



IN HIS IMAGE

If you're on Facebook or Instagram or some other social networking site you'll probably have written a bio or profile of some kind. And you'll know that the name of the game is to present an image of yourself that you're happy for other people to see. So, my bio says I'm a Christian, a husband, a father, and a pastor, a musician, a reader, a movie-fan and a music-lover. Oh, and a curry-enthusiast. All very 'safe.'

But what it fails to mention is the fact that I have my good days and bad days, that I'm a bit OCD (or a lot), and that I get it wrong with the people I love on an almost daily basis (so now you know).

The reality is: we all do this. Because what we put out there is rarely a completely honest picture of ourselves. But that's not the biggest problem. The biggest problem is that it's often a self-defined image, or worse, an others-defined image, rather than a God-defined one.

So, what is our 'bio' according to God? And why does it matter?

Let's take a look at:

Genesis 1:26-31

There is a trajectory to Genesis 1, even if it's not what you might expect – because as I've said before, this is a theological take on the origin of the universe, not a scientific one. But there is one subject at least where the trajectories line up:

Us.

Because Genesis ch1 builds to the moment when humanity appears, just as everything in nature does. It's what used to be called the 'anthropic principle': the idea that the laws of the universe seem to have been written with us in mind. And in Genesis 1, it kicks off with God changing the script, from "Let there be" or "Let the earth bring forth" to "Let us make man in our image, and in our likeness." What theologians call the *Imago Dei*, or 'image of God' in Latin.

So, what does that mean? That God is finite like us? No. That we are infinite like Him? No. Then what? It's an idea that comes straight out of the ancient world, where pharaohs and kings would set up statues of themselves in various parts of their kingdom, as a way of saying, "I'm in charge here. This land belongs to me."

I.e. we are God's representatives, in a way that nothing else is.

Why does this matter? Because it affects:

1) How We See God. As I've said before, there are 2 verbs that describe God's actions in Genesis ch1: the verb 'make' or 'fashion' (*asah*) and the verb 'create' or 'generate' (*bara*). And both of them are used of the formation of human beings in vs26-27. What's the point? That we are genetically related to every living thing, yes; but also, that there is something unique about us, something God has created from scratch – a reflection of Him, in each of us. Which means God is a personal being, like us. But He's also an interpersonal being, like us – think 'trinity' – hence the fact that He creates a whole species to reflect Him. And because God is both personal and interpersonal, it means we can be friends with Him.

2) How We See Ourselves. God creates both male and female, in His image – a game-changer then, and now. In part because it's saying, "This is marriage," but also, as Jackie Hill Perry says, it means we are *all* of equal worth in God's sight. And this is of huge relevance to our society today, where people are obsessed with the self yet struggle to feel valued. Where does this paradox come from? From decades of secular humanism, from teaching our kids that there is no God – that we are God, in fact. And all we're doing is feeding our egos, while guaranteeing that we stay empty and unfulfilled. It's like eating McDonald's all day long – it ain't good! I.e. it matters what we tell ourselves.

3) How We See Each Other. If we are made in the image of God, then so is everyone else. And that idea, and the Gospel as a whole, has changed the way human beings see each other, more than anything else has. As Tom Holland (the historian, not the latest Spiderman) says, if you were to go back to pre-Christian Greece or Rome you would find that a person's value amounted to little more than what you could get out of them. I.e. if you got nothing, they were worth nothing. And by the way, if you take scientific naturalism or neo-atheism to its logical conclusion, that's what you're left with – nothing. But the Bible says that we are worth *everything* – all of us – because our Maker says we are!

4) How We See The World. In the first command given to human beings, we are told to fill the earth, subdue the earth, and govern the earth. Now that doesn't mean the hyper-capitalist approach: swamp it, destroy it, exploit it. It means populate it, master it, and care for it – as a priest in a temple, as a king or queen over his or her kingdom. Because in the Bible, a good monarch cares about the world that he or she rules, and we are to do the same. We hear a lot about reducing our footprint, as in the carbon-variety, but this is about more than that – it's about *leaving* a footprint. It's about making a positive difference and departing this world a better place than it was when we entered it.

A Goofy Sense Of Humour

Now this whole *Imago Dei* idea is a nice but weird one – as illustrated by a certain *Calvin & Hobbes* cartoon, where Calvin is admiring his image in the mirror, while Hobbes the tiger is thinking, "God must have a goofy sense of humour." The point being: the tiger, in spite of his beauty and strength, is not the creature God has appointed to bear His image. *We* are – in spite of our limitations. And that is a puzzle the Bible itself acknowledges.

Hence Psalm 8:4:

*"What is man that You are mindful of him?
The son of man that You take care of him?"*

But that's not the only puzzle. Another one is: what the *hell* happened? Because according to Genesis 1, God saw everything He had made, and said it was "very good." And yet ... as you go through the rest of the Bible, it becomes apparent that we're *not*. What happened? Sin happened. And the image of God was marred.

Damaged.

Distorted.

Like a hall of mirrors.

But ... there is hope. Because yes, God makes us, in His image. But then He does what is unthinkable, to some at least: in Jesus, He makes Himself, in ours (Philippians 2:5-11). Why? To restore the image of God, in all of us.

Now, if we were to really believe this, what could the world look like? No wars or terrorism. No famines or genocides. No racism or hyper-nationalism. No sexism or ageism. No murder or rape. No abuse or neglect. No pornography or prostitution. No suicides or abortion-on-demand. No dehumanising of ourselves or one another. A *Greatest Showman* world!

That's what the world *could* look like. *Will* look like.

Hence why we *must* believe this. We *must*.