

O Splendor of God's Glory Bright

Ambrose (340–397); tr. Louis Benson (1855–1930)

O Splendor of God's glory bright,
from Light eternal bringing light,
O Light of light, light's living Spring,
true Day, all days illuminating.

Come, very Sun of heaven's love,
in lasting radiance from above,
and pour the Holy Spirit's ray
on all we think or do today.

And now to Thee our pray'rs ascend,
O Father, glorious without end;
we plead with sov'reign grace for pow'r
to conquer in temptation's hour.

Confirm our will to do the right,
and keep our hearts from envy's blight;
let faith her eager fires renew,
and hate the false, and love the true.

O joyful be the passing day
with thoughts as pure as morning's ray,
with faith like noontide shining bright,
our souls unshadowed by the night.

Dawn's glory gilds the earth and skies,
let Him, our perfect Morn, arise,
the Word in God the Father one,
the Father imaged in the Son.

ΤΩ ΚΡΟΝΟΥ ΚΑΙΡΩ

In the Nick of Time

God, Creation, and Humanity, Part 4: Why God Made Humans

Kevin T. Bauder

The creation account of Genesis 1–2 is indispensable for a right understanding of both God as creator and the world as His creation. It is also essential for a right understanding of human beings in relation to both God and the created world. What the Bible teaches is that humans have something in common with God, but they also have something in common with creation.

What they have in common with creation is that humans are creatures, like birds, stones, trees, and stars. If they are creatures, then they are not God. They are not absolute. They are not ultimate. Their being, purpose, and nature does not and cannot exist in themselves. They are the handiwork of someone greater and wiser than they. Someone else has designed them, and their design fits within an even larger design. Human beings can expect to find their fulfillment and joy only in completing their design within the great design.

Human ability to complete their design within creation, however, hinges on what they have in common with God. Yes, people are like other created things in important ways. In other ways they are more like God: out of all His creatures God has made them in His own image and likeness (Gen 1:26–27).

What is God's image and likeness in humans? The answer to this question is widely disputed. Nevertheless, the verses that narrate the creation of the human race (Gen 1:27–28) offer a clue. Verse 27 offers two descriptions of how God created humans: (1) in His image and likeness, and (2) as male and female. Verse 28 then expresses two blessings that God placed upon humanity: (1) to reproduce and fill the earth, and (2) to subdue the earth and exercise dominion over it. In this structure, being made as male and female is what enables humans to reproduce and fill the earth. Being made in God's image is what enables them to subdue it and exercise dominion. In other words, exercising dominion is a large part of what it means for humanity to be made in God's image.

This point is enlarged by David in Psalm 8. In view of the immensity of the universe, David asks why God should even pay attention to humans.



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His answer is that God has made humans a little lower than *'elohim*; He has crowned them with glory and honor (5). Specifically, God has made them “to have dominion over the works of thy hands; thou hast put all things under his feet” (6). Commenting on Psalm 8:6, the writer to the Hebrews observes that if God put all things under their feet, then God left nothing in creation outside of human dominion (Heb 2:8).

This dominion over creation is no light thing: God authorizes humans to “subdue” the created world. The term translated *subdue* (*kavash*) is a strong word. It means to *enslave* or to *dominate*. It is used of Israel conquering the land of Canaan (Num 32:22; Josh 18:1). It is also used of Haman attempting (as Ahasuerus believed) to rape Queen Esther (Esth 7:8). The word has the idea of wrestling someone into compliance against that person’s wishes.

This is the authority that God has given humans over the earth. Evidently, the original creation as it came from the hand of God remained unfinished. God created the world at a relatively lower level of order (Gen 1:1) and then brought it to a relatively higher level of order. Even so, parts of the created world were not yet as God intended them to be. Rather than arranging those parts Himself, God made humans responsible to bring increased order into the created world.

God’s plan was never to govern the world immediately. Rather, He created intermediaries who would do the work of governing on His behalf. He intended to fill the world with these God-like creatures who would continuously bring creation to higher and higher levels of order. These creatures would not have the power to create out of nothing, but they would have the ability to take the pre-existing materials of the world and to arrange those materials so as to force them to become more useful.

Human beings are those God-like creatures. They are created in God’s image and likeness. They are created to exercise dominion everywhere and over everything within the created world. Nothing on planet earth is exempted from their authority.

Not only do humans have dominion over the whole world, but the world is also made for the benefit of humans. God created the heavenly bodies for signs, seasons, days, and years (Gen 1:14), but only humans tell time. God made trees that were pleasant to look at and good for food (Gen 2:8). Both humans and animals consume fruit for food, but human beings are the only creatures who can derive pleasure from gazing upon the beauties of creation.

At a later point, God even gave humans explicit permission to kill animals for food (Gen 9:3). In other words, human dominion includes the authority to use and even to displace other parts of creation in the interest of human flourishing. This point cannot be emphasized too strongly: God never intended the created world to be preserved in pristine condition. He always

meant it to be ordered, arranged, and used by humans, without *a priori* restriction.

Since humans are made in God’s image, they also have one other privilege. They have the capacity to enjoy their relationship with the Creator. They are granted the blessing of being able to listen to “the voice of the Lord walking in the garden in the cool of the day” (Gen 3:8). Of all God’s creatures, they alone are more than servants. They are made to trust God, to obey Him, and to commune with Him. As later Scripture expands on this point, it shows that humans are made to treasure God’s perfections and His presence, reflecting praise back to Him in a relationship of worship.

To be made in the image of God, then, is to be oriented in two directions. On the one hand, it involves trust in, submission to, and worship of the Creator. On the other hand, it involves the exercise of dominion over creation, subduing it so that it reaches greater order and utility for human flourishing.

Worship and dominion are the core of the image of God. Humans stand as mediatorial rulers—kings and queens—over God’s world. To damage either worship or dominion is necessarily to damage both, and that is exactly what has happened. God’s image-bearers have rejected their obligation to trust, submit to, and worship Him. Consequently, their exercise of dominion has been severely hampered, though it has not been removed. Understanding how sin has damaged dominion will require another discussion, this one centering on the fall.



This essay is by Kevin T. Bauder, Research Professor of Historical and Systematic Theology at Central Baptist Theological Seminary. Not every one of the professors, students, or alumni of Central Seminary necessarily agrees with every opinion that it expresses.
