

The Search For Significance

Week 1 : The Origin of the Search

Our view of identity, our actions and the way we view the world around us are directly related to our beliefs.

If we have an incorrect view of God, we will have an incorrect view of self.

The person I think I am may or may not be who I really am.

The four general false beliefs that many of us apply daily in our relationships and circumstances:

- *I must meet certain standards to feel good about myself.*
- *I must have the approval of certain people to approve of myself. Without their approval, I cannot feel good about myself.*
- *Those who fail (including myself) are unworthy of love and therefore must be blamed and condemned.*
- *I am what I am. I cannot change. I am hopeless. I am the sum total of all of my past successes and failures, and I'll never be significantly different. (S. for S. 26)*

There are two possible options we can choose to determine self-worth:

- *The world's system: self-worth = performance (what you do) + others' opinions (what others think or say about you)*
- *God's system: self-worth = God's truth about you (S. for S. 160)*

Your value and worth are tied to what has been given to you: the image of God

“Then God said, ‘Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.’ So God created man in His own image; in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them” (Gen. 1:26, 27).

Over the course of history, many have promoted differing views regarding the theological idea of humans being made in the image of God.

In some cases, the notion of God's image and how it relates to humanity is said to be **only structural**: certain qualities found in God are manifest in humans as His creation. God has intelligence, a will, and emotions, so do men and women created in His image also.

Moral (inner sense of right and wrong...we reflect God in what we do, or don't do).

Spiritual (we have immaterial spirits...we relate to God, we will live forever)

Mental (we can think logically and learn abstract reasoning...)

We are "more like God than the rest of creation."

Alternately, other lines of thought claim that the image of God is not something inherent to our being human, rather it is seen as something shown when we **function** as beings representing God.

Relational (we can fellowship with each other)

Authoritative (we are to rule over creation and act as stewards)

Representative (we are to be God's ambassadors)

Biblically, if one is to be accurate, one must hold to both: we are made in the image of God, and bear certain unmistakable marks of His image, yet we have been given a divine mandate to function as ambassadors within creation to further spread God's image and bring glory to Him by the conveyance of His message of redemption. The Bible clearly teaches God created humans in His image.

And He made us for His glory...

Isaiah 43:7 is clear... "Everyone who is called by My name,
Whom I have created for My glory;
I have formed him, yes, I have made him."

God continues in Genesis 1:28 by telling humans to "fill the earth."

Why that's important: The fulfillment of this command would result in God's image being spread over the surface of the earth to all corners of inhabitable creation. Thus the knowledge of God and the glory of God would be manifest by those made in the image of God as they co-ruled alongside Him.

When sin entered the world, the perfect relationship that humans enjoyed with God was severed, and the image of God found in humanity became twisted and warped.

Only when we commit our lives to Jesus that we begin the exploration of finding out who we really are. Blaise Pascal wrote, *"Not only do we only know God through Jesus Christ, but we only know ourselves through Jesus Christ; we only know life and death through Jesus Christ. Apart from Jesus Christ we cannot know the meaning of our life or our death, of God or of ourselves."*

Let's think on this for a moment: Garden of Eden. Perfect relationship with God. God spends time with Adam and Eve in the cool of the day. Intimate, personal relationship with the Maker. Did Eve ever look around and say, "Hmm, I wonder who I am? I

wonder if I have worth." Did Adam ever sit and worry, "I hope I never feel rejection from anyone. I'm a little confused about what I'm supposed to do with my life exactly."

No, they did not. Why? Because they had a perfect relationship with this God in whose image they were made.

Satan hates the image of God within us and lies about the sources of our value and worth.

John 8:44 You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks out of his own character, for he is a liar and the father of lies.

Genesis 3:1-10 Now the serpent was more crafty than any other beast of the field that the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God actually say, 'You shall not eat of any tree in the garden'?" 2 And the woman said to the serpent, "We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden, 3 but God said, 'You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it, lest you die.'" 4 But the serpent said to the woman, "You will not surely die. 5 For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." 6 So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate. 7 Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked. And they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loincloths. 8 And they heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden. 9 But the LORD God called to the man and said to him, "Where are you?" 10 And he said, "I heard the sound of you in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked, and I hid myself."

1 Timothy 2:14 "...And Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor."

Adam chose, with full understanding, to disobey.

The turn against the glory of God at the Fall was so pervasive that humanity revolts even against the image of God found in ourselves.

What sin distorts:

- **Truth:** *"Has God indeed said, 'You shall not eat of every tree of the garden'?" (Gen. 3:1).*
- **Righteousness:** *"God has said, 'You shall not eat it, nor shall you touch it, lest you die.'" ... "You will not surely die" (3:4).*
- **Identity:** *"You will be like God, knowing good and evil" (3:4).*

Sin is irrational. It keeps us from seeing God, reality, and ourselves as we really are. Things are not as they seem, because our sin taints our view and clouds our vision.

Our minds, wills and emotions have been tainted by sin, so we have a broken relationship – one that must be mended. The mind, will and emotions cannot be allowed to seek their own way. We attempt to make Him over in our likeness and make ourselves in His likeness without His power, wisdom or righteousness. We, as creation, attempt to become creators. Sin has blinded humanity to the original purpose, significance and meaning of our lives

This rebellion motivates humans to focus inward rather than outward. Instead of the promotion of the purpose of God for His glory, humanity promotes its own agenda to garner self-seeking praise. We seek our own ways to gain love, acceptance and meaning.

"For all seek their own, not the things which are of Christ Jesus" (Philippians 2:21).

Instead of God's perfect image being spread, the image of fallen humanity prevails.

Romans 5:12 tells us, "Therefore, just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned..."

Though the Fall influenced all aspects of life on earth, *it did not totally erase the image of God.*

Proof of this fact is found in the establishment of the idea of capital punishment by God after the Flood. Scripture teaches that man, even in the post-Fall state, still bears the image of God; to kill another human unlawfully is, therefore, to strike at an extension of God Himself. God relates this connection to Noah after the Flood:

"Whoever sheds man's blood, by man his blood shall be shed; for in the image of God He made man" (Genesis 9:6).

James, in the New Testament, continues this line of thought by revealing not only the sanctity of the image of God found in humans, but also the hypocrisy found within human behavior in that "we bless our God and Father" and at the same time "curse men, *who have been made similitude of God*" (3:9).

How do you approach others with respect to the image of God within them?

Our identity is wrapped up in a relationship with Christ.

Jesus took on our fleshly image in order to redeem His heavenly image in us.

"Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared in the same, that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, and release those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage" (Hebrews 2:14-15).

God will have His mandate fulfilled; the universe will be full of His glory. In the Garden of Eden, we find perfect beings, fresh from the hand of creation, ready to do the work of God. Now we exist as beings eager to fulfill our own desires, and in desperate need of a redemptive touch from Him. In Christ we see the beginning of our redemption and the gradual restoration of the image of God which will be ultimately accomplished by Him.

Paul writes to the Corinthians: "But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord." (2 Corinthians 3:18).

This transformation takes place over time as believers grow in the faith and knowledge of Christ; "put on the new man who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him" (Colossians 3:10).

As our knowledge of God increases, and as we align ourselves with His command, our thinking is changed: "And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God" (Romans 12:2).

This idea of progressive sanctification has at its heart the pursuit of holiness and its resultant increase of Christlikeness.

"Not that I have already attained," writes Paul, "or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me... I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 3:12-14).

This "goal" is the reason for our creation: to be image-bearers for Christ for His glory.

We battle sin but recognize that our motivation is not to “do better” or “enjoy life,” but to **become like Him through a relationship**. Let’s say it **another way: He is reclaiming His glory in us through relationship**.

While believers are now becoming increasingly more like Christ, only at the final unfolding of God’s redemptive plan will we fully bear His image. At the culmination of God’s redemptive purpose for the universe, He shall transform believers into perfect image-bearers. This is the ultimate destiny of all who are in Christ.

“For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren” (Romans 8:29).

Even now, through faith and obedience, the image of God is being magnified in us and someday will be perfected in holiness.

“For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part, but then I shall know just as I also am known” (1 Corinthians 13:12).

“By which I understand two things: first, that they shall literally and physically, with their risen bodies, actually look into the face of Jesus; and secondly, that spiritually their mental faculties shall be enlarged, so that they shall be enabled to look into the very heart, and soul, and character of Christ, so as to understand him, his work, his love, his all in all, as they never understood him before.” (Charles Spurgeon)

Paul writes to the Corinthians: “But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror **the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord.**” (2 **Corinthians 3:18**).

Questions for Reflection:

How do some people try to make themselves appear to have more value?

Do these things every completely satisfy a person? Why or why not?

What effects of the Fall (sin entering into the world) were evident in this morning's newspaper stories or last night's news programs?

How much value do you have because you are made in the image of God?

Complete the following statement: "Because I, and all humans, are made in the image of God, one thing that I should begin to do in order to obey God is..."

Read James 3:9. Why should we be careful about how we speak about other people?

Read Ephesians 1:3-14 and list what God has done to you and for you.