

Mankind: God’s Handiwork



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week’s Study: *Gen. 1:27; Rom. 5:12–19; Gen. 1:26; Mark 12:13–17; Gen. 2:19–25; Acts 17:26.*

Memory Text: “Know ye that the LORD he is God: it is he that hath made us, and not we ourselves” (*Psalms 100:3*).

Key Thought: God created humanity in His own image; sin defiled that image. God’s plan is to restore that image in us.

A nineteenth-century thinker, Arthur Schopenhauer, while deep in thought about the essence of human identity, accidentally bumped into someone on the street. The person whom he hit angrily demanded, “Who do you think you are?”

“Who am I?” Schopenhauer responded. “I wish I knew.”

Who am I? Who are we as a race? What are we doing here? How did we get here, and why?

These are ancient questions that humans still debate today. Scripture, however, answers them all. That’s because there is an inseparable link between the question of our identity and the doctrine of creation. The answer to all those questions is found there; no other biblical doctrine is as central to our understanding of humanity as is creation, because it focuses on our origin, not merely our beginning. “Beginning” simply may refer to the fact of coming to be; “origin” attaches the idea of purpose to that fact of coming to be.

Therefore, the Bible teaching on the creation of humanity is radically opposed to evolution, which argues that there is no purpose for our existence (we are here by chance alone). Rarely have there been two teachings that present starker or more irreconcilable alternatives not only to our existence but to our identity as human beings.

**Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, October 20.*

Creation and Human Origins

“So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them” (Gen. 1:27). What does this text tell us about our origins that is so radically different from, even openly contradictory to, other views of human beginnings, such as evolution?

It is impossible to miss the point that, as a conscious act of God, humanity’s creation had a purpose behind it. Scripture has no room for any idea of chance. We were made with a distinct purpose, and we were given a distinct nature and essence right from the start.

Made “in the image of God” is about as concrete and distinct an essence, a purpose, as could be imagined. This point is important because some thinkers have argued that humans have to create their own meaning, their own purpose, because we are born without any meaning or purpose inherent in us. If, for instance, evolution were true, one could make the point that—because evolution teaches that we didn’t come with any purposes—we have to make up our own. In contrast, according to the Bible, we were made in the image of God and created to bring glory to Him.

Origins deal with history. Read **Jude 14, Romans 5:12–21, and 1 Corinthians 15:20–22**. How do these texts help us to understand the historicity of Adam in Genesis 1, 2? Why is it important to understand Adam as a historical person?

It’s amazing how many Bible scholars dismiss the historicity of Adam: he’s a myth, they say, a symbol for humanity but not a real person. One can hold those beliefs only through greatly distorting the texts themselves, both in the Old and New Testaments.

Dwell on the fact that you were made in the image of God. What should that tell you about your own inherent self-worth, regardless of your faults, weaknesses, and shortcomings?

The Image of God: Part 1

As we saw yesterday, Adam and Eve were literal people, not symbols or myths but actual flesh-and-blood beings made “in the image of God.” Obviously, being made in the image of God is something good, something sacred, something that bestows inherent value on us. What, however, does that really mean?

Read Genesis 1:26 carefully. What statement of intention seems to be linked to the creation of man in God’s image? That is, God says that humanity is to be made in His image, and then something immediately follows as a result. What is that something, and how does it help us in our understanding of the concept of “the image of God”?

Genesis 1:26 is God’s statement of intention. God creates man in His image and then commands him to do something. Being created in God’s image appears to be necessary for a certain function; in this case, to have “dominion” over the rest of what God had created. Therefore, “the image of God” points to physical, intellectual, social, and spiritual endowments needed in order for humanity to fulfill God’s purpose for it. Whatever it meant to have “dominion over” the rest of the creation, it certainly entailed respect, care, and good stewardship. Humanity was, perhaps, to interact in a dynamic way with the “lower” created order in a manner that reflected how God interacted with humans themselves. And being made in the image of God also meant that humans were to represent God in the world.

What a responsibility!

Read Mark 12:13–17. How do these verses help us to understand what it means to be made in God’s image?

Jesus’ practical message seems to be “ ‘Give your money to Caesar; it has his image on it, and thus it belongs to him. But give yourselves to God. You bear his image, and you belong to him.’ ”—Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1998), p. 515.

How is this translated into practical terms? Most likely, we also show that we bear God’s image in our love, commitment, and loyalty to Him, as well as in the ways in which we treat others. Again, being made in the image of God, whatever else it entails, is something manifested by our actions.

The Image of God: Part 2

Whatever else it means to be “made in the image of God,” it also shows that we were made to be in relationships. What are those relationships, and how should we, made as we are, act in them?

Read Genesis 2:19, 20. What does that tell us right away about humanity’s relationship to the world?

Notice the autonomy, the freedom, given to Adam here. He was to name the creatures that God had created. God didn’t do the naming Himself; He left that work to Adam. The text suggests that God was going to accept whatever names Adam gave to the creatures.

Read Genesis 2:20–25. How do these verses reveal more about the relational aspects for these beings made in God’s image?

A lot of commentary has been written over the centuries about the meaning of these verses. What is fascinating here, among other things, is the closeness and the intimacy that was meant to exist between Adam and Eve. Adam was created out of the soil and Eve out of Adam (something that helps to distinguish her from every other earthly created being). To be made in God’s image, then, certainly entails the capacity for close and loving relationships—something that surely reflects the relationship in the Godhead itself.

Now study Genesis 1:27 together with Genesis 3:20 and Acts 17:26. In what way is the unity between the first pair of humans extended to cover the unity of the entire human race? What does the unity of humanity have to say about ethical issues such as justice, racism, et cetera?

A Defiled Image

One of the many great obstacles for those who read evolution into the biblical creation account is the Fall. In the Bible, the world and humanity were perfect when created, a teaching that contradicts evolution at the most basic level. Only through transgression did suffering and death enter the world, a concept that's contrary to the evolutionary model, in which suffering and death are part of the very means of creation itself.

Imagine what it would say about the character of God if He had created us in the manner that evolution teaches. According to that false theory, God uses processes of violence, selfishness, and dominance of the strong against the weak in order to create a morally flawless and selfless being who “falls” into a state of violence, selfishness, and dominance of the strong over the weak—a state from which he has to be redeemed or else face final punishment.

Think, too, of what evolution does to the plan of salvation. The Lord incarnates into an evolved ape that was created through the vicious and painfully murderous cycle of natural selection, all in order to abolish death, “the last enemy” (*1 Cor. 15:26*)? But how can death be the “enemy” when it was one of God’s chosen means for creating humans? The Lord must have expended plenty of dead *Homo erectus*, *Homo heidelbergensis*, and *Homo neanderthalensis* in order to finally get one creature into His own image (*Homo sapiens*). So, Jesus comes to save humankind from the very process God used to create humankind in the first place? The whole idea is foolish and unbiblical.

Read Romans 5:12–19 and Colossians 3:10. How do these verses help us to understand what sin has done to humanity? How does the great controversy play into this whole picture? See 1 John 3:8.

Sin has touched all aspects of human life, and even the earth itself. Ellen G. White talked about a “threefold” curse that has rested on the world, the first resulting from Adam’s fall, the next from Cain’s murder of Abel, and the third from the damage caused by the Flood. Theologians also talk about “total depravity,” the idea that every aspect of humanity, life, and personality has been damaged by sin. As we look around at the world, and even at ourselves, it’s not hard to see, is it?

Some believe that violence, suffering, and death were all part of how God created humanity. Others believe that violence, suffering, and death were all part of how Satan seeks to destroy the humanity that God has created. Think about the differences in the character of God that these two opposing views present.

Restoration

As deep and pervasive as the effects of sin have been on humanity, our plight is not irreversible. The Bible speaks about the possibility of renewal and restoration of the image of God in us, at least to some degree.

Study the following passages carefully: *Rom. 8:29*; *2 Cor. 3:18*; and *Eph. 4:23, 24*. **What hope is presented in them?**

The Bible clearly holds up the hope for us to be remade in God's image. The renewal of the image of God in humanity is accompanied by a reduction of the effects that sin has had on us and our relationships. None of this, however, is the result of man's own achievement. The Bible points to Christ as being the basis of hope for man's renewal. Also, whatever changes are wrought in our lives, our hope of salvation must rest always on what Christ has accomplished for us and on the offer of salvation based on His righteousness, not our own.

How is 2 Corinthians 5:17 related to the re-creation of man in God's image? Does being a new creature place a person beyond the reach of sin and its effects on the human experience? What does your own experience tell you about the answer?

Overall, the evidence from Scripture leads to the conclusion that spiritual renewal comes at the cost of watchfulness in spiritual warfare. It is warfare between the flesh and the spirit (*Gal. 5:16, 17*). Those who are being renewed in God's image find this spiritual warfare to be the reality of the human experience, and thus they embrace the challenge in the strength of the Lord (*Eph. 6:10–13*). To choose to be re-made in the image of God is to place oneself on the side of God in the great controversy. Writing about those who have experienced the renewing power of Christ, Ellen G. White noted, "But because this experience is his, the Christian is not therefore to fold his hands, content with that which has been accomplished for him. He who has determined to enter the spiritual kingdom will find that all the powers and passions of unregenerate nature, backed by the forces of the kingdom of darkness, are arrayed against him. Each day he must renew his consecration, each day do battle with evil. Old habits, hereditary tendencies to wrong, will strive for the mastery, and against these he is to be ever on guard, striving in Christ's strength for victory."—*The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 476, 477.

Further Study: Read Ellen G. White, “The Creation,” pp. 44–51, in *Patriarchs and Prophets*.

“In the beginning, man was created in the image of God. He was in perfect harmony with the nature and the law of God; the principles of righteousness were written upon his heart. But sin alienated him from his Maker. He no longer reflected the divine image. His heart was at war with the principles of God’s law. ‘The carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be.’ Romans 8:7. But ‘God so loved the world, that He gave His only-begotten Son,’ that man might be reconciled to God. Through the merits of Christ he can be restored to harmony with his Maker. His heart must be renewed by divine grace; he must have a new life from above. This change is the new birth, without which, says Jesus, ‘he cannot see the kingdom of God.’”—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 467.

“The true object of education is to restore the image of God in the soul. In the beginning God created man in His own likeness. He endowed him with noble qualities. His mind was well balanced, and all the powers of his being were harmonious. But the Fall and its effects have perverted these gifts. Sin has marred and well-nigh obliterated the image of God in man. It was to restore this that the plan of salvation was devised, and a life of probation was granted to man.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 595.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 In what way does the teaching of evolution fit into the great-controversy scenario? How has Satan used this doctrine to undermine faith in the Bible?
- 2 Go through the New Testament and look up all the texts that talk about Adam. How clear is it that the New Testament writers all believed Adam to be a real person? Why is that understanding so important to our understanding of who we are, how we got into the situation we are in, and the hope that we have in Jesus?
- 3 Dwell more on the idea of being restored into God’s image. In what way are we meant to understand that, especially as beings who are subject to decay, death, sickness, and disease?
- 4 The two most foundational teachings in physics—quantum theory and general relativity—directly contradict each other. What should that tell us about how careful we need to be when accepting something as “fact” merely because science says it is so?

The Bible Text

The foreign evangelist wasn't sure what to expect as the evangelistic meetings among the Romani (Gypsy) people of Bulgaria neared. The leaders couldn't locate a suitable hall to rent. But the Romani Seventh-day Adventist community would let nothing stand in their way. They built a platform on a dead-end street and put benches in the street.

On opening night, crowds packed the street around the homemade platform. People filled the yards, balconies of homes, even nearby rooftops to hear the message of salvation in Jesus. The crowd was estimated at 5,000 people and didn't diminish during the five weeks of meetings. Hundreds were baptized. One of these new members was Ivan.

Ivan was 21, and his decision for Christ was based more on emotion than on an acceptance of a new lifestyle centered on Christ. Adventure called, and Ivan drifted away from Christ.

When Ivan realized that his life was headed in the wrong direction, he prayed. But nothing happened. He returned to church—at least on some Sabbaths—but still nothing changed. One day he cried out to God, “Lord, do You hear me? Are You still interested in me?”

That night he dreamed that the Lord spoke to him. “Find your baptismal certificate in the drawer. Read the Bible text written there.”

The next morning Ivan found the baptismal certificate exactly where he had seen it in his dream. He noticed a Bible text that the pastor had written on it. Ivan grabbed his Bible and looked up the text, Isaiah 43:2. “Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have summoned you by name; you are mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned; the flames will not set you ablaze” (*NIV*).

Ivan reread the words, amazed that God had known several years earlier that he would now need this very text at this time in his life. God knew him; God cared. Ivan rededicated his life to God. He spends time every day in prayer and Bible study to keep him from falling into the lake of indifference again.

Ivan praises God for sending evangelists to teach the Romani people about God. Recently a Thirteenth Sabbath Offering helped to build a church for a Romani community in northwestern Bulgaria. Thank you for sharing God's love through your mission offerings.

IVAN KIRILOV is part of a rapidly growing Romani Seventh-day Adventist community of more than 1,000 members in Kyustendil, Bulgaria.