

In the summer of 2005 the London Zoo opened a new exhibit. It featured eight homo-sapiens in a sealed enclosure next to an exhibit of monkeys and chimpanzees. There were three males and five females. A sign read, "[Warning: Humans in their Natural Environment.](#)"

The humans spent their time sunning on a rock ledge, playing board games, and waving to spectators. A plaque provided visitors information regarding diet, habitat, worldwide distribution, and threats to the species. The exhibition was designed to look like the other animal cages.

A Zoo spokesperson commented, "[Seeing people... among other animals, teaches the public that the human is just another primate.](#)" Tom Mahoney, one of the humans on exhibit, added, "[A lot of people think that humans are above other animals. Here they see humans as animals, and it kind of reminds them that we're not that special.](#)"

Of course, the humans are not exactly like their primate neighbors. Though the homo-sapiens exhibit is adjacent to the monkeys and the gorillas - the humans are protected by a high-voltage electrical fence. Surprise, surprise... the humans are a little uneasy about monkeying around with their uncivilized neighbors. Perhaps, there are a few more differences than the zookeepers and coordinators are willing to admit.

Psalm 8:4 asks the age-old question, "[What is man?](#)" This is a question that has preoccupied and perplexed philosophers down through the ages.

Plato, the great Greek philosopher searched and searched for a name that would describe man. Finally he settled on "[featherless biped.](#)" It worked well, until one of his students threw a plucked chicken over the academy wall. The featherless bird had a placard around its neck, "[Plato's Man](#)". His stunt proved Plato's wisdom to be inadequate.

Charles Darwin called humanity, "[The most efficient animal to ever emerge on earth.](#)" He viewed man as the highest rung on the evolutionary ladder.

One philosopher refers to mankind as a random reaction of cosmic chemistry. He calls us, "[congealed stardust.](#)"

Philosopher Edward Carnell puts it more bluntly - man is just "[a grown-up germ](#)".

Oliver Wendell Holmes wrote, "[I see no reason for attributing to man a significant difference from what belongs to a baboon or a grain of sand.](#)"

MIT's Marvin Minsky views man as a machine - "[computers made from meat.](#)"

German rocket scientist, Wernher von Braun, referred to man, "[As the only computer that can be mass-produced with unskilled labor.](#)" **What is man?** Are we nothing more than a *mature monkey* - a *magnificent machine* - or are we *marvelously made by God*?

This morning the "[Essentials](#)" tackles "[The Nature of Man.](#)" Each week we start and end with a *declaration* - in between we offer an *explanation*. Let me read this week's statement of faith, "[God created mankind in His image, and crowned him with authority. Humans were created with spirit, in gender, and for dominion. People are most human when they bear witness to God's image, and are most fulfilled when they are truly human.](#)"

Here's our question, "[what is man?](#)" Psalm 8 provides the answer. David says to God in verse 3. "[When I consider Your heavens, the work of Your fingers, the moon and the stars, which You have ordained, what is man that You are mindful of him, and the son of man that You visit him? For You have made him a little lower than the angels, and You have crowned him with glory and honor. You have made him to have dominion over the works of Your hands; You have put all things under his feet, all sheep and oxen - even the beasts of the field, the birds of the air, and the fish of the sea that pass through the paths of the seas. O LORD, our Lord, how excellent is Your name in all the earth!](#)"

Picture David, a young shepherd, out in the fields, keeping watch over his father's flocks... He's curled up in a sleeping bag, under a starry sky. His eyes are fixed on the heavens. He gazes at an ocean of stars. And as young boys do - David dreams of sailing across the galaxies. He's a star-traveler on the celestial sea. David is admiring God's artistry and genius - when suddenly it hits him! *He's stunned by the thought.... While he is on earth thinking about God - God is in heaven thinking about him.* David marvels at the grace of God, "What is man that You are mindful of him, or the son of man that You visit him?"

Astronomers claim the universe could contain as many as 500 billion galaxies. God has a large back yard - with endless fascinations. *What if you could view the universe from God's vantage point?* From the precipice of space what would you explore - *quasars, and black holes, and supernovas, and antimatter?*

Here's what God revealed to David... Throughout the vast universe He created, God had narrowed His focus to one tiny galaxy – and one tiny solar system – and one tiny planet... And of the millions of creatures on planet earth there is one which God values far more than all the others. In God's estimation, *the cream of His creative work* – the apple of His eye - is an earthling He calls "man."

Yet why man? Our planet teems with different types of life. Bugs have humans outnumbered 200 million to 1... There's over 24,000 species of fish, and nearly 10,000 varieties of birds occupying our planet. Did you know if every human on Earth stood shoulder to shoulder we could fit them all within Gwinnett, Walton, and Barrow counties. We're not Earth's only inhabitants – *so why do we get so much of God's attention?*

David gives us the answer in verse 5, "For You have made him a little lower than the angels, and You have crowned him with glory and honor." Man is created in God's image and crowned with God's glory.

Notice first God "made" man. You and I are no accident. Humans are not "congealed stardust" or "grown up germs" or "efficient animals" or "computers made from meat" - we are God's handiwork.

Today it's often noted that there's a 98.7% similarity between the DNA of humans and apes – yet this is as much a proof for a common Designer and Creator - as it is for a common ancestry. And the 1-plus % of genetic deviation separates man and apes in inexplicably distinctive ways.

Apes have human-like hands, but don't use their hands in human ways. A chimpanzee peels a banana, but can't play a guitar, or write poetry, or paint a seascape. He sees into the future only as far as his next meal. He doesn't think to plant or harvest. Animals are driven by urges, and blind instincts, and hunger pangs – not moral ideals and creative pursuits. Even the brightest animal doesn't have a fraction of a human's nobility and capability. Man is not a mere animal. Man is God's special creation.

Once, the world's scientists gathered for a convention. They decided since they were able to clone people, manipulate genetics, and perform technological marvels – the human race no longer had a need for God. The scientists picked a representative, and sent him to break the news to God. Before He bowed out, God suggested they first conduct a test.

He told the scientist, "Let's have a man-making contest. Let's both make a man just the way I made Adam. We'll see who does the better job?" The scientist was eager, "No problem!" But as the man reached to grab a handful of dirt, God stopped him, "Woe, you need to get your own dirt!"

When God created the dirt and stars He did so with the spoken word. God said, "Let there be..." And what came out of His mouth came into being. In Genesis 1:4 God says, "Let there be light;" and there was light." God spoke the light, and sun, and clouds, and plants, and animals

into existence - but Genesis 2:7 tells us, “And the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life...” This is a very different type of creative work...

Last week we learned two Hebrew words that get translated “create.” “*Bara*” is “to create out of nothing.” “*Asah*” means “to assemble.” But Genesis 2:7 introduces a third term. The word translated “formed” is “*yatsar*” - which means “to squeeze into shape, to mold.” Here God plays in the dirt. God squats to His knees and squeezes mud between his fingers...

Picture God – taking His time – He’s hands on - God is “forming...” as a potter shapes the clay. He molds a man from the dust of the ground. Man is the work of God’s hands – His masterpiece – the Creator’s work of art. It’s been said of mankind, “The Creator’s fingerprints are all over us.”

Humans exist today not because we’ve out-evolved other species in the contest for survival. Humans are the result of God’s touch and gentleness.

And when God creates the woman the contact is even more intimate. He performs a surgery. He puts man to sleep, makes a delicate incision, opens a fold *under his arm, near to his heart* - then He takes a rib, or lobe, or muscle – and with it fashions the woman. There’s a romance to it all.

The creation of the man and woman were unique and special. In Genesis 1 God fills the water with fish - the air with birds - the land with cattle and creeping things... But when God creates the man and the woman He isn’t just filling the zoo... Theologian George Weigel says of men and women, “We are not just something, we are someone.”

Genesis 1:26 states, “Then God said, ‘Let us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness...’” The “Our” refers to the Trinity. All other life-forms were created after their own kind, but God made humans to reflect His Trinitarian nature. We are God’s image-bearers.

Notice again verse 5, the psalmist says, “You have made him a little lower than the angels, and You have crowned him with glory and honor.” God made man “a little lower than the angels” but only for a time. The NT teaches us that mankind is *destined for dominion*. One day redeemed humans will rule over all God’s creation – including angels.

In fact, there’s a Jewish legend that says this is why Satan rebelled. As God’s archangel, Lucifer couldn’t stand the thought of being ruled over by little dirt-dobbers – *glorified hairballs*. Human management was too much for Lucifer to stomach. Thus, he bucked God’s plan. At first the devil tried to thwart man’s *creation*. After he failed, he’s tried numerous times and in numerous ways to steal the *crown* off our head.

The idea though in verse 5 - that we were made “a little lower than the angels” - is that man was made less than divine. Humans are mortal, not immortal. We’re earthly, not heavenly. We’re natural, not supernatural. The NIV renders verse 5, “made a little lower than the heavenly beings.” The NAS goes further, “You have made him a little lower than God.” We’re less than God – and right now, we’re less than the angels – but we’re higher than the animals. We’re between terrestrial and celestial...

Mark Driscoll read a quote in the newspaper by a well-known religious leader. The man said, “There is goodness and divine within each of us.” Driscoll says that’s wrong. It presses us too far up. It takes us too high.

Later that day, he was listening to talk radio when a man called in and confessed to cheating on his wife, committing adultery with other women. The radio host told him, “Tell your wife you can’t help it. You’re a just highly-evolved animal with a job. That’s just the way men are.” Driscoll says that’s wrong as well – that takes us far too low. A man is much more than a highly-evolved animal with a driver’s license.

Modern man suffers an identity crisis. We don't know who we are.

At times we shoot too high. We listen to the psychologist, or Oprah, and assume we're innately good, and start to look for the god within us. At other times we yield to greed, and laziness, and selfishness, and lust; and then we blame our destructive behaviors on beastly instincts. *Are we angel or animal - god or gorilla?* The answer is in between. We're lower than divine, but higher than animal - under God and over creation.

Only the Bible puts us in our rightful, healthy, holy place. We are **created** to bear **God's image** and **crowned** with **God's authority**.

Here's what it means to be truly human. Theologians call it by a Latin term, "**Imago Dei**" – or "**God's image**." Our purpose is to display God's image in our lives. And honor His image in the lives of other humans.

Next week we'll talk about how sin has thrown a wrench in the gears. Today, God's image in man is marred. His likeness is blurred. But the reality of sin doesn't change mankind's calling and commission.

Romans 8:29 tells us Christianity's objective is the reestablishment of mankind's original purpose. "**To be conformed to the image of His Son...**" Jesus redeems you and me to restore and sharpen His image in us.

Let me run through some of the ways we bear God's image...

God is a **moral being**, and unlike the animals God created man with the capacity to think in terms of right and wrong...

God has freewill, and He created us to be **self-determinative**. We can make our own choices...

Like God we're **rational**, we think...

God is a Trinity. The one God exists in community. This is why He made us **relational** beings. We too enjoy community. Without connection with other people we become dysfunctional...

God is **emotional**, thus, He made you and me with a capacity for love, and anger, and joy, and satisfaction, and frustration, and sorrow...

God is the Creator, which means He's **creative**. Human creativity is a reflection of God's image. When an artist sings or composes a poem they're expression God's image...

God created **beauty** and our appreciation of His artistic flare is one of the ways we're created in His likeness...

There are though three more ways we're made in God's image that I'd like to spend some time developing... **spirit, gender, and dominion**...

One very important way we're made in the image of God is that we're created with a **spirit**. We are more than flesh, bones, muscles, tissues. The philosophers talk about, "**the ghost in the machine**" - or our spirit.

Genesis 2:7 tells us that after God formed Adam from the dust of the ground, He "**breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being.**" Adam was given an eternal soul or spirit. God created man to live forever. Unlike rocks, lakes, plants, even animals... there is a dimension of man that interfaces with another dimension. There's a side inside humans that can know God, and sense heavenly things, and experience eternal life. Plants and pets die and return to dust. But when a human body expires the spirit continues to live on *with God* in heaven or *without Him* in hell.

Yet this is what modern man is so quick to *discount* or *deny* about the nature of man. Today's society defines what it means to be human with a reductionist mentality – we use an incomplete set of criteria. People are reduced to mere **body** – or **brain** – or just **emotions** – or

they're a **by-product** of programming – or a **victim** of environment.

Today's pornographic culture depersonalizes and objectifies humans, especially women. It's all about body. People made in God's image - and crowned with His glory - are bought and sold like commodities. They're treated like merchandise. **Humans are reduced to hood-ornaments.**

What's happened in culture today is tragic. Too many little girls grow up thinking their value as a human being is determined by their body parts.

Other people try to isolate humanity to our cognitive abilities - our brain. This was the great philosopher Rene Descartes' philosophy of man. He summed it up in a famous phrase, "**I think, therefore I am.**" In other words, to be rational – to be able to reason - is what makes us truly human.

But what about a mentally-impaired person, or the man trapped in a coma – *are they less than human because of their inability to reason?* It's not our *body* or our *brain* that makes us human. Whether we're *cognitive* or *comatose* a human has a spirit that will live forever.

Behavioral psychologists like BF Skinner reduce man to a machine. Man is **a carbon based computer**. Humans are the byproduct of their programming - shaped and conditioned by their environment. *Accordingly, our problems are due to bad parents... or an injury we've suffered... or an injustice endured... or an abusive spouse... or we grew up disadvantaged, or poor, or uneducated, or discriminated against...* God doesn't want the negative circumstances of your life defining who you are. Being truly human is rising up above your circumstances.

Jesus died and rose again, and sent His Spirit, so you don't have to live in the shadow of your sin or the sins of others. God created you to bear His image and reflect His glory. This is where you'll find life, and freedom, and joy, and peace – not in holding on to victim status. Be God's image-bearer.

God created you as a whole person – body, mind, emotions, and spirit. Too often we compartmentalize our humanity rather than view it as an integrated whole. Jesus' plan for our humanity is to *save our soul, heal our emotions, renew our minds* - and at the rapture, *resurrect our bodies*. We make two mistakes... **we either focus exclusively on the spirit and ignore the whole person** - or **we treat man as if he had no spirit at all**.

Man is not just spiritual – we're physical, mental, emotional – this is all part of God's likeness. And this means every problem isn't a sin or a lack of faith. The brain gets sick like the throat or lungs. Mental illness is real.

On the other hand, it's wrong to overlook or underestimate our spiritual side. It's fundamental to our humanity. Secular society is quick to *medicate the body - meditate the mind - regurgitate the emotions* – while it ignores man's spirit. Not all problems are sin - but sin is our major problem. Confession, repentance, and faith are to the spirit what an antibiotic is to your body. Our help is not humane if we ignore our whole humanity.

An early church father, Irenaeus, wrote "**The glory of God is man fully alive.**" Jesus said it best when He commanded you to love God, "**with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.**"

Gender is another way God created humans in His likeness.

Genesis 1:27 puts it, "**So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.**" And He did it in such a creative and romantic way. As I mentioned earlier, God took from Adam's *side* what He used to fashion a bride.

Feminism puts the woman in front of the man. **Chauvinism** puts the man before the woman. But the **Bible** puts the man and woman side by side. They have different roles, but they're equal in importance.

In John 4:24, Jesus said, “God is spirit.” God doesn’t have a physical body; therefore He doesn’t have male or female features. Yet whenever God speaks to us He always reveals Himself in masculine terms. God is always “Father” never “mother.” Jesus is “Son of God” never “daughter of God.” The Holy Spirit is always “He” – never “she” or “it.”

Yet when God created man in His image He created both male and female. Gender proceeds from God and teaches us about God. Evidently, maleness and femaleness are a big deal to God.

When men and boys dress, and act, and talk like men they bear God’s image. When women and girls dress, and act, and talk like women they bear God’s image. But when we confuse gender, and gender roles - or pretend that gender doesn’t really matter - we mar God’s image. Understand that androgyny - asexual and bisexual culture – is the equivalent of spiritual vandalism. It defaces God’s image and glory.

There’s one other way humanity bears the image of God – and perhaps it’s most important. **To be made in God’s image is to take dominion.**

The psalmist says in verse 5, “For You have made him a little lower than the angels, and You have crowned him with glory and honor.” But he doesn’t stop there. “You have made him to have dominion over the works of Your hands; You have put all things under his feet, all sheep and oxen - even the beasts of the field, the birds of the air, and the fish of the sea...”

Humans are designed to be *under God*, and *over His creation*. Man was given **the right to rule** over the earth. It’s now every man’s job to take charge of his environment, work hard, and build a better life.

God spent six days filling the earth with life to support the one creature He loves most - and was fashioned in his image. The flora and the fauna – the fish and the fowl – were made for man’s survival and his enjoyment.

Because God made the Earth we should protect the environment and be wise caretakers. But we must never be enslaved to our environment. We have no right to *abuse* nature, but it is ours to *use*. God gave us dominion. The planet is ours to use for *God’s glory* AND for *our good*.

And realize this is the underpinning that accounts for the difference in the quality of life seen between the Western and Eastern Hemispheres.

Western civilization was reared on the Bible and Christian thought. Scripture teaches us to use science and technology to harness nature for our benefit. Christians see God and man as separate from nature. It’s our God-given duty to exercise dominion - to subdue and use nature.

Whereas, the Oriental world is dominated by pantheism – the belief that man is a part of nature – one with nature - and rather than subdue nature, man’s role is to harmonize with his surroundings. This is why cows roam free in India while people starve for lack of food. *Holy cow! That’s crazy.* Hinduism teaches it’s adherents to deify nature rather than subdue it.

And this is why the West prospers, while much of the East and Africa lie impoverished. A society’s religion will hold it back or aid its advancement.

Let me bring it back around to where we started. “**What is man?**”

We’re not animals in the London Zoo – or machines – or computerized pieces of meat – or *just* a body – and we’re not a victim. We were created to be *under the Creator*, and *over His creation*. We are someone special. You were made by God – **with spirit, in gender, for dominion** - crowned with glory and honor - you are the **Imago Dei** – you carry God’s image.

And here’s what you do in response. First, you **recognize** it in others.

Unlike *gender* one of the characteristic that apparently has nothing to do with God’s image is **race**. God makes no distinction between ethnicities. All humans are made in God’s image –

regardless of the color of your skin or the slant of your eyes - you bear the likeness of God. This is why it's sinful to greet people of another race and look for your own likeness. When I see another human I should see God's image – not my own.

If I grasp the truth that all humans are image-bearers of God regardless of how dim and marred that reflection might be it will change how I treat people... *the man with Alzheimer's... the bag lady on the street corner... the unborn baby... the deadbeat dad... the obnoxious neighbor... the person on the other end of the political spectrum I can't stand...*

As the world calls for more tolerance, if I see God's image in the people around me I'll be less tolerant of their sin, and evil, and destructive habits. If we all really bear God's image - "I just can't help it" – is not an excuse. *When I see God's image in others...* I'll pray more – love more – care more - confront more – help more... I'll believe better for people.

And what I **recognize** in others, I'll try to **reflect** in my own life. You and I have been placed on this planet for one reason – to bear God's image. This is why we were created and re-created – born and reborn. Here's why the Spirit lives in us - to reproduce His likeness.

2 Corinthians 3:18 speaks this language, "But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord."

Here's a noble life. This is a life that works under any circumstance. It will work in any locale – in any country on the planet. If your life is about bearing God's image – what happens to your 401K won't matter – you'll give little concern to your own image – it won't matter if you prosper or suffer – succeed or fail – taste pleasure or endure pain... Your whole life will be measured by bearing God's image faithfully.

This is living life to the fullest... This is what it means to be fully alive as a human being... **recognizing** God's image in others, and **reflecting** that image yourself... You were made to love and be loved... **You da' man.**

Let's close by reciting together what we believe. "God created mankind in His image, and crowned him with authority. Humans were created with spirit, in gender, and for dominion. People are most human when they bear witness to God's image, and are most fulfilled when they are truly human."

Evolutionary theory spawned prejudice and racism – not Christianity. Darwin believed whites had out-evolved blacks. He said certain races were *part human – not fully human*. Hitler picked up the idea from Darwin and used it as a rationale for the genocide of 6,000,000 innocent Jews.

A common Creator should break down all distinctions. It's not my image or your likeness that matters. When we see each other all we should see is God's image.

Neurosurgeon, William Penfield, worked with epilepsy patients. Penfield said he could cause movement in the limbs, as well as activate talk and swallow reflexes, by electrically stimulating portions of the brain. But he could never find a spot on the cerebral cortex where an electrical shock could cause *belief* or *decision*. Penfield concludes, "*It's because those functions originate in the conscious self, not the brain.*" They're separate. There is a ghost in the computer – man is a living spirit.

All of life is a gift, but human life is sacred. That's why *in utero and in old age* it should be respected and protected.

And grasping *what man is...* will also determine your respect for your fellow man. When you see man as God sees him... all human life becomes sacred.

Man is just a glob of tissue and blood. This is the assumption of the abortionist.

Man is an animal herd that needs to be thinned out from time to time. This is philosophy of a cruel dictator bent on mass genocide of an unwanted population.

Man is the creature that looks like me. Everyone with a different color skin or texture of hair is subhuman. This is the thought process of the racist.

But all three attitudes are a denial that all human life is special to God. This ignorance murders unborn babies, and orchestrates ethnic cleansing, and keeps racial bias alive and well. *God has placed a holy significance on all men.* Man oh man... Men and women are a big deal.

Yet it seems, we spend more time and money on saving the whales, and protecting the spotted owl – than on feeding and clothing homeless people. Some of us may even spend more money grooming our dog than on enabling our church, and supporting our missionaries, and meeting human needs. Guys, *spotted owls* and *Spot the dog* were never made in God's image. They won't reign and rule with Jesus. Hey, Jesus tasted death for Larry across the street, and for Betty at work. Human beings deserve special consideration...