

## **What We Believe...About Humanity** **Genesis 1:26-31**

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After a break last week we return this morning to our series on “What We Believe”, that is, we’re talking about basic beliefs we hold as Christians. We’re doing this series because our culture is rapidly turning from a general acceptance of these truths to a grudging tolerance and, in some cases, an outright hostility toward them. In the face of these changes, it’s important to know what we stand for.

Also, there’s no shortage of religious teachers who distort the Bible’s teaching, sometimes very convincingly. In the last several years, for example, one young pastor developed a great following with his talent for relating biblical truth to modern life. Unfortunately, his emphasis on God’s love, which is certainly true, led him to doubt the reality of hell as an eternal place of punishment and to imply that God will save everyone, regardless of whether or not they have a relationship with Christ – a concept known as ‘universalism’. Many have been sucked into these distortions because they don’t know historic, orthodox, biblical truth. Jesus Himself taught the reality of hell (Mark 9:42-48) and the Apostle Peter said plainly that salvation only comes to those who know Christ as their Savior because “Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved.” (Acts 4:12)

So, after talking about the Bible and God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit, today we want to focus on what the Bible teaches about humanity, or what has been called the doctrine of man. Like the other topics, it’s too big to tackle in just one sermon but we’ll do our best to highlight the important elements.

In thinking about humanity, one of the first things we’re confronted with is – how did we get here? The publication in 1859 of Charles Darwin’s book, *On The Origin Of Species*, has led inexorably to a near universal embrace in modern science of the theory of evolution as the explanation of how we came to be. To oversimplify, evolution states that the elemental building blocks of life came together by chance and, over millions of years, led to increasingly complex organisms and animals and ultimately to man. Some Christians feel the theory of evolution could be true. They maintain that the Genesis account was meant to be taken figuratively, not literally. On the opposite side are creationists, who view Genesis literally and find it incompatible with the theory of evolution. A third view is something called “intelligent design”. Without taking a position on *who* might have brought mankind into being, proponents of intelligent design believe that it’s impossible to hold that the extremely complex structures found at all levels of life came about just by chance or by any natural process of evolution.

Christians of good will have embraced all three – evolution, creationism, intelligent design – as explanations for how we came to be and I wouldn’t break fellowship with another Christian just because they held a different view from mine. Although admittedly not without its difficulties, for me I believe the creation story found

in Genesis was meant to be taken literally and is a true account of how we came to be. The findings of intelligent design serve to back this up, in my opinion. Evolution, on the other hand, generally denies God's hand in creation and, in the eyes of many, has led to a devaluing of human life, where animals are equal to humans and abortion is insignificant because we are simply one more link in the evolutionary chain.

The biblical account of our creation couldn't be more different. Genesis 1:27 says "So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them" and this is elaborated on in Genesis 2:7 "the LORD God formed the man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being." and Genesis 2:21,22 "[21] So the LORD God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep; and while he was sleeping, he took one of the man's ribs and closed up the place with flesh. [22] Then the LORD God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man."

Two things are clear from these verses. First, the Bible asserts that humans came into being by the direct action of God, not some natural process that took ages. God did use physical material, "dust" from the ground, something we share with other creatures (Gen. 2:19) but our first parents were formed directly by God Himself and given life by Him.

Secondly, it's clear that we are unique because, as Gen. 1:27 stated, we were created in God's own image. No other creature is said to have God's image and no other creature is given rule or dominion over creation (Gen. 1:28). Theologians have disagreed over what the image of God that we have is. It's not that we *look* like God because God is spirit (John 4:24) and so has no body. Generally, the image of God consists of the fact that, like God, we have things like; a spiritual component; we are rational, thinking beings; we are moral beings; we can exhibit righteousness and holiness (Ephesians 4:24); and that we can rule or exercise control over creation (Gen. 1:28). Of course, we do none of those things as perfectly or as fully as God does but you can see that they make us absolutely distinct and superior from anything else in creation.

Our importance is also seen in the fact that the death penalty is required when a person is killed, Gen. 9:6 "Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed; for in the image of God has God made man." And, using the example of birds, Jesus taught that we are much more valuable than other creatures (Matthew 6:26).

While Psalm 8:5-8 tells us that we were made a little lower than the angels, that is, in this earthly existence we're not heavenly beings, yet we have been made rulers over all creatures. And Hebrews 1:14 reminds us that part of the function of God's angels is to help us, they are not "above" us or more important than us.

Satan uses many ways to discourage us and make us believe we're worth nothing. So-called friends, or family members, or a boss at work, or images in the media, etc. give us the message that we're stupid, or incompetent, or fat, or ugly and

because of these things, we're worthless. Yet the Bible indicates that each of us is valuable in God's eyes. Not because of what we can do, how we look, how much we earn, how smart we are, or how good we are at sports, etc. but because God made each of us in His image. This, by the way, flies in the face of some today who advocate that the elderly or disabled should not use up valuable health resources because they don't contribute to society. We are to care for people not for what they contribute but because even in their disabled state they bear the image of God and so have worth in His eyes.

Although Adam and Eve, like everything else in creation, were created "good" (Gen. 1:31) and so were able to obey God perfectly, they chose to sin (Gen. 3:6; Romans 5:17). Their disobedience didn't destroy the image of God in us but it did distort it and in fact, introduced sin and imperfection in every element of creation (Rom. 8:20-22), including us. Not only did it damage us spiritually (Rom. 3:23; 6:23; Ephesians 2:1) but also physically and psychologically, which is why we have things such as disease, birth defects, mental illness, and so forth.

The good news is that God is redeeming the world and one day all will be made whole again. For us, this process begins when we receive Jesus as our Savior. We're forgiven and we become new creations in Christ (II Corinthians 5:17). We have a new orientation in life, one that wants to please Jesus (Eph. 4:22-24) instead of being stuck in old, sinful patterns. This doesn't happen all at once, it's a process called sanctification, but as we learn to allow Jesus to control more and more of our lives, we'll find that sin does less and less damage to us and to our relationships. We'll only be completely free from sin, however, when we're called to be with Jesus in heaven, where sin no longer exists and where, someday, we'll be given eternal, glorified bodies that have no physical imperfections either (II Corinthians 5:1; Rev. 21:4).

Theologians have wrestled with exactly how we're composed as humans. Most often, the Bible speaks of *two* aspects to our existence – a spiritual aspect and a physical aspect. What's confusing is that different words are often used interchangeably – "soul" and "spirit", "flesh" and "body". On a couple of occasions the Apostle Paul seems to speak of three parts to us – a spirit which relates to God, a soul which is kind of a 'life force', and a body (I Thessalonians 5:23; Hebrews 4:12). Yet most other times Paul only mentions two – a spirit and a body (Romans 8:10; II Cor. 7:1). We can't be one hundred percent sure but given that "spirit" and "soul" often mean the same thing and that most places in the Bible speak of just two aspects of a person – a spiritual one and a physical one – it seems the weight of Scripture views us as having two parts, each designed by God for a specific purpose.

So, what do we do with all this information? Well, it's clear that we're not an accident of nature, God brought humanity, and each of us (Psalm 139:13), specifically into being. All the days of our lives were planned by Him (Psalm 139:16). No matter how imperfect we may be in our own eyes or in the eyes of others, every one of us bears God's image and so we are valuable to Him, even if to no one else. And each of us, in ways big and small, can and should bring Him glory (I Cor. 10:31). When those

around us or culture in general, tell us that we aren't worth anything, remind yourself of the great value you have in God's eyes and that your worth rests in Him.