

We're Supposed to Look Like God

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Genesis 1:26-31

by Rev. Tom Cramer

Human Beings Bear the Image of God

If Genesis chapter one were an international sporting event, the fireworks would explode when human beings are created. The entire first chapter leads up to the creation of humankind.

God creates earth and sky, plants and trees, stars and planets, and pronounces all of them “good,” but when the narrative comes to creating human beings, God calls them “*very good*.” We find in Genesis that human beings are made in “the image of God,” and therefore bear the personal stamp of God.

Greg Ogden, the author of *Discipleship Essentials*, speaks about the qualitative difference between beings and things. As an author, he gets a great thrill whenever one of his books is published. But nothing, no-thing that he writes compares to 5:16 A.M. on August 31, 1975, when his daughter Aimee was born.

Bringing children into the world is an experience all to its own, to which writing a book cannot even hold a candle. God created cosmos and everything in it, but human beings bear his personhood like nothing else in all creation.

There is something about each of us that corresponds to the original. God leaves his distinct imprint on us, so today we're going to look at the nature of that imprint through two capacities God gives us from the beginning.

Let us pray: Almighty God, be our teacher today. We want to be your image bearers and we need your help. Guide us through your word to understand the purposes for which we've been created, in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

Humans are Made for Intimate Fellowship

The first capacity that God endows us with is the capacity for fellowship. Just as one God exists in the fellowship of three persons, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, so does God create us for fellowship with himself and with each other.

It's not that God needs to invite us to the party, as if he needed something outside himself to be whole, it's that his love for us is so exuberant that it would be out of character for him *not* to create us. Meister Eckhart, the German mystic, said

that the creation came into being out of the laughter of the Trinity. I love that line. It's so great to think that Godhead was laughing so hard that we just we popped out.

Another clue that we're made for intimate fellowship is the way we are created male and female. Genesis 1:27 says, "*So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.*"

We could easily pass over this point so quickly we would miss its significance. Yet humankind as "male and female" is a further indication that we are made for relationships. We mirror God as a being in fellowship, meaning that God made us different so that we could have person-to-person relationships with each other. Humankind as male and female is another way of saying that we mirror God in his plurality. We were created for love relationships, for the vertical love of God and the horizontal love with other humans—which leads us to the second capacity that God gives us as creation.

Our Role in the Design—"Dominion"

The second capacity God gives us is the ability to steward creation. That's what "dominion" means. God gives us a dominion responsibility over the earth: "*Let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.*" And a little later, that dominion is represented in the fact that God brings all the animals in front of man, and man gets to name them.

The word "*dominion*" is a fascinating word in the Hebrew. It's used 27 times in the Old Testament. The word "ra-dah" which is translated "*dominion*" is always used with reference to *human* dominion and *not* God's dominion. In fact, the root of the word in Hebrew is the word for "*tread*," as in "*treading grapes to make wine.*" It is the word for "stewardship" in the Old Testament. God makes the grapes, but we make the wine. God makes the animals, but we get to name them.

Dominion is Freedom with Responsibility

Our dominion is our stewardship responsibility for creation. We've been given dominion over our time, the dominion over our work, "*six days thou shall labor and the seventh thou shall rest,*" the dominion over our memories, we get to decide what we remember and what we don't. We have that freedom. Dominion is part of the freedom vocabulary of the Bible. We get to decide about our dominion over

the environment, over our relationships, about the money we have. *We have* that dominion. The rest of the created order doesn't get that.

Only Humans have Dominion

A tree can't make a bad choice. A tree *always* goes toward the light. That's a tree's job. That's what it does. On the other hand, we sometimes make bad choices with our freedom. I love a line from Calvin, "*Man with bad choices loses both himself and his freedom.*" But we do have the choice.

And yet, we can do something a tree can't do. A tree is totally reactive. When the soil around its root system starts to erode away and the tree does the very best to anchor its roots back into the ground, it can't heal itself. It can't stretch those roots all the way back to the soil, but a man can do it, a woman can do it.

We can go up to that tree and we can pack dirt around it, and we can trim that tree and we can prune that tree and we can help it to grow. We can do something the tree can't do. We can turn toward darkness, but we can *also* turn toward light. And we can do things as co-stewards of creation that are *good* for the earth. And that's this amazing dominion.

We'll be Held Accountable

But here's the rub. For every freedom dominion we're given there we're also held accountable. We're called to find our work and find our rest. Some of you may be workaholics and some of you may be rest-aholics.

But the point is that your work needs to have a restraint upon it, it needs to have a responsibility attached to it so that you're not a workaholic or a rest-aholic.

The same thing with memories. Some people have been nursing bitter feelings toward people, and grudges and resentments that they had held for years and years and they need to realize they have dominion over what to think about the emotion to attach to present feelings. That is a freedom that is given to you. You have the freedom to bring painful memories to Christ and ask him to heal them.

So every freedom you have, what you're going to do with the earth, what your going to do with your time, what your going to do with your work, your memories, there is an equal amount of responsibility. That's dominion. It's a principle of life.

Examples from Life

It's like learning to downhill ski. You're going to fall a lot unless you conform to three simple rules. There are three simple rules you have to obey. You must face downhill, you must go fast, you can't execute a turn without velocity, and, above all, you must keep your weight on the downhill ski. If you obey those three rules you will not break your leg, unless somebody runs into you or something like that. But you won't break your leg. You'll break your leg if you have your weight on the uphill ski because your skis will come out from under you and you'll become a human snow ball.

If you have your weight on your downhill ski you'll be able to be able to go fast and you'll be able to have freedom. Now notice, the freedom is attached to the rule. The restraint on skiing is in those inflexible rules that have to be followed, and then you get the freedom of skiing.

It's true with driving a car. A car has so much power and yet it must be road safe. It can't go faster than the speed of traffic or the road conditions will allow, but when you keep within those you'll have a lot of fun driving a car.

The same is true with mountain climbing. My friend David Dolan has summited Mt. Kilimanjaro several times, but he has to leave at twelve midnight to make his final summit. If you miss that very narrow window of time, and if you don't summit it right then, you'll freeze to death up there or you will run out of oxygen. That's the way it works. No matter how much someone pays you to make that climb, you can't exceed the window of time because you will run out of energy. There are rules that have to be followed and then the freedom comes in climbing.

And ironically, every one of us resents rules, we resent the restraint, which comes upon our dominion, and paradoxically, we like the rules. We have a love-hate relationship with regard to the restraint.

You may have a boy or a girl, a teenager who appears on the surface to be totally chaotic in their life, totally wild, and you will say, "That's a wild kid there." And yet when that very wild boy or girl who says, "I don't want to obey any rules, I want to do what I want to do," when they are setting up a sandlot football game, or a sandlot volleyball game down at the beach, the first thing they do is establish strict rules. Because there is no game without boundaries. There is no game without rules, what you can do with the football, where you can run with it, when you stop, where you line up. And those rules have to be followed or you can't

have a game. So we love the game because there is a restraint that makes the game possible.

And so it is with our stewardship relationship to others. We are made in God's image. He imprints us with his self-giving identity. Our dominion is constrained by the relationships we're made to nurture, the expression of God's love to the ends of the earth. Greg Ogden puts it this way, to be made in the image of God is *"to be made from the motive of love and for love."*

Example of Gold Rush

There's no question, we're given a dominion over the earth. God gives us the resources, and we all know that the stakes get larger and larger with regard to how we use those resources. Just think of China's new demand for oil, following in our footsteps.

In the gold rush in 1849, 150 years ago when the gold rush people came to California, the only thing California had going for it was gold. They didn't have any crops at all, except the fruit trees that Father Serra had planted at the mission; there were no crops. Pine nuts were the only eatable thing that grew in California. And the gold rush caused those people who came to California almost to destroy the whole state with placer mining throughout the hills of California. And then fortunately, gold lost its value. You should be grateful that gold lost its value, believe me.

And then Californians discovered that they had a resource beyond anything than anybody could have imagined. They learned how to harness water from the mountains in the central valley project and now agriculturally California is so rich, that if you took all the countries in the world, California would now be the third most wealthy country in the whole world in terms of agriculture. Agriculture that was brought in, crops that were grown, irrigation that was designed, and then when silicone was invented, imagine how that has increased California's value!

The resource of California is staggering. The resource of the United States is staggering. The resource of the world is staggering. And the resources of the worldwide church are staggering.

Examples from the Church

A couple of weeks ago Saddleback Church hosted the World AIDS Conference. Thousands of experts and health workers from all over the world gathered to hear leading voices in the fight against AIDS. During that conference, Pastor Rick

Warren did something to demonstrate the vast resources the church brings to the fight against AIDS. He put up a map of Africa with the location of all the hospitals. There were just a few dots scattered around in each country. Then he put up a map that added all the health clinics in Africa, and the map was filled in somewhat, but only to a small degree. And then, he put up a map with the location of all the churches in Africa, and almost the whole continent was covered with dots. That's the dominion that God has given to the church to make a difference on that continent. It's staggering to think about. And yet, we have that same dominion here.

Yesterday, several of us spent the morning serving the homebound people of this congregation. We phoned ahead and asked if there was anything we could do. My team of three replaced some florescent light tubes in one couple's house. In another, we moved all the furniture out of a living room so that we could flatten a throw rug that had developed a big bump in it. In the third home, we just shared some precious moments with an 85-year old widow who showed us her needlework. These weren't big things to us, but they were big things for them. In one house that was dark, we brought light. In another, where the way was rough, we made it smooth. In another, we offered a sense of companionship along life's way.

God doesn't hold us accountable everything, but we are held accountable for some things. We're not called to go everywhere, but we are called to go somewhere. God will hold us accountable for what he's given to us to use for his glory. I can replace a light bulb. Other people can't. I'm responsible for replacing light bulbs. Other people aren't. That's my dominion. At least it was my dominion yesterday.

What is your freedom responsibility? What are you being called to do to steward the resources that God has given you? We're created for a purpose and that purpose is to steward God's resources so that the whole world might be brought into a relationship with the living God. Would it be that our love for one another and our use of resources would bring new life, healing, and prosperity to all those God intends to bless through us. Amen.