



Lesson 2:
Why God Created
People (Genesis 1:26-31)

To understand our text, we need to understand the sweep of God's purpose as revealed throughout the Scriptures. Behind God's purpose in creating man is His conflict with Satan and the fallen angels. Before he fell into sin, Satan "had the seal of perfection," and was "in Eden, the garden of God." (The only biblical hints of Satan's fall are in Isa. 14:12-15 & Ezek. 28:12-16.)

It is possible that Satan, before his fall, ruled an earlier earth under God. When he rebelled and led several angelic forces with him, God brought a judgment on that original creation, resulting in the chaos, emptiness, and darkness of Genesis 1:2 (the "gap theory"). In the recreated earth, God's purpose is to have man on earth reflecting His image and having dominion over the earth under His sovereignty.

But to whom was man to reflect God's image? There wasn't anybody except Adam and Eve. Once others were born, people could reflect God's image to one another, thus glorifying God. But that isn't the full picture. The more complete answer is, the man and woman were to reflect God's image to the angelic hosts, both good and evil. God put man here to have dominion in place of Satan.

The earth is the theater for God's ultimate victory over Satan and the fallen angels. Satan wants to defy God by ruling the earth. So he came to the first couple and tempted them to follow him in rebellion against God. When they fell into sin, God's purpose for the earth was temporarily thwarted as Adam and Eve came under Satan's rule. Thus, for the present Satan is recognized as the ruler of this world (John 12:31; 14:30). But God regained dominion through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ (John 12:31; Eph. 1:19-23).

But how does Christ exercise His dominion? One day He will return and rule the earth, but for now He is not physically present on the earth. In Ephesians Paul reveals that Christ's dominion is to be exercised and God's image is to be reflected through the church and through the unit of the church, the home.

Together, as male and female (Gen. 1:27), the first man was to reflect God's image. The church is the corporate "new man," Head and body, Bridegroom and Bride, created in God's image to have dominion over Satan (Eph. 1:22-23; 2:15-16; 4:24; 5:32; 6:10-20; Col. 3:10). Thus it is through the church (and its unit, the home) that Christ is regaining that which was lost in the fall.

Note Ephesians 3:9-12. Paul is explaining his ministry in light of God's eternal purpose. In verse 9 he refers to "God, who created all things." Why does Paul bring in the creation at this juncture? Because he is talking about God's purpose in creation, namely, to have a corporate man on earth reflecting His image and exercising dominion. Christ and the church are that new creation.

The home, as the unit of the church, is also to have a part in God's purpose for the earth, since the marriage relationship is an earthly picture of Christ and the church (Eph. 5:22-33). As a husband and wife live together in unity in the context of their proper roles (male and female, equal and yet distinct; equal and yet in proper headship and submission), their home becomes an outpost of God's rule.

God created people to reflect His image, to rule over creation, and to reproduce godly offspring.

II. God created people to reflect His image.

The first thing that strikes us is the repetition of the plural pronouns in reference to God: “Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness” (1:26). Scripture is clear that God did not take counsel with the angels when He created man (Isa. 40:12-26; 44:24), and besides, He didn’t create man in the image of Himself along with the angels. We have here a consultation among the persons of the Godhead prior to the creation of man.

Second, note that it is affirmed three times over (1:27) that God created man, twice emphasizing “in His image.” There is no room for harmonizing the Genesis account with an evolutionary origin of man. God created man distinct from animals. Only man is made in God’s image.

What does it mean that man is made in God’s image and likeness? I take the two words as synonymous, used in combined form to add either intensity or clarification. With his personality, intelligence, and ability to know and relate to God, man is able to reflect God-likeness in a limited way.

The fact that human beings have been created in God's image has many practical implications. The first is, unless you are rightly related to the Creator, your life has no lasting purpose. You are born, grow up, live a few years trying to make a comfortable existence, but your body too soon grows old and you die (assuming you don't die sooner)!

What's the point of it? But if you know the eternal God through the Lord Jesus Christ who revealed Him to us and who, by His death and resurrection, opened the way for us to be forgiven and to have fellowship with our Creator, both now and for all eternity, then your life has purpose and meaning beyond the grave.

That every human, male and female, is created in God's image also means that human life is valuable and every person must be treated with respect. The unborn baby is not to be killed because it is not convenient to have a child, or because the parents prefer having a boy instead of a girl. Even if that child is deformed or mentally deficient, it is still human life, valuable in God's sight. At the other end of life, the elderly, even those who can no longer think clearly, must be treated with dignity and care.

The fact that those in Christ have "put on the new man, which in the likeness of God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth" (Eph. 4:24), means that we must committed to growing in godliness. We are to reflect God's image in every aspect and area of our lives, especially in our families. Much more could be said, but we must move on. Stemming from the fact that God made man in His image is a second purpose:

III. God created people to rule over creation.

“Let them rule” (1:26) is the consequence of “Let Us make man in Our image.” God gave the right of dominion over all living things to man. The command to subdue it (1:28) implies that there was work involved, even in the perfect setting of the Garden, to bring the creation under man’s rightful dominion. This dominion involves a stewardship of the earth and its resources under the sovereignty of God.

Fallen man has gone in two directions when it comes to the earth and its resources. Either he has tended to spoil the creation, through pollution and other forms of wanton disregard; or he has been ruled by creation, through false worship of nature.

Apparently in the original creation, both man and beasts were vegetarian (1:29-30;). After the Flood God gave explicit permission for men to eat meat, as long as they did not eat the blood (Gen. 9:3-4).

Does that mean that it's more spiritual to be a vegetarian? Before you jump to that conclusion, remember that the Lord and two angels ate beef when they visited Abraham (Gen. 18:7-8). God ordained for the priests, for whom personal holiness was essential, to eat part of the sacrifices (1 Cor. 9:13). Jesus ate roasted lamb (the Passover, Luke 22:15) as well as broiled fish (after the resurrection, Luke 24:42-43). So while you are free not to eat meat for dietary reasons if you so choose, you are not more sanctified by abstaining.

Man ruled creation before the fall. But when Satan got man to obey him, then Satan became the ruler of this world. For man to regain his rightful place of dominion over this world, he must exercise dominion not only over the material world, but also over the spiritual forces of darkness (Eph. 6:10-20). This can only be gained by becoming a member of the body of Christ, the Head, who through His resurrection has been elevated to the place of dominion over all things (Eph. 1:19-23). And so a major part of our purpose as the church, is to exercise dominion for Christ over Satan and his forces through spiritual warfare.

The practical implication of our ruling over creation is that we must put on the full armor of God and, especially, become people of prayer (Eph. 6:13-17, esp. 18-19). When Peter talks of the roles of husband and wife in marriage, he tells the husband to grant his wife honor as a fellow heir of the grace of life, and then adds, “so that your prayers may not be hindered” (1 Pet. 3:7). Thus both in the church and in our homes we are to rule over all creation, but especially over the spiritual forces of darkness, under the authority of Christ through prayer.

So God put us on this earth to reflect His image and to rule over creation. There’s a third reason indicated in our text:

IV. God created people to reproduce godly offspring.

“Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it” (1:28). This is both God’s pronouncement of blessing as well as His delegation of responsibility. The blessing of sharing in God’s creative process by producing offspring was given to other living things besides man (1:22, 24-25). But man alone was commanded not only to fill the earth, but also to subdue it. This requires not only bearing children, but rearing godly children who will properly subdue the earth under God. By producing ungodly children man fills, but does not subdue, the earth.

How should we apply this verse today? Roman Catholics, of course, have taken it to mean that birth control is wrong and that the major purpose of marriage is to bear children. But also many Protestants advocate not practicing any form of artificial birth control and having as many children as possible. But we need to be careful to apply the verse correctly.

Clearly, the text does not mean that every person must get married and have children to fulfill God's purpose. Neither Jesus nor the apostle Paul would have qualified if it means that. But it does mean that children are to be viewed as blessings from God. That needs to be said in our day when many couples choose not to have children so they can selfishly pursue their careers and materialistic lifestyles. Our children are one of the greatest blessings and biggest responsibilities God entrusts to us. We need to take the time and effort to see each child come to know Christ and to be trained in His ways.

But I believe that there also is a spiritual application of Genesis 1:28: To reproduce godly offspring means that we all must be involved in the work of evangelism. To fill the earth and subdue it means that we've got to subdue the ruler of the earth, Satan, by rescuing people from his domain of darkness and seeing them transferred to the kingdom of God's beloved Son (Col. 1:13).

People cannot reflect God's image, rule over His creation, and reproduce godly offspring unless they live under the lordship of Jesus Christ. The author of Hebrews makes this spiritual application when he attributes to Christ the words, "Behold, I and the children whom God has given Me" (Heb. 2:13). One of God's greatest blessings is when He gives you spiritual children, fruit that remains through all eternity!

V. Conclusion

A man died and they put on his tombstone: “He came, stayed a while, and left.” Sad epitaph! But what if it had said, “He came, stayed a while, got married, worked at his job, raised a family, and left”? Throw in, “He became a success in his career and made a pile of money.” It’s still missing the purpose for which God created us.

God made us individually, and as male and female in our marriages, and corporately as His church, *to reflect His image* by being godly people. He made us *to rule over His creation* as responsible stewards of the earth, and to rule over the ruler of this fallen world as we exercise the authority of Christ our Head through prayer. He made us *to reproduce godly offspring*, both in our families and in our church family through bearing spiritual children.

That’s why God created people. That’s why He created you--to know and grow to be like the One in whose image you were created; to reign with Him; and, to be used by Him in His kingdom. You will be restless, confused, or lacking in fulfillment until you begin living in line with God’s purpose for creating you.