



GENESIS

FOUNDATIONS



Studies in the book of Genesis
PART ONE—Genesis 1:1 — 2:24
Group Applications
Personal Study



FOUR OAKS CHURCH

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Genesis 1:1-5

"Remember the former things of old; for I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like me." — Isaiah 46:9

No One Like Him

The Christian life rests upon one foundational truth: God is God and we are not. God is not like us; He is bigger and better. He is in a class of his own. We see this in the first verse of the entire Bible: "In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth." God existed for an eternity prior to creation. Nothing exists apart from God's creative act. Therefore, everything in heaven and on earth owes its existence to Him. Our temptation is to imagine a perfect person, perhaps a beloved grandmother, or a virtuous friend, or even ourselves on our best day, and then subtract our physical body, add moral perfection, and sprinkle in some supernatural powers for good measure and presto! We have God. The problem is, of course, that this god is not God. It is a figment of our imagination. It is a god made in our image who acts and thinks like us. In short, it is an idol.

Idols are not just created things we worship over God. It is also any god we imagine that opposes the God of the Bible. When we think about God, we have to start first with who God says He is and not what we might imagine Him to be. God tells us He is our Creator. That makes us His creation, which means that any notion we have of being self-sufficient or the masters of our own fate is an illusion. We were formed from the dust. We die. Our every breath comes from the hand of the God who created all things, and without whom nothing would exist. If this vision of God unsettles you then you're onto the real thing. This is what it means to fear the Lord, and fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom (Proverbs 1:7).

But God does not sit in the sky in a bubble detached from His creation. He's involved. He molds the world with the eye of a craftsman. He walks alongside Adam in the garden and speaks to him. He communicates with His creatures! He gives gifts to His creatures: the joy of sex, marriage, work, and rest. He provides for His creatures an abundance of food and activity, and He promises His creatures rewards for obeying

Him, even though they owe Him their obedience. Genesis teaches us that the mighty God who created all things overflows with generosity. Our hope rests in the fact that God is not like us. He is not petty like us. He does not flip between love and apathy like we do. He keeps His word. He is ever-faithful. He is God. And we are not.

Sermon Notes

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Treasure

1. Read through the passage two or three times.
2. Write down 10 observations about the text. Start by asking who/what/where/when/why/how?

Grow

1. Why is it important for us to recognize God as our Creator?

2. How does our knowledge of God as Creator affect how we live?

Go

1. What are common conceptions of God today?

2. What is the modern attitude towards the idea that God created us?

Group Discussion Questions

1. Share about your exposure to and understanding of the creation story as a child. To what extent was God a part of your life growing up?

2. Who wrote the book of Genesis? To whom was it written? Why do you think this book is important for us (and our society) today?

3. What persons of God are present in creation? How do you know this? Consider sharing verses in other parts of the Bible to support your answer.

4. In verse 3, God says “Let there be light.” Why do you think God started with creating light on the first day? How might this relate to the theme of God as light & life found in John 1?

5. What significance should God being the Creator have in your life today? In what ways might you be falling short of honoring Him as Creator? Spend some time as a group praying for these things.

Additional Reading

From *The Self-Sufficiency of God* by A.W. Tozer¹

“The Father hath life in himself,” said our Lord, and it is characteristic of His teaching that He thus in a brief sentence sets forth truth so lofty as to transcend the highest reaches of human thought. God, He said, is self-sufficient; He is what He is in Himself, in the final meaning of those words.

Whatever God is, and all that God is, He is in Himself. All life is in and from God, whether it be the lowest form of unconscious life or the highly self-conscious, intelligent life of a seraph. No creature has life in itself; all life is a gift from God.

The life of God, conversely, is not a gift from another. Were there another from whom God could receive the gift of life, or indeed any gift whatever, that other would be God in fact. An elementary but correct way to think of God is as the One who contains all, who gives all that is given, but who Himself can receive nothing that He has not first given.

To admit the existence of a need in God is to admit incompleteness in the divine Being. Need is a creature-word and cannot be spoken of the Creator. God has a voluntary relation to everything He has made, but He has no necessary relation to anything outside of Himself. His interest in His creatures arises from His sovereign good pleasure, not from any need those creatures can supply nor from any completeness they can bring to Him who is complete in Himself.

Again we must reverse the familiar flow of our thoughts and try to understand that which is unique, that which stands alone as being true in this situation and nowhere else. Our common habits of thought allow for the existence of need among created things. Nothing is complete in itself but requires something outside itself in order to exist. All breathing things need air; every organism needs food and water. Take air and water from the earth and all life would perish instantly. It may be stated as an axiom that to stay alive every created thing needs some other created thing and all things need God. To God alone nothing is necessary.

¹Tozer, A. W. “The Self-Sufficiency of God.” Monergism.com Blog, www.monergism.com/self-sufficiency-god.

The river grows larger by its tributaries, but where is the tributary that can enlarge the One out of whom came everything and to whose infinite fullness all creation owes its being?

Genesis 1:1-25

*“When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers,
the moon and the stars, which you have set in place,
what is man that you are mindful of him,
and the son of man that you care for him?” — Psalm 8:3-4*

Creation

If you're searching for controversy look no further than Genesis 1. Theologians throughout church history have wrestled with the meaning and implications of this mysterious first chapter. Moses did not seek to write a scientific account of the earth's origins. Ancient Hebrews did not think about science in the way we do. Nevertheless, Genesis 1 means something. Below are a few ways Christians have interpreted Genesis 1.

Literal Six Days: Genesis 1 depicts God's creation of all things in six literal 24-hour periods.

Day-Age: Genesis 1 depicts God's creation over long periods of time symbolized by each "day."

Framework: Genesis 1 is a theological way of understanding the meaning of God's creation. God gives form to creation in the first three symbolic days and then fills it on the final three symbolic days.

Analogy: God creates in a way that is different from us therefore we can only read the creation account as an analogy. God is speaking in human terms about divine action.

Each of these categories has sub-theories with various nuances, but this is a general overview. The key interpretive questions to ask are: Why did Moses write Genesis 1? In what way would his original audience have interpreted this text? It is not an easy subject, but one worth looking into. Nevertheless, we should not divide over

interpretations of Genesis 1. Church figures throughout history have not come to a consensus, and we should approach interpretation of this unique text with humility.

Sermon Notes

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Treasure

1. Read through the passage two or three times.
2. Write down 10 observations about the text. Start by asking who/what/where/when/why/how?

Grow

1. What creation view makes the most sense to you? Why?

2. What do you find challenging about the views you do not agree with?

Go

1. How would you open a conversation about faith and science with a non-believer?

2. What would you say to a new believer who struggles with Genesis 1?

Discussion Questions

1. Talk about the significance of the debate surrounding creation and evolution in our society. Why do you think this is an important issue?

2. How did God create the universe? Look at some of the verbs God uses to describe the act of creating. What are some other times in Scripture that God uses His voice?

3. Look at the repetition in Genesis 1. What phrases are repeated? Why do you think Moses uses repetition to describe the six days of creation?

4. We believe the Bible is the inerrant word of God. Is it easy for you to believe the creation narrative as true? What parts are difficult for you to affirm?

5. The entire universe obeys the commands of our Creator God without hesitation or resistance. What commands from God cause you to hesitate or resist?

6. Throughout creation, God separates things: the light from the dark, the day from the night, the waters from one another, etc. What does God call us to be separate from? How are you doing at setting yourself apart for Him? Spend some time as a group praying for these things.

Additional Reading

From *The First Things (Creation) (1): In the Beginning God* by Ligon Duncan

Don't be confused by the whole issue of creation. There are only three options on the market and don't think that the Christian view has somehow been disproved by science. It hasn't. Listen to these words: "The impression has gone abroad, not only that the Christian doctrine of creation has been disproved, but that scholars have agreed on an alternative. Neither of these assumptions is correct. There is no agreed alternative to the Christian position. Those which are affirmed are beset with enormous difficulties. The Christian doctrine, on the other hand, seems to have no particular difficulty of its own. It is supported by a great body of argument, philosophical and scientific, and is confirmed by the whole process of special revelation in which God both asserts and describes Himself."

There are only three options on the market. There is the Christian view and that view is that before creation God alone existed and that He, in His sovereignty, is responsible for bringing into being everything there is. In contrast to that view, there are only two options out there. First, there is the view that before creation nothing existed. Before this universe was, nothing existed, absolutely nothing; not God, not matter, not mass, not energy, not potential, not a protoplasm, nothing. Now it needs, I think it's fair to say, a fair measure of credulity to rest in that particular view. The philosophers themselves said *Ex nihilo nihil fit*, out of nothing, nothing comes. And so that possibility is very implausible. The fact that something now exists drives us to the conclusion that there is something that always existed.

But in contrast to that view, for those who do not want to accept God, they put before us another view. And that view is the most popular view held among scientists and physicists today. And that view is that before the creation of the universe as we know it now, an impersonal something existed. Some protoplasm or primary particle in which all the potentialities later realized in the universe were latent. Listen to this description about that theory. Surely, the existence of an impersonal something is no less a mystery and no less of a stumbling block to the

¹Duncan, Ligon. "The First Things (Creation) (1): In the Beginning God." LigonDuncan.com, 8 Apr. 1998, ligonduncan.com/the-first-things-creation-1-in-the-beginning-god-880/.

radically skeptical intellect than the existence of God Himself. If you postulate that everything came from a primary particle of protoplasm, doesn't that primary particle of protoplasm then have in itself all the characteristics of a sovereign God except personality? Let me go on with this description. Such a 'something' already possesses some of the characteristics of deity. It is eternal, self-existent and omnipotent. Moreover, this theory of origins is burdened with all the difficulties that face consistent materialism. The nature of the universe itself is against it. It is difficult to believe that the complexity of the life forms with which we are familiar is the result of an unprogrammed molecular and genetic change. And it is even more difficult to convince ourselves that Paradise Lost, Hamlet and the Sermon on the Mount were derived through an inexorable sequence of cause and effect from a primitive protein. The movement from the impersonal to the person is an impossible barrier for modern naturalism and materialism, and don't let anyone fool you into thinking that they've got it all figured out. They have enormous problems and I'd much rather have mine.

Genesis 1:28-2:3

“And Jesus came and said to them, ‘All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.’”

— Matthew 28:18-20

Rule and Rest

The first part of this passage, commonly called the “cultural mandate”, is really the heart and design for humanity’s purpose and function here on earth. Just as the “great commission” (quoted above) is the center focus of the church in the New Testament, this “first great commission” is the center of all human activity and work in this world. It dignifies all kinds of work whether it be high or low income, physical, mental, or creative, and it fills them with incredible significance.

The two aspects of this command are essentially to procreate, filling the whole earth with “image bearers”, and to subdue the earth, exercising dominion over the rest of creation. They are to expand the bounds of Eden by cultivating the earth and spreading God’s glory. The inherent nature of what Eden was (God’s dwelling or a kind of temple) and what man was (God’s representative and reflection) shows us that this calling was both very “earthy” and human, and also very spiritual and religious. There was no sacred/secular divide in Eden. Mankind would live all of life before the face of God in loving worship to Him alone. This call did not get ruined when sin entered the picture. In fact, we could say that one big aspect of Jesus’s work was to fulfill it by restoring humanity back to its original calling, and then to bring it into perfect completion in the new creation. As Christians we fulfill this original mandate by working in our ordinary callings of the family, vocation, and recreation, as well as in our disciple-making and worship. We should strive to reflect God as we bring “order out of chaos” in everything we do.

The second part of this passage, which begins in chapter two, shows us how God has woven a pattern of rest into the fabric of creation. He did this to show us how to order our lives after His example. The reality is that we need rest and most people in our day and age don't give themselves a moment, let alone a day, to unplug. It is important to note that this "resting" is not a cessation of all activity but of a certain kind of activity. God rested from His works of creation but He still continues to "uphold all things by the word of His power" (Heb.1:3). In the same way we should see activity in spending time with people, enjoying recreation, and of course public and private worship as great ways of honoring God's pattern of rest. Lastly, there is great significance in this "consummation-rest" picture. It points to the deep soul rest we experience as we trust in Jesus's finished work on the cross, and it points to the final rest believers will have with Him in glory when He returns (Heb. 4:9-10).

Sermon Notes

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal blue or grey ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page, typical of notebook paper used for writing or drawing. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the page.

Treasure

1. Read through the passage two or three times.
2. Write down 10 observations about the text. Start by asking who/what/where/when/why/how?

Grow

1. How or in what area of life have you bought into the lie of seeing life and work as unimportant?

2. What could it look like to incorporate more of God's pattern of rest into your life?

Go

1. How does this cultural mandate change the way you think about God's mission in the world and how could it affect the way you share the gospel?

2. What spheres of influence has God given you stewardship over and how can you use them to further His mission?

Discussion Questions

1. Share about a work experience you had that did not turn out to be as expected. Why was it challenging? What would have made you better suited for it?

2. God blessed the man and woman to work and have dominion. What exactly were they given dominion over? What has God entrusted to you to have dominion over? How are you doing at carrying out these responsibilities?

3. What priority does work have in your life (too high, too low, or just right)? To what extent are you honoring God with your work?

4. God rested on the seventh day after completing His work of creation. Why did He rest? How often do you rest? What changes, if any, do you need to make in practicing rest? How would you benefit from practicing rest?

5. Rest is never just physical; it's also spiritual. Jesus today offers us "spiritual rest" through His death and resurrection (see Hebrews 4). Is it difficult for you to believe that the work of salvation is complete? Do you ever try to keep working for redemption? How might you rest in Jesus today?

6. Spend some time praying for one another about working and resting well.

Additional Reading

From *The Mission of God's People* by Christopher J. H. Wright¹

The Bible's story is that the God who created the universe, only to see it ravaged by evil and sin, has committed himself to the total redemption and restoration of the whole creation, has accomplished it in advance through the cross and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth, and will bring it to glorious completion in the new creation when Christ returns. In between the great poles of the original creation and the new creation, the Bible has a great deal more to say about creation.

To be human is to be in proper relationship with God, other people, and the world. Sin has marred and well-nigh destroyed these relationships, but in Christ, the perfect human, they are restored.... Each of these three relationships is restored as we increasingly grow into the image of Christ. Because Christ is the perfect human, the one person who completely fills out the image of God, the more we become like him, the more human we become...The Christian life, far from transforming us into super-spiritual, quasi-angelic beings, is actually a quest to recover our humanity.

— Michael Wittmer

It may be easy to forget, but we were human beings before we became Christians, and we don't stop being human beings when we do become Christians (though some Christians make you wonder...). And God will hold us accountable for our humanity as much as for our Christianity. For there are things we have been commanded by God to do as human creatures, from which no other Bible text or teaching exempts us. On the contrary, being God's people and therefore already among the new redeemed humanity surely reinforces and intensifies our obligation to live by his original mandate to the human race. Human beings are people with a mission.

¹Wright, Christopher J. H. *The Mission of God's People* (Biblical Theology for Life). Zondervan. Kindle Edition.

Genesis 1:26-2:5

"O Lord, our Lord,

how majestic is your name in all the earth!

You have set your glory above the heavens.

Out of the mouth of babies and infants,

you have established strength because of your foes,

to still the enemy and the avenger.

When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers,

the moon and the stars, which you have set in place,

what is man that you are mindful of him,

and the son of man that you care for him?

Yet you have made him a little lower than the heavenly beings

and crowned him with glory and honor.

You have given him dominion over the works of your hands;

you have put all things under his feet,

all sheep and oxen,

and also the beasts of the field,

the birds of the heavens, and the fish of the sea,

whatever passes along the paths of the seas.

O Lord, our Lord,

how majestic is your name in all the earth!" — Psalm 8:1-9

The Image of God

This is a very profound passage in scripture. It is one that we could study, read, and teach on all of our days and never fully realize all that it contains. The passage starts with God wanting to make man. God planned mankind for His own glory. We were not a mistake, not an after-thought, and certainly not like the rest of God's vast creation. God did not need to create us and doesn't need us, but He created us for His glory, which means we are important to God Himself. If we meditated on that truth alone, it would change how we start our day, engage our relationships, and make decisions. God created us for His glory and that gives our lives purpose and joy.

Not only did God plan to create man, but He created man "in His own image." We are not God, but we do share some of His attributes. We are His representatives to creation even after the fall which means sin has not destroyed our intrinsic worth and dignity. Christ came as a man and the perfect image of God who lived a sinless life and died so that we can have new life. This means that even in this life, marred by sin and distorted, we can progressively become more like Jesus and grow in likeness to God. Paul says in Colossians 3:10 "put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator."

After creating man, God gives him the "cultural mandate" to develop culture under the lordship of Christ. He tells Adam to "be fruitful and multiply, fill the earth and subdue it and have dominion over" creation. Human beings cannot help but create culture—our role is inescapable. People build, research, develop, and teach what they have learned. Jesus gives us the great commission to make disciples of all nations as a complement to the cultural mandate. In making disciples and baptizing the nations, we create and shape the culture around us.

[illegible]

Treasure

1. Read through the passage two or three times.
2. Write down 10 observations about the text. Start by asking who/what/where/when/why/how?

Grow

1. Bruce Waltke said, “How we understand ourselves dictates how we behave.” What do you believe about yourself?

2. How does or doesn’t this understanding dictate how you behave?

Go

1. What do your interactions with others reveal about what you believe about mankind?

2. In what ways are you living out the cultural mandate?

Discussion Questions

1. Share what the term “self-worth” means to you. How might “imago dei,” or being made according to the image of God, impact your understanding of self-worth?

2. How did God’s creation of man differ from His creation of the animals? What did He use? Why is this special?

3. God retells some of the creation story from chapter 1 in chapter 2. How is the second account different? What emphasis can we take away from the second telling?

4. God created the animals according to their kind, but He made man one of a kind – according to God’s kind. This is the highest honor God could give any creature (see Psalm 2). In what ways are you tempted to see yourself as not in God’s image? In what ways are you tempted to see others as not in God’s image? How does your view need to change?

5. All of creation, including man, has been created through Jesus and for Jesus (Colossians 1:16). If this is true, then everything exists for Jesus. Think about the purpose of Jesus Christ. What does this mean for the purpose of man? How does this change your purpose?

Additional Reading

From *Every Moment Holy* by Douglas Kaine McKelvey

May our acts of service and creation,
frail and wanting as they are,
be met and multiplied by the mysterious workings of your Spirit
who weaves all things together toward a redemption more good and glorious than
we yet have eyes to see, or courage to hope for.
May our love and our labors now echo your love and your labors, O Lord.

Let all that we do here,
in these our brief lives,
in this our brief moment to love,
in this the work that you have ordained,
for this community,
flower in winsome and beautiful foretaste of greater glories yet to come.

¹ McKelvey, Douglas Kaine. *Every Moment Holy*. Nashville, Rabbit Room Press, 2017

Genesis 1:26-27

"Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh." This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church.

— Ephesians 5:31-32

Men & Women

This passage reveals awe-inspiring truths. We'll ponder two.

First, God is shown to be triune; an eternally relational being. Did you catch that nuance in verse 26? God is speaking in a relational way right from the beginning. "Let us," He says. Us. He is speaking within Himself. God was and has always been 'us' from the beginning of all things. He creates in union with Himself. His nature is perfect unity with distinct persons. Though the book introduced God by the name Elohim (a masculine word with a plural ending used in every single verse of the book to this point), this reference to "us" is still somewhat surprising.

What? How? The trinity is not an easy concept to understand, less still to explain succinctly. Nonetheless, we must receive God as He has been revealed to us; and He has been revealed as one God in three persons. This is rarely explicit in scripture but is undeniably implicit throughout. It is what one might call a consequent necessity. To understand God in His being, in His creating, and in His redeeming is to understand Him as triune.

Second, this passage emphasizes the complementary nature of men and women. Together we reflect the image of God and fulfill His mandate for creation. Together we carry the stamp of God's Spirit, His moral reasoning, and His creative mandate in the earth. We have a unified, innate essence that is of utmost value and glory. Both male and female are sourced in the image of God the creator.

However, the passage clearly indicates that the full image of God is equal, yet with distinction. Male and female were distinct reflections of God's glory by design, not happenstance. To observe and to uphold the differences in male and female is not to rob one nor the other in a kind of contest. It is to honor God in His desire that there should be a difference.

Men are men. Women are women. Any attempt to blur or hide or be ashamed of the glorious, designed difference between male and female is to forfeit the goodness of God's reflection in the world. It is true that within these gender frameworks there is an array of personality, gifting, and interests. However, no matter where or how frequently those characteristics may overlap in men and women there is a remaining, fundamental difference.

[illegible]

Treasure

1. Read through the passage two or three times.
2. Write down 10 observations about the text. Start by asking who/what/where/when/why/how?

Grow

1. Name as many characteristics of God as you can. In other words, what is His image?

2. How many of these are evident in humanity, made in His image?

Go

1. How would you define the trinity to someone interested in Christianity?
Could you do it in a few sentences?

2. How would you respond to someone who believes there is no meaningful distinction between male and female?

Discussion Questions

1. Growing up, how did you think men & women/boys & girls ought to relate to one another? Are there any ways your understanding has changed through the years?

2. "So God created mankind in his own image...male and female he created them." How and why is this statement significant, particularly in the culture that we live?

3. As you look at Genesis 1-2, what observations can you make about the differences between male and female? How can these differences be celebrated and serve as complements to one another?

4. In what ways has our culture's changing view of gender influenced or impacted you or your family? What questions do you currently have about gender? How might your group come alongside of you?

5. What do you think are wise ways to talk about gender within the church? Outside of the church? How might God grow your compassion for those who believe or practice differently than you? Spend some time praying about this as a group.

Additional Reading

From *Genesis: A Commentary* by Bruce K. Waltke and Cathi J. Fredricks

Fundamental to Genesis and the entirety of Scripture is the creation of humanity in the image of God. The expression “image of God” is used uniquely with reference to human beings and so sets them apart from the other creatures. Whereas the other creatures are created “according to their kinds” (Gen. 1:21, 24, 25), humanity is made “in the image of God.” Being made in God’s image establishes humanity’s role on earth and facilitates communication with the divine. D. J. A. Clines details a number of characteristics of being made in the image of God. First, the term image refers to a statue in the round, suggesting that a human being is a psychosomatic unity. Second, an image functions to express, not to depict; thus, humanity is a faithful and adequate representation, though not a facsimile.

It is often said that the Bible represents God anthropomorphically (i.e., as a human being). More accurately, a human being is theomorphic, made like God so that God can communicate himself to people. He gave people ears to show that he hears the cry of the afflicted and eyes to show that he sees the plight of the pitiful (Ps. 94:9). Third, an image possesses the life of the one being represented. Fourth, an image represents the presence of the one represented. Fifth, inseparable from the notion of serving as a representative, the image functions as ruler in the place of the deity. Hart explains,

“In the ancient Near East it was widely believed that a god’s spirit lived in any statue or image of that god, with the result that the image could function as a kind of representative of or substitute for the god wherever it was placed. It was also customary in the ANE to think of a king as a representative of a god; obviously the king ruled, and the god was the ultimate ruler, so the king must be ruling on the god’s behalf. It is therefore not surprising that these two separate ideas became connected and a king came to be described as an image of a god. The Hebrew perspective bears a distinct difference. In ancient Near Eastern texts only the king is in the image of God.”

¹ Bruce K. Waltke and Cathi J. Fredricks, *Genesis: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2001), 65–66.

But in the Hebrew perspective this is democratized to all humanity. “The text is saying that exercising royal dominion over the earth as God’s representative is the basic purpose for which God created man,” explains Hart. He adds, “man is appointed king over creation, responsible to God the ultimate king, and as such expected to manage and develop and care for creation, this task to include actual physical work.” Finally, in the context of Genesis, the image refers to the plurality of male and female within the unity of humanity. This concept is also distinct from the ancient Near Eastern perspective.

The important addition of “likeness” underscores that humanity is only a facsimile of God and hence distinct from him. Whereas the image of the deity is equated with the deity itself in the ancient Near East, the word likeness serves to clearly distinguish God from humans in the biblical worldview.

Genesis 2:18-24

“Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish. In the same way husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church, because we are members of his body. ‘Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.’ This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church. However, let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband.”

— Ephesians 5:25-33

A Very Good Marriage

In chapter 2 of Genesis, the curtain is pulled back a bit further on the scene of the sixth day of creation. All of God’s magnificent creation culminates at this moment as the breath of God goes into man and he comes alive. What an amazing scene! God declares everything up to this point as “good.” But right before He escalates this assessment to “very good” (1:31), God pauses because His design is still incomplete. For the first time, God uses the words “not good.”

Marriage is often mocked, cheapened, and redefined in our day. It is more than just a side topic or one theme among many in the scriptures. The story of the Gospel is

intimately connected with the idea of marriage as a picture of Christ and His Church. This text is where we first encounter God's foundational design for man and woman. In our pluralistic society, the authority to define marriage is easily lost or strongly disputed. However, God instituted marriage in His original design to be one man and one woman. All other views distort God's perfect union and destroy the beauty of the Gospel.

God intentionally created the man and His new bride to live in such close intimacy that He describes their relationship as "one flesh." God did not intend for man to function alone. God brings the woman to the man just like a father gives his beloved daughter away to the groom. There couldn't have been a more beautiful setting for the first marriage ceremony in all of human history. The lush Garden of Eden was the venue and all of creation stood in amazement. This special relationship even inspired Adam to write the first love song! The idea of living as "one flesh" is so incredibly beautiful when cultivated and nurtured. It can also be devastating and hurtful when selfish desires drive a wedge of disunity between the two. Marriage is not two lives in co-existence, but two lives melded together as one. The new couple must now live with new priorities as a family unit in the way they order their lives spiritually, financially, and relationally.

God's idea is not just a good idea for society, but it is rooted in the original design of the Creator. God designed it to function this way. Marriage was not only significant to God at the beginning of His creation, but this union will be celebrated at the culmination of time with Christ's bride, the Church, at the marriage supper of the Lamb.

[illegible]

Treasure

1. Read through the passage two or three times.
2. Write down 10 observations about the text. Start by asking who/what/where/when/why/how?

Grow

1. How does God's design for relationship between husband and wife inform our thinking about the character of God?

2. Why is it so important to understand that marriage is a gospel picture of Christ and His Church?

Go

1. In what ways are you tempted to push away from the idea of being "one flesh" in your marriage?

2. How does your understanding of the marriage of Christ and the Church change the way you view your holiness?

Group Discussion Questions

1. Share about your wedding day. If you are not married, share about a wedding you enjoyed watching or participating in.

2. God says, "It is not good for the man to be alone." What does He mean? How might this relate to man being made in the image of the triune God?

3. God creates Eve as "a helper fit for him." What do you think it means for Eve to be a helper? What does it not mean?

4. Paul shares in Ephesians 5 that marriage is a great mystery. What does he mean by this? What was unclear in Genesis that is made clear through Jesus and His marriage to the church? How might you become more like Jesus in your marriage?

5. Verse 24 says that marriage is the man and woman leaving father and mother and becoming "one flesh." What do you think this means? How might seeing your spouse as your own flesh change the way you relate to him or her? (See Ephesians 5:28 – 31 for help.)

6. Genesis 2 concludes with "Adam and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame." This is the goal of marriage: to be known and loved. How might you grow in knowing and loving your spouse? Is there any place shame has crept into your marriage? Spend some time praying for one another in your marriages.

Additional Reading

From *Marriage and the Mystery of the Gospel* by Ray Ortland

“Therefore.” This word signals that Moses is drawing an inference from the Eden narrative for our lives in the world today. It’s as if we are sitting in Moses’ living room, watching his DVD of the creation of the universe (Genesis 1) and of man and woman (Genesis 2). At this point in the DVD, he hits the pause button on the remote, the screen freezes, he turns to us post-fall people watching these amazing primeval events, and he says to us, “I want you to know how God’s original design remains normative for us today. Every marriage now should follow the precedent of God’s ‘pattern established back then.’”

“...a man shall leave his father and his mother.” If even parental claims must yield to the primacy of marriage, so must all other bonds, however strong. A man’s primary human relationship should be with his wife alone, as they start a new family together. In a culture that venerated ancestral ties, this was a radical departure from custom and expectation. And it is not the woman who makes all the sacrifices to get the marriage going. “A man shall leave his father and his mother.”

“... and hold fast to his wife.” The Hebrew root translated “hold fast” is used elsewhere for soldering two parts of metal together (Isa, 41:7). In marrying, a man joins himself to his wife at a profound level. He does not ask her to move his way, to do all the adjusting toward him. But he takes the initiative to move toward his wife, enfolding her into his heart, bonding with her as with no other human being, not even his children. He rejoices to identify with his wife, as Adam did with Eve--“This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh.” At every level of his being, a husband should be wholeheartedly devoted to his wife, loyal to his wife, steadfast toward his wife, as toward no other.

“.. and they shall become one flesh.” “One flesh” is the biblical definition of marriage in two brief but freighted words. This expression names marriage as one mortal life fully shared. The word “one” bespeaks a life fully shared, and the word “flesh” suggests the transient mortality of this life (Gen. 6:3; Ps. 78:39). So in the one-flesh union of marriage, all the boundaries between a man and a woman fall away,

¹Ortland, Ray. *Marriage and the Mystery of the Gospel*. Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway, 2016. (p.29-30)

and the married couple comes together completely, as long as they both shall live. In real terms, two selfish me's start learning to think like one unified us, building a new life together with one total everything: one story, one purpose, one reputation, one bed, one suffering, one budget, one family, and so forth. Marriage removes all barriers and replaces them with a comprehensive oneness. It is this all-encompassing unity that sets marriage apart as marriage, more profound than even the most intense friendship.



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