4; 9:25; 9:31-34)

waters of God's lordship – which leads to life and blessing – for the broken cisterns that hold no water and bring only spiritual sickness and misery to us.

Application

1. The great commission – make disciples of all nations – is intricately linked to the great commandment – love your neighbor as yourself. If we love our neighbor, who has been created in God's image, but in Adam bears a broken image, we will long to see them restored to God and His purposes for them, which is possible only "in Christ."

And so, in the words of Paul, we as God's ambassadors – God making His appeal through us – implore our neighbors, on behalf of Christ, to be reconciled to God through Christ (2 Corinthians 5:20), the sinless One who became a sin offering for our sins that we might become the righteousness of God (5:21).

2. Because all people are made in God's image, sexism and racism are great sins. There are not many "races." According to the Bible, there is only one race: the human race.
 - Again, the gospel is the solution to this.
 - Ephesians 2:11-21 – Christ has made His people "one," for they all belong to and thus are "in" Him, "the new man." The cost of this horizontal peace: Jesus' death on a cross.
3. Because all people are made in God's image, all murder – including abortion and euthanasia – is a grave sin.
 - This is why God implemented capital punishment for murder in the OT
 - Genesis 9:5-6 – "From his fellow man I will require a reckoning for the life of man. Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed, for God made man in His own image."²⁵

²⁵ Interestingly, the very next verse says, "And you, be fruitful and multiply, increase greatly on the earth and multiply in it." It seems that murder of our fellow humans is not only an attack against God's character, whose image we bear, but also against His creation mandate and mission for us (cf. 11:4).

4. Because all people are made in God's image, they have dignity, worth, value, irrespective of their age, intelligence, wealth, gender, or physical abilities.
 - Understanding the *Imago Dei* is extremely practical and relevant when ministering to those who are discouraged and depressed.
5. When we remember God's sovereignty, and that He makes no mistakes, we can trust that He knew what He was doing when He created us the way we are, and that we are no less valuable or human than others.
 - Understanding *Imago Dei* This ought to forever undermine and erode our fallen disposition of comparing ourselves with others.
6. However God has made us, we exist for His glory.
 - "And so, whether you [as a male or female, child or adult, rich or poor, short or tall, weak or strong, intelligent or unintelligent, popular or unpopular] eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all for the glory of God."
(1 Corinthians 10:31)

Soli Deo Gloria!!