



– Week 1 –

“My neighbor is made in the image of God.”

Genesis 1:26-28; 2:7

Since the creation of mankind, God established a precedent for the dignity and value of all people. No other created thing has what we have. There is a special bond between us and God. Humankind’s value is not based upon ability, or age, or lineage. Rather, our value—what we’re worth—has been determined by God.

We are not some high form of primate. We aren’t mere animals. We are something more. God, the Creator of the universe, undoubtedly values all life; but He also places a higher premium on the lives of Human beings than any other.

From the beginning we were made to be something more.

READ: Genesis 1:26-28; 2:7

There are *three* words I want to examine from these passages:

i. Our “image” – **צֶלֶם** (tselem)

This idea may seem foreign to us, but the people of the OT would’ve been used to hearing about how kings, rulers, and tyrants were claiming to be the image of God. In fact, many of their images remain today. They’d erect massive idols for their people to worship them and their supposed divine status.

But God commanded that no one ought to make an idol or image to worship (cf. Ex. 20:4). This was because he had already created his own images: us! Humans are formed and appointed to participate in God's divine rule of the universe. As his representatives, humanity was supposed to rule on God’s behalf. We, the human race, are the living, breathing, “middle managers” of God on this earth.¹

ii. Our “formation” - **יָצַר** (yâtsare)

The Hebrew word “formed” means *to mold, shape, tailor, forge or fashion* a set of materials into something useful. This is similar to the way a potter molds a clay vessel; or the way a wood-carver turns a piece of wood into a desk. The idea is all about detail, delicacy, and precision.²

What does this mean? Well, consider God’s creation of the stars and everything in the night sky. Doesn’t it amaze you? Have you ever tried counting the stars? That would be impossible, but it’s still fun to try isn’t it? Now consider Genesis 1:16. It says that God “also made the stars.”

iii. Our “breath” - **נִפְחָה** (nâphach)

Yes, God did also form the animals out of the ground as he did with man. However, mankind was the only creature which was also given the very breathed of God. God not only carefully handcrafted human beings, but he went a step further and personally and directly energized man with his own breath (cf. Ps. 104:30).

¹ Continue your learning about the nuances of the word “image” in the OT by consuming everything from the Bible Project: <https://bibleproject.com/explore/image-god/>

² Mccomiskey, Thomas E., “898, יָצַר,” *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* ed. R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer Jr., and Bruce K. Waltke (Chicago: Moody Press, 1999), p. 396.

Now, throughout the OT *naphach* is mostly used in connection with a smith's furnace (cf. Job 41:20; Isa. 54:16; Ez. 22:21). But when it shows up in the in the book of Ezekiel again something really strange occurs.

Ezekiel was a prophet living in exile in Babylon. You see, the children of Israel disobeyed God and so God allowed a foreign power to conquer them to exact punishment. While there, Ezekiel received a number of visions mostly disturbing until about half way. In chapters 34-37, Ezekiel is told about a new David, a messianic king, which would deliver the people, exchange their hearts of son for hearts of flesh, and then they'd worship the lord in Spirit and truth (cf. Ez. 36:26).

Then, Ezekiel is shown a strange vision of a barren wasteland full of bones. This was a metaphor for their spiritual state in exile. They were a people who had abandoned god and we were spiritual destitute. But the scene doesn't end there. God commands Ezekiel in this vision to preach to the valley of dry bones and we read that...

READ: Ezekiel 37:7-10

This was the same breath that first animated human life. Now, God was showing Ezekiel that what we lost in the Garden would be reclaimed once more. His breath, that is, his Spirit, would indwell us once again.

In fact, we have record of the moment this occurred. Apparently, it occurred in stages.

READ: John 20:19-22

Seven weeks later, on the day of Pentecost, we're told that when the Spirit came that...

READ: Acts 2:2-4

That same life-giving Spirit indwells the believer (cf. Jn. 14:16-17). We are the new creation. We have reclaimed what was lost in the garden all those years ago. We know walk with God and God now walks with us.

This means that all humans have the capacity to be reunited with God once again. Even your annoying and unpleasant neighbors. They too can have not only the breath which makes them *unique*, but the breath which makes the *whole*.

SO, WHAT'S THE TAKEAWAY?

If so much divine effort has been expended for every human being, shouldn't we make it our life's mission to seek to reclaim our image-bearing title once more? Every man, woman, and child has been made in the image of God, formed by his hand, and given divine breath to function (cf. Ps. 139:13-16). Human life is sacred. This fact does not merely apply to the unborn child, but for the aged sage. The sanctity of life is a key foundation for a healthy society.

The image of God may have been corrupted by the fall, but it was not destroyed. It has been reclaimed through Jesus Christ (cf. Rom. 1:16-25; 2 Cor. 5:11-21). We ought to be constantly working at helping others get there as well. Your neighborhood is filled with image-bearers of God. How can you help them reclaim their reason for living?