

Introduction to Chapter 3

In a second set of three days, God created the inhabitants of the cosmos which he had formed on the first triad of days. On the fourth day, God spoke to generate the lights of the heavens (Gen 1:14–19). This paralleled the creation of light on the first day (Gen 1:3–5). These lights enabled vision and set the secular and religious calendars. People tracked the movement of the stars to synchronize the lunar and the solar calendars. The Lord created them to serve, in contrast to the Ancient Near Eastern (ANE) focus upon worshiping these lights as gods.

Day five harmonizes with day two. On the second day, God separated the sky from the waters (Gen 1:6–8). Then on the fifth day, he created the inhabitants of those environments: aquatic creatures and birds,¹ including “*tannin*,” “the great sea monsters” (Gen 1:20–23).² Moses’s original audience associated *tannin* with the chaotic forces of anarchy who ruled the cosmic waters in ANE creation epics.³ In Genesis, these monsters were merely creatures whom the Lord had made,⁴ living under their creator’s command.⁵ He wrote, “And God saw that it was good” and the Lord blessed them.

On the sixth day, the Lord brought forth living creatures from the earth to live upon the dry ground which had appeared on the third day (Gen 1:9–13, 24–25). These animals separate into three categories: domestic animals, prey, and predators. Together, they comprise “every living thing which moves on the earth.” By constructing plants and creatures which self-propagate “according to their kind,” the creator produced creators.⁶

Let Us Make Humanity

1) Gen 1:26: Moses wrote, “Then God said, ‘Let us make humanity in our image, according to our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea, and the birds of the heavens, and the cattle, and all the earth, and all the creeping things which creep on the earth.’” A momentous event was about to take place on “the sixth day.” The cosmos had been created and organized in a serene process to provide for God’s masterpiece.⁷ Only here in Gen 1 did God announce his plan before creating. In addition, Moses replaced the usual closing formula (“and it was so”) with a blessing (Gen 1:28).⁸

By shifting from “Let there be” to “Let us make,” the Lord hinted that he was about to perform an act of great importance.⁹ According to Dietrich Bonhoeffer, this represented “the significance and sublimity of the creator’s action.”¹⁰ Several major issues complicate these verses. First, we will examine what the Lord meant by using a plural in stating, “Let us make humanity in our image.”¹¹ Our presuppositions and our method of interpretation affect how we understand this plural pronoun.¹² Many Christian readers

¹Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis, Chapters 1–17*, 220.

²Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 24.

³Walton, *Genesis*, 126–7.

⁴Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 24.

⁵Bonhoeffer, *Creation and Fall: A Theological Exposition of Genesis 1–3*, 58.

⁶Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis, Chapters 1–17*, 132.

⁷Matthews, Chavalas, and Walton, *IVPBBCOT*, Gen 1:31.

⁸Waltke and Fredricks, *Genesis: A Commentary*, 64.

⁹Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis, Chapters 1–17*, 134.

¹⁰Bonhoeffer, *Creation and Fall: A Theological Exposition of Genesis 1–3*, 61.

¹¹Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 27.

¹²Walton, *Genesis*, 128.

assume that this verse proves that God exists in tri-unity.¹³ However, approaching the passage by asking, “How can I make this fit with what I already believe?” may make it harder for us to understand what the text teaches.¹⁴

During the time of Moses, Israelites questioned whether they should worship multiple gods who were self-serving and fickle, not whether God consisted of one or three persons. Thus, we should seek to understand how the original audience interpreted the word “us.” We will consider six possibilities.¹⁵

The first of these involves the Ancient Near Eastern (ANE) cultural background.¹⁶ For the scholars who view this text as borrowed mythology, the “us” remains as a reference the multiple gods of surrounding nations which the monotheistic editor overlooked and failed to remove.¹⁷ Thus a remnant of polytheism remains. This concept fails to convince most scholars,¹⁸ especially since the overall thrust of Genesis 1 rejects any polytheistic elements. In fact, modern commentators virtually unite in asserting that the author would not have permitted this.¹⁹ List the arguments for and against this view on p. 28.

Other scholars contend that God was speaking to his heavenly court of angels,²⁰ also known as the “sons of God.”²¹ Jewish commentators have long held this view.²² According to the first century AD philosopher Philo:

“Man[kind] is almost the only one of all living things which...often chooses that which is worst...Very appropriately therefore has God attributed the creation of this being, man[kind], to his lieutenants, saying, ‘Let us make man[kind]’, in order that the successes of the intellect may be attributed to him alone, but the errors of the being thus created, to his subordinate power.”²³

Philo believed that God created the best parts of humanity while the angels made the negative aspects. In addition to meshing with the ANE conception of a group of gods who confer to make decisions,²⁴ this position has some biblical support. The Old Testament (OT) describes the Lord meeting with “the sons of God” (1 Ki 22:19–21; Job 2:1; Ps 89:5–7). Some scholars object that it debases God for him to consult with created beings like angels (Isa 40:13–14). However, the Lord chooses to operate in that fashion, rather than needing to do so (Gen 18:16–18).²⁵

For example, in Gen 11:5–8, the Lord discussed his plans with his heavenly court, but he carried out the decision himself (Cf. Job 38:4–7).²⁶ The divine image differentiates between animals and people, not between angels and people (Gen 1:24–26; Gen 5:3). Therefore, this

¹³ Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis, Chapters 1–17*, 132.

¹⁴ Walton, *Genesis*, 129.

¹⁵ Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis, Chapters 1–17*, 132–3.

¹⁶ Walton, *Genesis*, 128.

¹⁷ Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis, Chapters 1–17*, 133.

¹⁸ Walton, *Genesis*, 129.

¹⁹ Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 28.

²⁰ Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis, Chapters 1–17*, 133.

²¹ Walton, *Genesis*, 129.

²² Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 27.

²³ Philo, “On the Confusion of Tongues,” in *The Works of Philo*, Vol. 2 (trans. Charles Duke Yonge; London: Bohn, 1854), 35, 38, <https://archive.org/stream/workphiloujudaeu02philuoft#page/38/mode/2up>.

²⁴ “Enuma Elish” (The Creation Epic) in *ANET*, 3:130–9, 66.

²⁵ Walton, *Genesis*, 129.

²⁶ Waltke and Fredricks, *Genesis: A Commentary*, 64–5.

interpretation could easily mesh with how Moses’s original audience understood the plural pronoun.²⁷ Record the arguments for and against this position on p. 28.

God does not exist in isolation but as one in close community with others.²⁸ Thus, the plural “us” may represent the creator and the Holy Spirit (Gen 1:1–2).²⁹ Aside from the OT, the name *Elohim* (the plural form of “God”) always refers to multiple gods in the ANE, yet the singular “*El*” occurs as the name of one of the highest gods. Concerning the God of Israel, “*Elohim*” appears 2,372 times, while the singular “*El*” appears only fifty-seven times, mostly in the book of Job.³⁰ This linguistic evidence points to the possibility of several persons within the creator.³¹

The Epistle of Barnabas (ca. 80–120 AD), specifically identifies the Son as the one to whom the creator spoke in Gen 1:26.³² Although Christians have traditionally adopted this interpretation, scholars unite in agreement that the author of Genesis would never have intended to convey that to his original audience.³³ The other cases where the OT refers to God with a plural pronoun do not seem to refer to various persons within the Godhead (Gen 3:22–24;³⁴ Gen 11:7; Isa 6:6–8).³⁵

Even within the New Testament (NT), no text specifically states that the plural in Gen 1:26 refers to the Trinity.³⁶ On the other hand, the NT does provide hints of plurality within God, such as John 1:1–3, 14; Col 1:15–19; and Heb 1:2.³⁷ List the positive and negative aspects of this view on p. 28.

Finally, there are grammatical and rhetorical issues to consider as our fourth, fifth, and sixth options.³⁸ Genesis 1:26; Gen 11:7; and Isa 6:8 could all be cases where the authors employed a majestic plural,³⁹ as if the Queen of England had stated, “We are not amused.” Yet, a prominent Hebrew scholar observed that plurals of majesty are never used with verbs.⁴⁰ Other possibilities include linguistic agreement with *Elohim*, the plural name of God,⁴¹ or that the Lord was talking to himself for encouragement.⁴² Since none of these occur regularly in the OT, most scholars easily dismiss the grammatical and rhetorical categories.⁴³ List the support for and against each of these possibilities on p. 28.

Consequently, two strong contenders remain. When viewed through the lens of the understanding of the original audience, the most likely candidate is that God was speaking to his heavenly court. In the OT, angels did occasionally appear as men (Gen 18:1–3; Gen 19:1). Note

²⁷ Walton, *Genesis*, 129–30.

²⁸ Anthony A. Hoekema, *Created in God’s Image* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), 12.

²⁹ Walton, *Genesis*, 128.

³⁰ Terence E. Fretheim, “אֱלֹהִים” (*elohim*), *NIDOTTE* 1:405.

³¹ Walton, *Genesis*, 128.

³² Kirsopp Lake, trans., *The Epistle of Barnabas*, in *The Apostolic Fathers* (New York: MacMillan, 1912), 6.12, <https://archive.org/stream/theapostolicfath00unknuoft#page/360/mode/2up>.

³³ Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 27.

³⁴ The plural here may allude to the presence of the cherubim.

³⁵ Waltke and Fredricks, *Genesis: A Commentary*, 64.

³⁶ Walton, *Genesis*, 128.

³⁷ Waltke and Fredricks, *Genesis: A Commentary*, 64.

³⁸ Walton, *Genesis*, 128.

³⁹ Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis, Chapters 1–17*, 133.

⁴⁰ Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 28.

⁴¹ Walton, *Genesis*, 128.

⁴² Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 28.

⁴³ Walton, *Genesis*, 128.

that when God created in Gen 1:27, the verb “created” is singular. From that vantage point, this comprises a divine proclamation to the heavenly court.⁴⁴

On the other hand, Moses was likely capable of grasping the concept of plurality within unity. Although the OT never explicitly mentions the Trinity, one cannot dismiss the many clues within its pages (e.g. Ps 2; Dan 10:4–9; Rev 1:12–17). Certainly Gen 1:1–2 cites the Holy Spirit as present during the creation of the cosmos. These hints awaited the fullness of time to be revealed (Gal 4:4–6).⁴⁵

Read Gen 1:26. Cite the arguments for and against each of the options for “us” listed below:

- reflects Ancient Near Eastern gods (p. 26)

positives

negatives

- God’s heavenly court (p. 26)

positives

negatives

- more than one person within God (p. 27)

Positives

negatives

- plural of majesty (p. 27)

positives

negatives

- agrees with plural *Elohim* (p. 27)

positives

negatives

- God speaking to himself (p. 27)

positives

negatives

Which one of these best fits the ANE context of the passage? How does the NT affect the way we understand the plural pronoun?

⁴⁴ Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 28.

⁴⁵ Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis, Chapters 1–17*, 134.

Equality with God

2) Phil 2:5–6: Philippians 2:5–11 generates more discussion among scholars than virtually any other passage in the Bible.⁴⁶ These verses contain one of the most beloved and exalted descriptions of Christ in Paul’s letters.⁴⁷ The apostle depicted the Son of God from his preexistence to his time on earth,⁴⁸ shedding important light on the identity of “us” in Gen 1:26. Paul then detailed Christ’s status after the incarnation, including the future submission of all of creation to him.⁴⁹

Verse 5 provides a critical transition, for it enables us to understand the frame of reference for interpreting the hymn which follows.⁵⁰ After his charge to the church in Phil 2:2–4, Paul emphatically stated,⁵¹ “This think among yourselves which [was] also in Christ Jesus.”⁵² Christians must develop the same attitudes exhibited by our Lord in our dealings with each other,⁵³ not “selfish ambition” and “conceit.”⁵⁴

Most modern scholars view Phil 2:6–11 as a preexistent hymn which Paul inserted into his letter.⁵⁵ However, even those who consider this Paul’s own composition recognize its poetic rhythm and highly unusual vocabulary. Three of the words here occur nowhere else in the New Testament (NT).⁵⁶ The absence of the apostle’s usual emphasis upon the resurrection,⁵⁷ as well as the omission of the name Jesus or Christ until Phil 2:10–11 also suggest this represents existing material used by Paul.⁵⁸ This ode provides us with a glimpse of the earliest form of Christian worship, revealing what followers of Jesus believed about him even before the four gospels were written.⁵⁹

Verse 6 begins with “Who being in the form of God,” pointing to the Son’s preeminence before he took on “the form of a slave.”⁶⁰ Although “form” (*morphē*) appears only twice in the NT, here and in Phil 2:7,⁶¹ it is well-attested in ancient literature.⁶²

For example, the Jewish philosopher Philo (ca. 20 BC–40 AD) described Moses’s encounter with the burning bush (Exod 3:1–3). He wrote, “And in the middle of the flame there was seen a certain very beautiful form (*morphē*), not resembling any visible thing, a most godlike image, emitting a light more brilliant than fire, which any one might have imagined to be the image of the living God.”⁶³

⁴⁶Frank Thielman, *Philippians* (NIVAC; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), 113.

⁴⁷Gordon D. Fee, *Paul’s Letter to the Philippians* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 192.

⁴⁸Ben Witherington III, *Paul’s Letter to the Philippians: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011), 136.

⁴⁹Thielman, *Philippians*, 109.

⁵⁰Witherington, *Paul’s Letter to the Philippians: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary*, 137.

⁵¹Fee, *Paul’s Letter to the Philippians*, 199.

⁵²Although this says, “This think in you” (plural), *en humin* is an idiom for “among yourselves” (*BDAG*, p. 1066).

⁵³Thielman, *Philippians*, 113.

⁵⁴Fee, *Paul’s Letter to the Philippians*, 196.

⁵⁵John T. Fitzgerald, “Philippians, Epistle to the,” *ABD* 5:318–26, 323–4.

⁵⁶Thielman, *Philippians*, 110.

⁵⁷Witherington, *Paul’s Letter to the Philippians: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary*, 132.

⁵⁸Gerald F. Hawthorne, *Philippians* (WBC; Dallas: Word, 2004), 110.

⁵⁹Thielman, *Philippians*, 109–10.

⁶⁰Fee, *Paul’s Letter to the Philippians*, 202–3.

⁶¹Hawthorne, *Philippians*, 110.

⁶²Danker, et al., “μορφη” (*morphē*), *BDAG*, 659.

⁶³Philo, *On the Life of Moses I* (vol. 3 of *The Works of Philo Judaeus*; trans. Charles Duke Yonge; London: Bohn, 1855), 16, <https://archive.org/stream/workspphilofudaeu03philuoft#page/16/mode/2up>.

No English word has precisely the same meaning as *morphē*.⁶⁴ Typically, it connotes “an outward form which completely expresses the underlying reality of the person or thing’s essential nature.”⁶⁵ Thus, one’s “form” consists of what is objectively there, rather than a subjective appearance.⁶⁶ Consequently, before he put on flesh, the Son of God possessed all the characteristics of God,⁶⁷ including his sovereign divine majesty.⁶⁸ Christ was equal to the Father in cosmic authority while in his pre-incarnate state. Such parity was always his. Paul did not convey that “equality with God” was something Jesus desired which he did not have.⁶⁹

The Greek term *perichoresis* best captures the essence of the Trinity. As in a perfectly choreographed dance, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit so interpenetrate one another that they possess a unified will.⁷⁰ Dance scenes like those from a Jane Austen movie illustrate this well. A group of people moves in perfect time and placement in relation to each other, with no one member of the unit more important than another. Even so, in the Trinity, where there is one, so are the other two, without any one being greater than the others.⁷¹

As Augustine (354–430 AD) stated, “Believe then that the Son is equal with the Father... For if he be not equal, he is not a true Son.”⁷²

A review of Philip Schaff’s massive work *The Creeds of Christendom* indicates that the currently popular notion that Jesus was subordinate to the Father by obeying him prior to his birth does not occur within orthodox Christianity. In fact, the few creeds which mentioned such submission by Christ vigorously condemned the concept:

CREED	DATE	PAGE(S)	EQUALITY/SUBORDINATION
<u>Volume II: The Greek and Latin Creeds:</u>			
Gregorius Thaumaturgus of Neo-Caesarea	ca AD 270	24–7	“nothing created or subservient”
Lucian of Antioch	AD 300	25–8	“in personality three, but in harmony one”
First Creed of Epiphanius/Nicene Creed 1 st Formula	AD 374	33–4	“only begotten Son of God”
The Athanasian Creed	5 th Century AD	66–70	“none is greater or less than another... three persons coeternal and coequal... Unity in Trinity and Trinity in Unity”
<u>Volume III: The Evangelical Protestant Creeds:</u>			
The Augsburg Confession	1530	7–9	“unity of the divine essence and persons”

⁶⁴ Fee, *Paul’s Letter to the Philippians*, 204.

⁶⁵ Witherington, *Paul’s Letter to the Philippians: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary*, 140.

⁶⁶ Johannes Behm, “μορφή” (*morphē*), *TNDT* 4:742–52, 743.

⁶⁷ Hawthorne, *Philippians*, 114.

⁶⁸ Behm, “μορφή” (*morphē*), *TNDT* 4:751.

⁶⁹ Fee, *Paul’s Letter to the Philippians*, 207–8.

⁷⁰ Kevin Giles, *The Trinity and Subordinationism: The Doctrine of God and the Contemporary Gender Debate* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2002), 113.

⁷¹ William G. T. Shedd, *Dogmatic Theology*, 3rd Ed. (ed. Alan W. Gomes; Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2003), 250.

⁷² Augustine, “Sermon 140,” in *Sermons (131–140) on Selected Lessons of the New Testament (NPNF2)* (ed. Philip Schaff; trans. R. G. MacMullen; Edinburgh: Eerdmans, 1867), 5, <https://www.ewtn.com/library/PATRISTC/PNI6-13.TXT>.

CREED	DATE	PAGE(S)	EQUALITY/SUBORDINATION
The Formula of Concord	1576	179	“heresy that Father and Son have distinct essences, equal or unequal, we condemn.”
The French Confession of Faith (John Calvin)	1559	359–63	“same essence, equal in eternity and power”
The Belgic Confession	1561	389–95	“there is neither first nor last... the Son is equal to the Father in all things.”
Thirty-Nine Articles of Religion of the Church of England	1562	487–9	“of one substance, power, and eternity”
The Irish Articles of Religion	1615	528	“in unity...substance, power, and eternity”
The Westminster Confession of Faith	1647	606	“one substance, power, and eternity”
The Westminster Shorter Catechism	1647	677	“same substance, equal in power and glory”
Methodist Articles of Religion	1784	807	“in unity of this Godhead, there are three persons of one substance, power, and eternity”
Evangelical Free Church of Geneva	1848	781–2	“born from a virgin...has been able to obey God in a perfect way”
Articles of Religion of the Reformed Episcopal Church	1875	814–5	“in unity of this Godhead, there be three persons of one substance, power, and eternity”
The Second Helvetic Confession	1566	835	“in order, one going before another, yet without any inequality”
Presbyterian Church of England Articles of Faith	1890	916	“[Christ] at the right hand of God...clothed with authority and power as Lord over all”
American Congregational Statement of Doctrine	1883	914	“of one substance with the Father... worshiped and glorified”
Brief Statement of the Reformed Faith	1902	922	“one in substance, equal in power and glory”
The Basis of Union of the United Church of Canada	1925	935–6	“same substance, equal in power and glory... express image of the Father’s person” ⁷³
Orthodox-Reformed Statement on the Holy Trinity	1992		“conjoined in all their distinctiveness, for the entire and undivided Godhead resides in each Person, and each Person dwells in or inheres in the Other; so that the whole of one Person is imaged in the whole of the Other”

Equally difficult to grapple with is the meaning of the phrase “He did not consider being equal with God *harpagmon*.” Only here in the NT does this word appear.⁷⁴ In Greco-Roman literature, where it rarely occurs, it means “robbery,” which does not fit the context of the passage.⁷⁵

⁷³Philip Schaff, *The Creeds of Christendom, 3 Vols.* (rev David S. Schaff; Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1931), <https://archive.org/details/bibliothecasymbo020scha>.

⁷⁴Hawthorne, *Philippians*, 115.

⁷⁵Fee, *Paul’s Letter to the Philippians*, 205.

However, this word is synonymous with *harpagma*, which occurs much more frequently.⁷⁶ That term refers to “taking advantage of a thing which one already possesses,” instead of meaning “grasping at something which one does not have.”⁷⁷ Contrary to what one would expect of a sovereign Lord, Jesus did not regard his equality with God as a right to utilize while he lived on earth.⁷⁸

The 4th century bishop Eusebius employed *harpagmon* and *harpagma* synonymously.⁷⁹ According to him, when it came to the prospect of suffering torture for their faith, “Some, shrinking from the trial, rather than be taken and fall into the hands of their enemies, threw themselves from lofty houses, considering death [by suicide] advantageous (*harpagma*) to the cruelty of the impious.”⁸⁰

Eusebius noted that the Apostle Peter considered death on a cross to his advantage (*harpagmon*) because of the hope of salvation.⁸¹ These martyrs considered death a beneficial opportunity.⁸² In addition, Eusebius recounted a proclamation made by Constantine to those who had been exiled, permitting them to return if they considered it to their benefit (*harpagma*).⁸³

Philippians 2:6 uses the same sense of *harpagmon* as “an advantage to be seized.”⁸⁴ Despite his equality with the Father, Jesus chose not to exploit his position but to unselfishly give himself.⁸⁵ Consequently, the best translation of this phrase is, “He did not regard being equal with God as something to use for his own advantage.” The issue is not whether Christ possessed equality with God, but whether he used it for his own benefit (Rom 15:3).⁸⁶

People living in the Roman colony of Philippi would have expected grasping and seizing by a lordly power.⁸⁷ This city was comprised largely of military veterans after the Battle of Philippi in 42 BC. Paul did not command the recipients of this letter to give up the Roman citizenship they had earned to embrace their heavenly allegiance (Phil 3:20).⁸⁸ Christ did not lose his heavenly identity when he became human.⁸⁹ Yet, he chose not to pursue his right to satisfy his own desires ahead of tending to the needs of others (Phil 2:4).⁹⁰

a) Read Phil 2:5–6. What was Jesus’s status before he became human? What evidence supports that view? How can you emulate Christ?

⁷⁶ Thielman, *Philippians*, 116.

⁷⁷ Witherington, *Paul’s Letter to the Philippians: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary*, 134.

⁷⁸ W. Foerster, “*ἡρπαγμός*” (*harpagmos*), *TDNT* 1:473–4, 474.

⁷⁹ Thielman, *Philippians*, 116.

⁸⁰ Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* (ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace; vol. 1 of *Church History, Life of Constantine, Oration in Praise of Constantine (NPNF2)*; Edinburgh; London; New York: T & T Clark, 1890), 8.12.2, <https://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf201.iii.xiii.xiii.html>.

⁸¹ Eusebius, *Commentary on Luke*, 6. Cited by Thielman.

⁸² Thielman, *Philippians*, 116.

⁸³ Eusebius, *The Life of the Blessed Emperor Constantine* (ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace; vol. 1 of *Church History, Life of Constantine, Oration in Praise of Constantine (NPNF2)*; trans. Ernest Cushing Richardson; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1955), 31.2, <https://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf201.iv.vi.ii.xxxi.html>.

⁸⁴ Roy W. Hoover, “*Harpagmos* Enigma: A Philological Solution,” *HTR* 64, no. 1 (January 1971): 95–119, 109, 117, <http://digilander.libero.it/domingo7/Harpagmos8.jpg>, <http://digilander.libero.it/domingo7/Harpagmos13.jpg>.

⁸⁵ Thielman, *Philippians*, 116.

⁸⁶ Thielman, *Philippians*, 118.

⁸⁷ Fee, *Paul’s Letter to the Philippians*, 208.

⁸⁸ Witherington, *Paul’s Letter to the Philippians: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary*, 143.

⁸⁹ Witherington, *Paul’s Letter to the Philippians: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary*, 143.

⁹⁰ Fee, *Paul’s Letter to the Philippians*, 208.

Taking the Form of a Slave

b) Phil 2:7: The Son’s greatest declaration of his fundamental equality with the Father came when “himself he emptied.”⁹¹ By placing “himself” first for emphasis and using an active verb, the hymn writer strongly suggested the voluntary nature of this deed accomplished by the preexistent Son. This was not something the Father ordered Christ to do.⁹² Every other New Testament occurrence of “empty” (*kenoō*) as a verb involves nullifying a thing to make it of no account (Rom 4:14; 1 Cor 1:17; 1 Cor 9:15; 2 Cor 9:3).⁹³ Jesus “emptied himself” of what would have prevented him from becoming fully human.⁹⁴ This involved divesting himself of his sacred privileges and prestige.⁹⁵

However, the metaphor does not convey a loss of divine attributes. That he “emptied himself” poetically states that Christ poured himself out completely for the benefit of others, becoming poor that he might make many rich (2 Cor 8:9). The Greek translation of the Old Testament uses this verb to describe Rebekah “pouring out” water into a trough for the benefit of thirsty camels (Gen 24:20).⁹⁶

The Son accomplished this metaphorical emptying of himself by “taking the form (*morphē*) of a slave” and “becoming in human (*anthrōpos*) likeness” (Cf. Gen 1:26–27).⁹⁷ Note that the term *doulos*, which some Bible versions translate as “servant,” instead means “slave” (e.g. Rom 1:1, where Paul describes himself as “a slave of Christ Jesus”).⁹⁸ Unlike other synonyms for “slave” in Greek, *doulos* stresses the total dependency of a slave upon his master. No term provides greater contrast to “God” or “Lord.”⁹⁹

In a status-conscious city like Philippi,¹⁰⁰ the notion that Christ chose to strip off his divine privileges to put on the qualities of a man in subjugation would evoke shock.¹⁰¹ As living property, slaves received no rights.¹⁰² For example, the first century AD author Martial admonished a slave-owner with these words, “You say the hare is not sufficiently cooked, and call for a whip. You would rather cut up your cook, Rufus, than your hare.”¹⁰³

In some respects, Greco-Roman slavery differed substantially from that practiced in the United States and the United Kingdom. Roman slaves worked as physicians, teachers, authors, bailiffs, and sea captains, in addition to performing manual labor. Legislation provided for most slaves to be set free by age 30, making enslavement a temporary condition.¹⁰⁴ Nevertheless, by “taking the form of a slave” the Son adopted the essential quality of a slave.¹⁰⁵ He temporarily

⁹¹ Fee, *Paul’s Letter to the Philippians*, 208.

⁹² Hawthorne, *Philippians*, 116–7.

⁹³ Thielman, *Philippians*, 117.

⁹⁴ Witherington, *Paul’s Letter to the Philippians: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary*, 145.

⁹⁵ Danker, et al., “κενόω” (*kenoō*), *BDAG*, 539.

⁹⁶ Hawthorne, *Philippians*, 117.

⁹⁷ *Anthrōpos* can refer to a person of either gender, as in *BDAG* p. 81.

⁹⁸ Danker, et al., “δοῦλος” (*doulos*), *BDAG*, 259–60.

⁹⁹ Karl Heinrich Rengstorff, “δοῦλος” (*doulos*), *TDNT*, 2:261–80, 261, 278.

¹⁰⁰ Witherington, *Paul’s Letter to the Philippians: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary*, 143.

¹⁰¹ Fee, *Paul’s Letter to the Philippians*, 204.

¹⁰² Witherington, *Paul’s Letter to the Philippians: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary*, 143.

¹⁰³ Martial, *Epigrams* (revised by Roger Pearse; London: Bohn, 2008), 3.94,

<https://archive.org/stream/epigramsofmarti00mart#page/174/mode/2up>.

¹⁰⁴ S. Scott Bartchy, “Slavery: New Testament,” *ABD* 6:65–73, 69–70.

¹⁰⁵ Fee, *Paul’s Letter to the Philippians*, 211.

put himself completely at the will of another.¹⁰⁶ This position of extreme abasement diametrically contrasted with Christ’s preexistent condition.¹⁰⁷

Greco-Roman gentiles accepted the concept of a god putting on human form, for Zeus and Hermes cavorted as people. Yet, their gods would never choose enslavement. That would upend their hierarchical society and demolish their code of honor and shame.¹⁰⁸

A second aspect of the Son’s “emptying himself” is that “in the likeness of human beings he was born.”¹⁰⁹ By renouncing the “form of God” and taking on the “form of a slave,” Christ became a man in appearance, thought, and emotion. Only in his consistent obedience to the will of God did he differ from other people (Luke 2:51–52; Heb 4:15).¹¹⁰

The 12th century theologian Bernard of Clairvaux noted, “We behold Light withholding its rays, the Word an infant, the Living Water athirst, him who is the Bread of Heaven suffering hunger. Attend and see how Omnipotence is ruled, Wisdom instructed, Power sustained; the God who rejoices the angels is become a babe at the breast; he who consoles the afflicted lies weeping in a manger.”¹¹¹

Various heresies arose to try to explain this mystery, which tended to emphasize either Jesus’s humanity or his deity while understating the other. Consequently, the emperor called church leaders to the Council of Chalcedon in 451. They wrote this confession:

“We all with one voice confess our Lord Jesus Christ one and the same Son, at once complete in Godhood and complete in manhood, truly God and truly man...acknowledged in two natures, without confusion, without change, without division, or without separation; the distinction of natures being in no way abolished because of the union, but rather the characteristic property of each nature being preserved and coming together to form one person.”¹¹²

Since that church council, the church universal has affirmed that the eternal Son of God took on our humanity, resulting in both a human and a divine nature within one body.¹¹³

Jonathan Edwards (1703–1758) wrote:

“If Christ had remained only in the divine nature, he would not have been in a capacity to have purchased our salvation, not from any imperfection of the divine nature, but by reason of its absolute and infinite perfection. For Christ, merely as God, was not capable of that obedience or suffering that was needful.

“The divine nature is not capable of suffering, for it is infinitely above suffering. Neither is it capable of obedience to that law which was given to man. It is as impossible that one who is only God should obey the law that was given to man, as it is that he should suffer man’s punishment.”¹¹⁴

Although in every way equal to the Father and the Spirit, while Jesus lived on earth, he voluntarily divested himself of those rights (John 17:1–5, 20–26).¹¹⁵ The world’s fastest sprinter

¹⁰⁶ Hawthorne, *Philippians*, 119.

¹⁰⁷ J. Behm, “μορφή” (*morphē*), *TDNT* 4:750.

¹⁰⁸ Witherington, *Paul’s Letter to the Philippians: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary*, 148.

¹⁰⁹ Hawthorne, *Philippians*, 120.

¹¹⁰ Johannes Schneider, “ο*μοιωμα” (*homoiōma*), *TNDT* 5:191–8, 197.

¹¹¹ Bernard of Clairvaux, *Sermons of Saint Bernard on Advent and Christmas Including the Famous Treatise on the Incarnation Called “Missus Est”* (Translated by St. Mary’s Convent; London: R & T Washbourne, 1909), 39, <https://archive.org/stream/sermonsofstberna00bernuoft#page/38/mode/2up>.

¹¹² Bruce L. Shelley, *Church History in Plain Language, 3rd Ed.* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2008), 111–5.

¹¹³ Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1938), 321.

¹¹⁴ Jonathan Edwards, *A History of the Work of Redemption; Comprising an Outline of Church History* (New York: American Tract Society, 1816), 207–8, <https://archive.org/stream/historyofworkofr00edwa#page/208/mode/2up>.

¹¹⁵ Hawthorne, *Philippians*, 115.

joining you in a three-legged race provides a good analogy of the incarnation: Jesus remained fully God but became functionally limited in his abilities while in his earthly body.¹¹⁶ In Christ we see God living a fully human life,¹¹⁷ in addition to a person living in complete reliance upon the Father and the Spirit (John 11:40–44; Luke 4:1).¹¹⁸

Read Phil 2:7. What was the effect of Jesus’s “emptying himself?” Why was it necessary for him to be both human and divine to secure our salvation? How does reflecting upon the change in his status which Christ willingly accepted impact your relationship with him?

Obedient to the Point of Death

c) Phil 2:8: Concerning Christ, Paul recorded that while “in the form of God, himself he emptied” (Phil 2:5–7). Then, when “in appearance he was found as a human, he humbled himself.” In contrast to the word “likeness” (*homoioōma*), which focuses upon an essential quality of something,¹¹⁹ “appearance” (*schēma*) refers to the recognized shape or outward form in which something occurs.¹²⁰ Christ both was and looked human (1 John 1:1–4).¹²¹

The King of kings came to earth and deliberately chose to abase himself,¹²² taking the lowest place.¹²³ He accomplished this by “becoming obedient (*hypēkoos*) to the point of death.”¹²⁴ Jesus had to learn submission by choosing to conform his will. Such an attitude did not come naturally to him (Luke 2:48–52; Heb 5:7–8). Even his death occurred due to an act of obedience, not an accident of history.¹²⁵ He offered himself both to the Father and to the service of humanity (Heb 10:5–7; Luke 19:10).¹²⁶

Unlike the Greek word *doulos*, the Hebrew word translated as “slave” (*evedh*) can also mean “servant.”¹²⁷ By becoming a slave, Christ fulfilled the role of the suffering servant of the Lord, the one whose coming Isaiah predicted seven hundred years earlier (Isa 52:13–53:12).¹²⁸ In describing his impending death, Jesus spoke to his disciples in language reminiscent of Isaiah’s Servant Songs (Luke 18:31–33; Luke 22:37; Mark 10:42–45).¹²⁹

¹¹⁶Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 3rd Ed., 670–1.

¹¹⁷ Fee, *Paul’s Letter to the Philippians*, 213.

¹¹⁸ Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 658.

¹¹⁹ Fee, *Paul’s Letter to the Philippians*, 215.

¹²⁰Danker, et al., “σχῆμα” (*schēma*), *BDAG*, 981.

¹²¹ Hawthorne, *Philippians*, 120.

¹²² Danker et al., “ταπεινω” (*tapeinoō*), *BDAG*, 990.

¹²³ Fee, *Paul’s Letter to the Philippians*, 216.

¹²⁴ Hawthorne, *Philippians*, 122.

¹²⁵ Witherington, *Paul’s Letter to the Philippians: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary*, 148–9.

¹²⁶ Hawthorne, *Philippians*, 122.

¹²⁷ Brown, Driver, and Briggs, “עֶבֶד” (*evedh*), *BDB*, 713–4.

<https://archive.org/stream/hebrewenglishlex00browuoft#page/712/mode/2up>.

¹²⁸ Hawthorne, *Philippians*, 119.

¹²⁹ Fee, *Paul’s Letter to the Philippians*, 212.

Furthermore, Christ took the role of a slave in washing his disciples' feet (John 13:3–17).¹³⁰ Paul had previously used Isa 53:4–12 as the background for 2 Cor 5:21,¹³¹ so his gentile readers likely knew these verses from the book of Isaiah.¹³² Since Christ renounced his privileges and served as a slave to the point of death, surely we as his followers can regard no task as beneath our dignity.¹³³

“Death on a cross” was the cruelest form of execution officially practiced in the Roman Empire. Government officials generally reserved it for those guilty of treason and for slaves.¹³⁴ Christ rejected the culturally honorable options of dying in resistance to oppression or by suicide. Instead, he allowed himself to be executed in what people considered the most shameful way to die (Matt 26:51–54).¹³⁵ In Jewish thought, God's curse resulted in death on a cross (Deut 21:22–23).¹³⁶ That their messiah would die by crucifixion was unthinkable (John 12:31–34). Gentiles considered the notion that a god would willingly perish that way absurd (1 Cor 1:23). In Greco-Roman society, those engaging in polite discourse forbade even speaking the word “cross.”¹³⁷

According to the 1st century BC philosopher Cicero:

“Even if death be threatened, we may die free men; but the executioner, and the veiling of the head, and the mere name of the gibbet, should be far removed, not only from the persons of Roman citizens—from their thoughts, and eyes, and ears. For not only the actual fact and endurance of all these things, but the bare possibility of being exposed to them—the expectation, the mere mention of them even—is unworthy of a Roman citizen and of a free man. Does not the kindness of their masters at one touch deliver our slaves from the fear of all these punishments?”¹³⁸

Christ's execution created a divine scandal.¹³⁹ The one who was equal with God surrendered to a death reserved for criminals,¹⁴⁰ a fate so terrible that honorable people refused to even mention crucifixion. However, the cross reveals God's true character and his outrageous love which he has lavished upon us (John 15:12–13).¹⁴¹ Where such love exists, rivalry, selfishness, and arguments cannot persist (1 Cor 1:10; Phil 4:2).¹⁴²

Instead, God calls us to accept suffering for Jesus's sake (Phil 1:29).¹⁴³ The Holy Spirit transforms those experiencing genuine life in Christ into his likeness.¹⁴⁴ Paul rejected a triumphal demeanor, for that contradicts Christ's attitude (1 Cor 1:25–31).¹⁴⁵

¹³⁰ Hawthorne, *Philippians*, 119.

¹³¹ J. V. Fesko, “N.T. Wright on Imputation.” *RTR* 66, no.1 Apr 2007: 2–22, 12.

¹³² Fee, *Paul's Letter to the Philippians*, 212.

¹³³ Witherington, *Paul's Letter to the Philippians: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary*, 140.

¹³⁴ Thielman, *Philippians*, 119.

¹³⁵ Witherington, *Paul's Letter to the Philippians: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary*, 150.

¹³⁶ Hawthorne, *Philippians*, 122–3.

¹³⁷ Witherington, *Paul's Letter to the Philippians: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary*, 150.

¹³⁸ M. Tullius Cicero, *For Rabirius on a Charge of Treason* (The Orations of Marcus Tullius Cicero; trans. Charles Duke Yonge; Covent Garden: Henry G. Bohn, 1856), 16,

<http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.02.0019%3Atext%3DRab.%20Perd.%3Achapter%3D5>.

¹³⁹ Fee, *Paul's Letter to the Philippians*, 217.

¹⁴⁰ Hawthorne, *Philippians*, 123.

¹⁴¹ Fee, *Paul's Letter to the Philippians*, 208.

¹⁴² Witherington, *Paul's Letter to the Philippians: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary*, 149.

¹⁴³ Fee, *Paul's Letter to the Philippians*, 218.

¹⁴⁴ Fee, *Paul's Letter to the Philippians*, 227.

¹⁴⁵ Fee, *Paul's Letter to the Philippians*, 197.

Read Phil 2:8. Why would both Jews and gentiles be scandalized by the notion that people would worship someone who had been crucified? How can we follow Christ’s example?

The Name Above Every Name

d) Phil 2:9–11: The Trinity exemplifies self-giving. Thus, both the cross and the sacrificed lamb best reveal God’s character (John 8:28–29; John 12:27–33; John 1:28–29).¹⁴⁶ Since crucifixion had such negative connotations in the Jewish and Greco-Roman cultures (Phil 2:8; 1 Cor 1:23–25), the only plausible explanation for the rise of Christianity is that something extraordinary happened to Jesus after his death.¹⁴⁷

This hymn cited by Paul concludes by celebrating the unrivaled honor bestowed upon the one who abased himself and now reigns in supreme glory.¹⁴⁸ For those in Philippi, where people worshiped Caesar as Lord, this passage elicited shock.¹⁴⁹ While followers of Christ worship Jesus as king, all things have not yet come under his subjection.¹⁵⁰ Consequently, this Scripture concerns the time in which we live. Many bible scholars call this era “the now and not yet.”

A radical shift occurs in Phil 2:9, a great reversal on several levels.¹⁵¹ To this point, Jesus has performed the action (Phil 2:5–8). From here until the end of the hymn, Christ behaves as the recipient,¹⁵² as he sits enthroned in the heavenly court (Ps 110:1; Matt 16:24–27; Matt 18:4).¹⁵³ Although this hymn cites neither the resurrection nor the ascension of Jesus, the author assumes both.¹⁵⁴

Paul quoted, “Therefore God super-exalted him.”¹⁵⁵ This action by the Father serves as the proof of Jesus’s righteousness, rather than as a reward for Christ’s self-abasement.¹⁵⁶ Unlike the gradual descent into humiliation, God raised his son in one dramatic act from the depths of degradation to the loftiest heights.¹⁵⁷ As a result, Christ reigns over the universe (Acts 2:32–36; Eph 1:18–23; Heb 1:3; Heb 7:26).¹⁵⁸

Consequently, he must receive the highest honor, praise, obedience, and submission from everyone (Ps 97:9). In addition, Paul gave Christians a model to follow. By being obedient even to the point of death, God shall vindicate and glorify us (Matt 10:16–39; Phil 3:20–21).¹⁵⁹

¹⁴⁶ Witherington, *Paul’s Letter to the Philippians: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary*, 156.

¹⁴⁷ Witherington, *Paul’s Letter to the Philippians: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary*, 150.

¹⁴⁸ Hawthorne, *Philippians*, 107.

¹⁴⁹ Fee, *Paul’s Letter to the Philippians*, 197.

¹⁵⁰ Fee, *Paul’s Letter to the Philippians*, 219.

¹⁵¹ Hawthorne, *Philippians*, 123.

¹⁵² Witherington, *Paul’s Letter to the Philippians: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary*, 151.

¹⁵³ Hawthorne, *Philippians*, 123.

¹⁵⁴ Fee, *Paul’s Letter to the Philippians*, 220.

¹⁵⁵ Danker, et al., “ὑπερυψῶω” (*hyperupsoō*), *BDAG*, 1034. This term appears nowhere else in the New Testament.

¹⁵⁶ Fee, *Paul’s Letter to the Philippians*, 220.

¹⁵⁷ Hawthorne, *Philippians*, 125.

¹⁵⁸ Georg Bertram, “ὑψῶω” (*hypsōō*) *TNDT* 8:602–14, 609.

¹⁵⁹ Witherington, *Paul’s Letter to the Philippians: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary*, 151–2.

Since he was equal with God prior to the incarnation, Christ has returned to his previous eminence (John 17:4–5).¹⁶⁰ No higher place exists than that occupied by the Lord.¹⁶¹ That God “bestowed on him a name which [is] above every name” comprises one aspect of Christ’s super-exaltation.¹⁶² This literary repetition reinforces the extent of Jesus’s supremacy.

In the ancient world, a name not only revealed one’s inner character but also emphasized status (1 Sam 25:25; John 1:40–42; Matt 16:16–18).¹⁶³ By receiving the name above all others, the Father gave Christ his own power and authority.¹⁶⁴ Once again, the Son enjoys equality with the Father.¹⁶⁵ Although Paul did not overtly specify that name,¹⁶⁶ the Greek Old Testament translates the name Yahweh as Lord (*kyrios*), such as in Exod 3:4.¹⁶⁷ Observant Jewish people regarded the divine name as too holy to speak; therefore, they substituted “Lord” for “Yahweh.”¹⁶⁸

“Jesus is Lord” serves as the earliest Christian confession, with the term “Lord” appearing 717 times in the New Testament (Acts 2:36; 1 Cor 12:3; Rom 10:9–10).¹⁶⁹ Paul alluded to Isa 45:21–25 here, confirming that the name Yahweh belongs to Jesus.¹⁷⁰ In particular, note the statement, “For I am God and there is not another” (Isa 45:22). As a result, the apostle made an astonishing pronouncement, for he asserted that we owe homage directly to the Son, rather than to the Father through the Son.¹⁷¹

God made this bestowal “in order that before the name of Jesus every knee might bow.”¹⁷² This refers to the historical man who came from Nazareth, instead of a cosmic nonentity.¹⁷³ “To bend the knee” is an idiom meaning “to acknowledge and submit to the authority of another.”¹⁷⁴ The one who previously obeyed fully must now be fully obeyed (Cf. Phil 2:7–8).¹⁷⁵

By citing the passage in Isaiah, Paul implied that at Christ’s return, all—those willing and unwilling—will bend the knee to him. No one shall escape from the reality of Jesus’s supremacy.¹⁷⁶ Some people will experience great joy, while others face shameful disgrace for resisting his rule.¹⁷⁷ Everyone shall acknowledge his sovereignty at the end of time, even if they now refuse to yield their wills to his.¹⁷⁸

This shall be true of “[those] of heaven and of earth and under the earth.” Ancient people believed in a three-part universe (Rev 5:3).¹⁷⁹ For example, Homer wrote, “Now therefore let

¹⁶⁰ Thielman, *Philippians*, 120.

¹⁶¹ Witherington, *Paul’s Letter to the Philippians: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary*, 152.

¹⁶² Fee, *Paul’s Letter to the Philippians*, 220–1.

¹⁶³ Hawthorne, *Philippians*, 126.

¹⁶⁴ Fee, *Paul’s Letter to the Philippians*, 225–6.

¹⁶⁵ Hawthorne, *Philippians*, 126.

¹⁶⁶ Thielman, *Philippians*, 120.

¹⁶⁷ Witherington, *Paul’s Letter to the Philippians: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary*, 152.

¹⁶⁸ Fee, *Paul’s Letter to the Philippians*, 225.

¹⁶⁹ Witherington, *Paul’s Letter to the Philippians: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary*, 153.

¹⁷⁰ Fee, *Paul’s Letter to the Philippians*, 222.

¹⁷¹ Hawthorne, *Philippians*, 127.

¹⁷² Thielman, *Philippians*, 121.

¹⁷³ Hawthorne, *Philippians*, 127.

¹⁷⁴ Witherington, *Paul’s Letter to the Philippians: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary*, 153.

¹⁷⁵ Hawthorne, *Philippians*, 127.

¹⁷⁶ Witherington, *Paul’s Letter to the Philippians: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary*, 153–4.

¹⁷⁷ Schreiner, *Paul Apostle of God’s Glory in Christ: A Pauline Theology*, 188.

¹⁷⁸ Fee, *Paul’s Letter to the Philippians*, 224.

¹⁷⁹ Hawthorne, *Philippians*, 128.

earth be witness to this, and the broad heaven above, and the down-flowing water of the Styx (the entrance to the underworld).¹⁸⁰ “Those of heaven” refers to angels, even those who have rebelled against the Lord’s authority (Job 1:6; Mark 1:21–26; James 2:19).¹⁸¹ Among those “on the earth” were the people who persecuted the church in Philippi, even Paul’s captors (Phil 1:12–13).¹⁸² The ones “under the earth” consist of those who have died (Ps 16:9–11).¹⁸³ Worship will be universal (Rev 5:11–14),¹⁸⁴ extending to all of creation (Ps 148).¹⁸⁵

“And every tongue shall confess that Jesus Christ [is] Lord.” Here the hymn reaches its apex, for everyone shall recognize “the name that is above every name” as authoritative. Christ will be installed as head of the universe, not only of the church,¹⁸⁶ for everyone shall see that Jesus has been resurrected. However, for those who persist in unbelief, this confession will not result in conversion (Heb 9:27–28; Rev 20:12–15).¹⁸⁷ Instead, Jesus shall triumph over his foes.¹⁸⁸ Similarly, an individual who dislikes the president still swears an oath of allegiance to the commander-in-chief when joining the military. One may not like the person but cannot deny the office belongs to him.¹⁸⁹

All of this shall be “to the glory of God the Father.” Paradoxically, Christ’s exaltation does not displace the Father,¹⁹⁰ who handed over his name and rule but suffered no reduction in his glory (1 Cor 8:6).¹⁹¹ Thus, the Incarnation redefines monotheism to include more than one person within the Godhead (Cf. Deut 6:4–5).¹⁹² Just as the Son took the role of a servant, here we see the Father doing likewise.¹⁹³ Therefore, when we confess “Jesus is Lord,” we do not dishonor the Father, for this fulfills his divine plan.¹⁹⁴

In keeping with the perfect unity of the Father and the Son, in this era of the “now and not yet,” Christ rules over all authorities, powers, and dominions. However, when all of creation has been subjected to him, Jesus shall place everything under the Father. This includes himself, “in order that God may be all in all” (1 Cor 15:24–28; John 13:31–32; Rev 3:21).

According to Augustine (354–430), due to the unity within the Godhead, whenever one of them is magnified, so is the other. Therefore, “When [Christ] shall have delivered up the kingdom to...the Father, Jesus does not take the kingdom from himself; since, when he shall bring believers to the contemplation of God, even the Father, doubtless he will bring them to the

¹⁸⁰Homer, *The Odyssey* (trans. A. T. Murray; LCL; Cambridge; London: Harvard University Press; Heinemann, 1919), 5.184–6, <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.01.0136%3Abook%3D5%3Acard%3D145>.

¹⁸¹ Keener, *IVPBBCNT*, Phil 2:10–1.

¹⁸² Fee, *Paul’s Letter to the Philippians*, 224–5.

¹⁸³ Witherington, *Paul’s Letter to the Philippians: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary*, 155.

¹⁸⁴ Hawthorne, *Philippians*, 128.

¹⁸⁵ Witherington, *Paul’s Letter to the Philippians: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary*, 154–5.

¹⁸⁶ Hawthorne, *Philippians*, 128.

¹⁸⁷ Fee, *Paul’s Letter to the Philippians*, 225.

¹⁸⁸ Hawthorne, *Philippians*, 128.

¹⁸⁹ Witherington, *Paul’s Letter to the Philippians: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary*, 154.

¹⁹⁰ Hawthorne, *Philippians*, 130.

¹⁹¹ Witherington, *Paul’s Letter to the Philippians: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary*, 153.

¹⁹² Witherington, *Paul’s Letter to the Philippians: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary*, 155.

¹⁹³ Witherington, *Paul’s Letter to the Philippians: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary*, 153.

¹⁹⁴ Hawthorne, *Philippians*, 130.

contemplation of Himself.”¹⁹⁵ The perfect unity within the Trinity shall remain throughout eternity.

In Roman colonial cities, public inscriptions glorified Caesar Augustus (27 BC–14 AD) as the savior of the world. The Priene calendar inscription gives the rationale for setting the emperor’s birthday as the first day of the year:¹⁹⁶

“Since Providence...has set [the world] in most perfect order by giving us Augustus, whom she filled with virtue that he might benefit humankind, and sending him as a savior, both for us and for our descendants, that he might end war and arrange all things...surpassing all previous benefactors and not even leaving to posterity any hope of surpassing what he has done, and since the birthday of the god Augustus was the beginning of the good tidings (*euangelion*) for the world...”¹⁹⁷ In addition to denoting “good tidings,” *euangelion* also means “gospel.”¹⁹⁸

This hymn in Phil 2 undercuts all imperial claims,¹⁹⁹ despite Paul’s confinement in Nero’s prison when he wrote this letter (Phil 1:12–14).²⁰⁰ The apostle turned the notion of how one achieves honor and power on its head: the one worthy to rule over all is the one who serves all (Mark 10:42–45).²⁰¹ Thus, no sacrifice we make for the cause of the gospel can be too great.²⁰² Furthermore, if the Son humbled himself to the lowest place, how can those who claim to follow him quarrel and fight for social status?²⁰³

As Augustine wrote:

“What mercy could be greater, so far as we poor wretches are concerned, than that which drew the Creator of the heavens down from heaven, clothed the Maker of the earth with earthly vesture, made Him, who in eternity remains equal to His Father, equal to us in mortality, and imposed on the Lord of the universe the form of a servant, so that He, our Bread, might hunger; that He, our Fulfillment, might thirst; that He, our Strength, might be weakened; that He, our Health, might be injured; that He, our Life, might die? And all this [He did] to satisfy our hunger, to moisten our dryness, to soothe our infirmity, to wipe out our iniquity, to enkindle our charity. What greater mercy could there be than that the Creator be created, the Ruler be served, the Redeemer be sold, the Exalted be humbled and the Reviver be killed?”²⁰⁴

Read Phil 2:9–11. How shall Jesus be glorified? What characterizes the relationship between the Son and the Father? How does reading Phil 2:3–11 affect the way we understand the word “us” in Gen 1:26? Why would this passage have given hope to Paul’s readers in Philippi? What are the implications of this hymn for how we live?

¹⁹⁵Augustine, “On the Trinity,” in *NPNF1–03* (ed. Philip Schaff; trans. Arthur West Haddan, revised by William G. T. Shedd; Edinburgh; Grand Rapids: T & T Clark; Eerdmans, 1887), 1.9, 27, <https://archive.org/stream/aselectlibrary03unknuoft#page/26/mode/2up>.

¹⁹⁶Craig A. Evans, “Mark’s Incipit and the Priene Calendar Inscription: From Jewish Gospel to Greco-Roman Gospel,” *JGRChJ*, no. 1 (1 January 2000): 70, http://www.jgrchj.net/volume1/JGRChJ1-5_Evans.pdf.

¹⁹⁷Evans, “Mark’s Incipit and the Priene Calendar Inscription: From Jewish Gospel to Greco-Roman Gospel,” 69, http://www.jgrchj.net/volume1/JGRChJ1-5_Evans.pdf.

¹⁹⁸Arndt, Danker, and Bauer, “εὐαγγέλιον” (*euangelion*), *BDAG*, 402–3.

¹⁹⁹Witherington, *Paul’s Letter to the Philippians: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary*, 156.

²⁰⁰Fee, *Paul’s Letter to the Philippians*, 222–3.

²⁰¹Witherington, *Paul’s Letter to the Philippians: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary*, 156.

²⁰²Thielman, *Philippians*, 128.

²⁰³Witherington, *Paul’s Letter to the Philippians: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary*, 156.

²⁰⁴Augustine, “Sermon 207,” in *Saint Augustine: Sermons on the Liturgical Seasons* (trans. Sister Mary Sarch Muldowney; FC; New York: Fathers of the Church, 1959), 89–92, <https://archive.org/stream/fathersofthechur009512mbp#page/n111/mode/2up>.

Made in the Image of God

3) Gen 1:26 continued: A second major issue in this verse concerns the nature of the image (*tselem*) of God, and how that term relates to the “likeness” (*demuth*) of God.²⁰⁵ Unlike other creatures, which God created “according to their kind” (*min*) (Gen 1:21, 24–25), he made humanity (*adam*) in his own image. Although this concept forms the basis for understanding Genesis and the rest of Scripture,²⁰⁶ the phrase “image of God” appears in only two other verses in the Old Testament (OT) (Gen 1:27 (2x); Gen 9:6).²⁰⁷

Complicating matters, this Hebrew word for “image” occurs only seventeen times in the entire OT. Ten of those refer to physical models or idols (e.g. 1 Sam 6:4–5; Ezek 16:17; Num 33:51–52).²⁰⁸ Of these, only the images in 1 Samuel remain free from condemnation as illicit representations.²⁰⁹ Two uses of “image” in the Psalms compare human existence to a fleeting shadow (Ps 39:6; Ps 73:20).²¹⁰

In the Ancient Near Eastern (ANE) perspective, the gods created the world for their own enjoyment. They made humanity as an afterthought to relieve them from the drudgery of doing their own labor.²¹¹ According to Enuma Elish, the gods tired of working to obtain food, so they came up with a plan to create others to feed them. The hero Marduk announced, “Blood I will mass and cause bones to be. I will establish a savage. ‘Man’ shall be his name. Truly, savage man I will create. He shall be charged with the service of the gods that they might be at ease!” Then Marduk slew the god who had incited the cosmic sea monster to rebel. The god Ea mixed clay with Kingu’s blood to fashion people to work as their slaves.²¹²

Throughout the ANE, only a king or high-ranking official could be designated as “the image of God.”²¹³ For example, Egyptians revered pharaohs as both kings and the incarnation of a god. A Pyramid Text states, “For the King is a great power who has power over the other powers; the king is a sacred image, the most sacred of the sacred images of the Great One. And whomsoever he finds in his way, him he devours piecemeal...Thousands serve him, hundreds make offerings for him.”²¹⁴

One man wrote, “To the king, my lord, and my sun god say, ‘Thus Biridiya, the true servant of the king. At the feet of the king, my lord, and my sun god, seven times and seven times I fall.’”²¹⁵ According to an Akkadian proverb, “[Humanity] is the shadow of a god, a slave is the shadow of a man; but the king is like the (very) image of a god.”²¹⁶

²⁰⁵Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis*, Chapters 1–17, 134.

²⁰⁶Waltke and Fredricks, *Genesis: A Commentary*, 65.

²⁰⁷Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis*, Chapters 1–17, 134.

²⁰⁸Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 29.

²⁰⁹Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis*, Chapters 1–17, 135.

²¹⁰Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 29.

²¹¹Matthews, Chavalas, and Walton, *IVPBBCOT*, Gen 1:31.

²¹²“The Creation Epic” (Enuma Elish), *ANET*, lines 6.1–36, 68.

²¹³Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis*, Chapters 1–17, 135.

²¹⁴Raymond O. Faulkner, *The Ancient Egyptian Pyramid Texts* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1969), lines 407–8, 82.

²¹⁵W. F. Albright and George E. Mendenhall, trans., “The Amarna Letters, RA XIX,” in *ANET*, lines 1–10, 485.

²¹⁶Robert F. Pfeiffer, trans., “Akkadian Proverbs and Counsels,” in *ANET*, 5.3, 426.

While in Egypt, Israel’s overlords taught Moses’s original readers that they existed solely to work for the pharaoh. In contrast, Gen 1:26 uses royal language to describe all humanity, from the greatest king to the lowliest slave.²¹⁷

People living in the ANE believed that an image carried the essential nature of what it personified. An Egyptian stele states:

“[Ptah, the Creator-god,] fashioned the gods...He installed the gods in their holy places, he made their offerings to flourish, he equipped their holy places. He made likenesses of their bodies to the satisfaction of their hearts. Then the gods entered into their bodies of every wood and every stone and every metal.”²¹⁸

Consequently, those worshiping an idol considered their activity equivalent to adoration of the god whom the idol portrayed. While a statue may not have looked exactly like the god, it could accomplish the deity’s work.²¹⁹ Similarly, the Hebrew concept of “image” (*tselem*) does not necessarily specify an exact physical likeness.²²⁰

In Mesopotamia, a son could be born in the image of his father, but only a god could be created in the image of the gods.²²¹ As a result, ancient rulers set up images of themselves in distant parts of their realms to represent their authority. That explains why Nebuchadnezzar II expressed such outrage when three Hebrew men refused to bow in worship before the statue he erected after his dream (Dan 2:31–45; Dan 3:1, 8–15).²²²

The Assyrian emperor Shalmaneser III recorded his victories on a black obelisk, noting that after defeating the people of Hattina and installing a new ruler, “I fashioned a heroic image of my royal personage; I had it set up in...his royal city, in the house of his gods.”²²³ A new god ruled over the temple and the city.

A phenomenal example of this concept appears in Abu Simbel, Egypt. Rameses II had this temple complex carved out of a cliff side along his border with Nubia to display his power. It depicts his victory over the Hittites at Kadesh. Four images of gods—including Rameses the Great himself—sit at the back of the largest temple. On his birthday and coronation day, which are conveniently six months apart, a ray of light shines to the back of the temple, illuminating three of the four idols. Ptah, the god of darkness, remains unlit.²²⁴

“According to our likeness (*demuth*)” more precisely defines the meaning of “the image of God.”²²⁵ Most scholars assert that this phrase affirms that some distinctions exist between the creator and humanity,²²⁶ just as Seth could not have been completely identical to his father (Gen

²¹⁷Phyllis A. Bird, “‘Male and Female He Created Them’: Gen 1:27b in the Context of the Priestly Account of Creation,” *HTR* 74, no. 2: 129–59, 144.

<http://www.bhporter.com/Porter%20PDF%20Files/male%20and%20female%20he%20created%20them%20Gne%201%2027%20in%20the%20context%20of%20the%20priestly%20account%20of%20creation.pdf>.

²¹⁸James H. Breasted, *Development of Religion and Thought in Ancient Egypt* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1972), 46, <https://archive.org/stream/developmentofrel00brea#page/46/mode/2up>.

²¹⁹Walton, *Genesis*, 130.

²²⁰Swanson, “*תְּצַלֵּם*” (*tselem*), *DBLSDH*, 7512.

²²¹Walton, *Genesis*, 130.

²²²Hoekema, *Created in God’s Image*, 67.

²²³Daniel David Luckenbill, ed., *Ancient Records of Assyria and Babylonia (ARAB): Historical Records of Assyria from the Earliest Times to Sargon, Vol. 1* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1926), 1:208–9, https://archive.org/stream/LuckenbillAncientRecordsAssyria01/Luckenbill_Ancient_Records_Assyria01#page/n223/mode/2up.

²²⁴History Channel, “Rameses’ Temple at Abu Simbel,” <http://www.history.com/topics/ancient-history/ancient-egypt/videos/ramses-temple-at-abu-simbel>. This link is for a three-minute video.

²²⁵Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 29.

²²⁶Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis, Chapters 1–17*, 135–6.

5:3).²²⁷ The word “likeness” occurs three times in Ezek 1:26.²²⁸ Notably, the prophet did not say that he saw a throne or a man,²²⁹ but “something like” them.²³⁰ Thus, humanity bears great resemblance to God but does not comprise God himself.²³¹

What makes sin so serious is that we use our God-given capacities to do things which offend the one who endows us with them.²³² Yet, Moses did not define what constitutes the image or the likeness of God.²³³ Some commentators suspect that we read what we most value about being human into the text, leading them to abandon any attempt to explain the term.²³⁴

Other theologians have been more obliging. They suggest several major categories. The first involves mental and spiritual capacities, such as the ability to reason and to determine a proper course of action, personality, intelligence, self-awareness,²³⁵ moral sensitivity, a sense of beauty, creativity,²³⁶ original righteousness, the ability to enjoy fellowship with God,²³⁷ and the potential to love others sacrificially (Eph 4:32–5:2).²³⁸

Some scholars contend that the image of God consists of a physical resemblance. This interpretation comes primarily from Gen 5:3, for Adam “fathered [Seth] in his likeness, according to his image.” As noted previously, the most common meaning of “image” involves physical appearance. Since the OT stresses that God does not possess a body and is invisible, this interpretation remains problematic (Deut 4:15–16).²³⁹ On the other hand, the Lord describes himself as having eyes and ears to communicate his awareness of the plight of the afflicted (Ps 94:9).²⁴⁰

To focus upon any one aspect of humanity when seeking to define God’s image is inadequate. Since people function as a unity of body and soul, we cannot elevate one aspect of the Lord’s likeness over the others.²⁴¹ As Dietrich Bonhoeffer noted, “If the creator wishes to create the creator’s own image, then the creator must create it free. And only such an image, in its freedom, would fully praise God, would fully proclaim God’s glory as creator.”²⁴²

As redeemed people, we seek to become more fully conformed to the image of Christ (Rom 8:29; 2 Cor 3:18; Col 3:4–11).²⁴³ Nevertheless, even those without Christ continue to bear God’s image (James 3:8–9). According to the 13th century theologian Thomas Aquinas, “The image of God abides ever in the soul; ‘whether this image of God be so obsolete,’ as it were

²²⁷ Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 29–30.

²²⁸ Brown, Driver, and Briggs, “דְמוּת” (*demuth*), *BDB*, 198, <https://archive.org/stream/hebrewenglishlex00browuoft#page/198/mode/2up>.

²²⁹ Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis, Chapters 1–17*, 136.

²³⁰ Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 29.

²³¹ Waltke and Fredricks, *Genesis: A Commentary*, 66.

²³² Hoekema, *Created in God’s Image*, 70–2.

²³³ Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis, Chapters 1–17*, 137.

²³⁴ Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 29.

²³⁵ Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 29–30.

²³⁶ Hoekema, *Created in God’s Image*, 70–2.

²³⁷ Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis, Chapters 1–17*, 137.

²³⁸ Hoekema, *Created in God’s Image*, 29.

²³⁹ Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 30.

²⁴⁰ Waltke and Fredricks, *Genesis: A Commentary*, 65.

²⁴¹ Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis, Chapters 1–17*, 137.

²⁴² Bonhoeffer, *Creation and Fall: A Theological Exposition of Genesis 1–3*, 61.

²⁴³ Hoekema, *Created in God’s Image*, 24.

clouded, ‘as almost to amount to nothing,’ as in those who have not the use of reason; ‘or obscured and disfigured,’ as in sinners; or ‘clear and beautiful,’ as in the just.”²⁴⁴

Even John Calvin, who emphasized the frightful deformity of humanity,²⁴⁵ wrote this: “Scripture...tells us that we are not to look to what men in themselves deserve, but to attend to the image of God, which exists in all, and to which we owe all honor and love. But in those who are of the household of faith, the same rule is to be more carefully observed...as that image is renewed and restored in them by the Spirit of Christ. Therefore, whoever be the man that is presented to you as needing your assistance, you have no ground for declining to give it to him.”²⁴⁶

Thus, the image of God remains inseparable from humanity regardless of the way one lives. We do not merely bear the likeness of our creator; we are the image of God.²⁴⁷ Every person—no matter how marred that image may be—must be treated with respect. Each human life is sacred. Murder is an affront to our creator, for it destroys God’s image (Gen 9:5–6).²⁴⁸

That the Son of God came to us in flesh enables us to comprehend more fully what it means to be the image of God: it is to be like Jesus.²⁴⁹ Furthermore, as those in whom the Spirit of God resides, we can grow more fully into Christ’s image (Eph 4:11–16, 22–24; Col 3:12–15). As we develop character like Jesus’s, we better reflect God’s image (Col 1:15).²⁵⁰

In the ANE, the image of God applied to the king primarily in terms of his function and his presence.²⁵¹ Consequently, in recent years the dominant view among scholars understands the “image of God” in Genesis 1 in terms of exercising dominion over the world, ruling as God’s representatives on earth.²⁵² Even as emperors placed statues of themselves in the temples of their under-lords, so God made Adam and Eve in his image and placed them on earth to signify that the Lord rules the planet.²⁵³ Given the ANE context, this view has the greatest merit for defining the divine image.

For example, one pharaoh wrote this to his son:²⁵⁴
 “Well directed are *men, the cattle of the god*. He made heaven and earth according to their desire, and he repelled the water monster. He made the breath of life [for] their nostrils. *They who have issued from his body are his images*. He arises in heaven according to their desire. He made for them plants, animals, fowl, and fish to feed them. He slew his enemies and injured [even] his [own] children because they thought of making rebellion. He makes the light of day according to their desire, and he sails by in order to see them. He has erected a shrine around about them, and when they weep, he hears.”²⁵⁵

²⁴⁴Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* (trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province; New York: Benziger, 1947), 1.93.8, <http://dhsprory.org/thomas/summa/FP/FP093.html#FPQ93OUTP1>.

²⁴⁵Hoekema, *Created in God’s Image*, 43.

²⁴⁶John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (trans. Henry Beveridge; Edinburgh: Calvin Translation Society, 1845), 3.7.6, 624–5, <https://archive.org/stream/institutesofchr01calv#page/624/mode/2up>.

²⁴⁷Hoekema, *Created in God’s Image*, 65.

²⁴⁸Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 31–2.

²⁴⁹Hoekema, *Created in God’s Image*, 22.

²⁵⁰Walton, *Genesis*, 131.

²⁵¹Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 30.

²⁵²Ian Hart, “Genesis 1:1–2:3 as a Prologue to the Book of Genesis.” *TynBul* 46, no. 2 (November 1995): 315–36, 317–19, http://tyndalehouse.com/tynbul/library/TynBull_1995_46_2_06_Hart_Gen1Prologue.pdf.

²⁵³Beale, *The Temple and the Church’s Mission: A Biblical Theology of the Dwelling Place of God*, 82.

²⁵⁴James B. Pritchard, ed., *The Ancient Near East: An Anthology of Texts and Pictures, 3rd Ed. (ANET)* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969), 414.

²⁵⁵John A. Wilson, trans., “The Instruction for King Meri-Ka-Re,” in *ANET*, lines 131–5, 417, Italics mine.

Note the depiction of commoners as the cattle of the sun god. Only the rulers who issued from the sun god’s body were made in the god’s image, not in physical appearance but in their privileges and power.²⁵⁶ In contrast, the OT view is highly democratic, for God created all people in his image.²⁵⁷

a) Read Gen 1:26. In what way did the Hebrew view of humanity differ from that of the nations around them? Taking the ANE context into account, how would you define “the image of God”? How does recognizing the image of God in other people affect the way you treat them?

Stewards of the Earth

b) Gen 1:26 cont.: Concerning humanity—the ones made in his image—God said, “And let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the heavens and over the beasts of all the earth and over all of the creeping things which creep about on the earth.” In Akkadian, a related Ancient Near Eastern (ANE) language, the word “rule” means to guide or drive animals. Thus, this term connotes exercising dominion by caring for creation.²⁵⁸

Typically, the Hebrew verb “rule” (*radhah*) applies to human relationships (Lev 25:43; 1 Ki 4:24) or nations (Ps 72:8–14).²⁵⁹ It implies protection and care for those under one’s dominion.²⁶⁰ Within Israel, the Lord condemned rulers whom he compared to shepherds abusing their flocks (Ezek 34:1–4, 10).²⁶¹

Regarding just dominion, an Egyptian pharaoh wrote this to his son: “Foster thy younger generation, that the residence city may love thee, and increase thy adherents with *recruits*. Behold, thy citizenry is full of new growing (boys). It is twenty years that the younger generation is happy following its heart, (and then) *recruits [come] forth anew*... Make thy officials great, advance thy [*soldiers*], increase the younger generation of thy [follow]ing, provided with *property*, endowed with fields, and rewarded with cattle.”²⁶²

Our commission and empowerment to govern creation comprises a significant aspect of our likeness to God.²⁶³ Far greater than the ANE view of humanity as slaves of the gods, the Lord made us to serve as creators and laborers with him to promote the flourishing of the world.²⁶⁴ Compassion must characterize our dominion, not exploitation (Prov 12:10). Even in Eden, the ones created as lords of all served the garden (Gen 2:15).²⁶⁵

²⁵⁶ Walton, *Genesis*, 130.

²⁵⁷ Waltke and Fredricks, *Genesis: A Commentary*, 66.

²⁵⁸ Philip J. Nel, “רָדָה” (*radhah*), *NIDOTTE*, 1056.

²⁵⁹ H.-J. Zobel, “רָדָה” (*radhah*), *TDOT* 13:331–6, 331.

²⁶⁰ Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis, Chapters 1–17*, 137–8.

²⁶¹ Zobel, “רָדָה” (*radhah*), *TDOT* 13:333.

²⁶² Wilson, trans., “The Instruction for King Meri-Ka-Re,” in *ANET*, 59–61, 415. Italics original.

²⁶³ Bonhoeffer, *Creation and Fall: A Theological Exposition of Genesis 1–3*, 66.

²⁶⁴ Venema and McKnight, *Adam and the Genome: Reading Scripture After Genetic Science*, loc. 2945 of 5792.

²⁶⁵ Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis, Chapters 1–17*, 138.

As representatives of the Lord,²⁶⁶ he calls us to manage the earth for its true owner (Ps 24:1–2).²⁶⁷ Freedom to rule involves being bound to those over whom we exercise dominion, for when we care for creation, it cares for us.²⁶⁸ Therefore, believers must seek the redemption of not only people but of our environment and all who dwell within it.²⁶⁹

Read Gen 1:26. How do you fulfill God’s mandate to rule over all the creatures of the earth? What steps can you take to improve the way you care for our planet?

Male and Female He Created Them

c) Gen 1:27: Three brief sentences define the most compelling aspects of human existence.²⁷⁰ In a shift from poetic narrative, here we read the first true poetry in the Bible. This verse highlights the unique standing of humanity in God’s creation.²⁷¹

“And God created humanity (*adam*) in his image. In the image of God, he created it.²⁷² Male and female, he created them.” The verb “created” (*bara*) is singular, contrary to the “us” of Gen 1:26. This supports the view that the Lord had been speaking to his heavenly council regarding his plans to fabricate people.²⁷³ Here *adam* refers to all of humanity,²⁷⁴ in contrast to a male person (*zakhar*).²⁷⁵ It appears that the first usage of “Adam” as a personal name does not occur until Gen 3:17.²⁷⁶

Moses wrote, “Male and female he created them.” Genesis 1:27 characterizes humanity by sexual differentiation. Unlike the animals, which God created in various species and kinds (*min*), he described people in terms of gender. Not until the flood narrative did the Lord portray creatures as male and female (Gen 6:19).²⁷⁷

Therefore, this verse affirms that God created both men and women in his image to rule over creation, even though sexual identity and function remain foreign to the Trinity. Our sexuality comes from God as a gift, rather than an accident of nature or a mere biological

²⁶⁶Hart, “Genesis 1:1–2:3 as a Prologue to the Book of Genesis,” 317–9,

http://tyndalehouse.com/tynbul/library/TynBull_1995_46_2_06_Hart_Gen1Prologue.pdf.

²⁶⁷Douglas J. Moo, “Nature and the New Creation: New Testament Eschatology and the Environment,” *JETS* 49, no. 3 (September 2006): 449–88, 478, http://www.etsjets.org/files/JETS-PDFs/49/49-3/JETS_49-3_449-488_Moo.pdf.

²⁶⁸Bonhoeffer, *Creation and Fall: A Theological Exposition of Genesis 1–3*, 66.

²⁶⁹Moo, “Nature and the New Creation: New Testament Eschatology and the Environment,” 474, http://www.etsjets.org/files/JETS-PDFs/49/49-3/JETS_49-3_449-488_Moo.pdf.

²⁷⁰Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 32.

²⁷¹Waltke and Fredricks, *Genesis: A Commentary*, 67.

²⁷²The pronoun here is third person masculine singular, which can mean either “it” or “him.”

²⁷³Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis, Chapters 1–17*, 138.

²⁷⁴Gesenius, *GKC*, 402, <https://archive.org/stream/geseniushebrewgr00geseuoft#page/402/mode/2up>.

²⁷⁵Holladay, “זָכָר” (*zakhar*), *CHALOT*, 89, <https://archive.org/stream/hebrewenglishlex00browuoft#page/270/mode/2up>.

²⁷⁶Brown, Driver, and Briggs, “אָדָם” (*adam*), *BDB*, 9, <https://archive.org/stream/hebrewenglishlex00browuoft#page/8/mode/2up>.

²⁷⁷Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis, Chapters 1–17*, 138.

phenomenon. Indeed, the Lord’s next words blessed human fertility (Gen 1:28).²⁷⁸ Since neither gender comprises all of humanity, men and women need interactions with each other.²⁷⁹ God created us as men and women. Therefore, he designed us to experience community across gender lines (Gen 2:18; 1 Cor 11:11–12). Only then can we express all that it means to be fully human,²⁸⁰ whether we marry or remain single.

Read Gen 1:26–27. Why is it significant that God created all of humanity to rule over his creation? If your family had been enslaved for generations, believing that the sole reason for your existence was to serve the god Pharaoh, how would learning that you had been created in the image of the creator of the universe affect your view of yourself? How do you interact across gender lines?

The Blessing of Fruitfulness

d) Gen 1:28: This text sits at the heart of western religious tradition concerning humanity’s place in our world.²⁸¹ It states, “And God blessed them and said to them, ‘Be fruitful and become numerous and fill the earth and subdue it and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and the birds of the heavens, and over all the living things which move about on the land.’” People who do not follow Christ remain in the image of God (Gen 1:26). This enables them to retain some glimmers of truth in their conception of God and of humanity.²⁸²

An Akkadian text asserts that the formation of the earth and of people were divine processes:

“When the god Anu created heaven, [when] the god [of waters] created the...ocean, his dwelling, the god Ea pinched off a piece of clay in the...ocean, created the [brick god] for the restoration of [temples], created the reed marsh and the forest for the work of their construction, created the gods...to be the completers of their construction work, created mountains and oceans for everything...[created] the abundant products [of mountain and ocean] to be offerings... created the deities...to be presenters of offerings, created the god Kusug, high priest of the great gods, to be the one who completes their rites and ceremonies, created the king to be the provider ...*created men to be the makers.*²⁸³

However, Gen 1 differs from the Ancient Near Eastern (ANE) conception of the world by asserting that only one God ultimately wields power in the universe. Furthermore, he granted jurisdiction to people made in his image, rather than to lesser gods.²⁸⁴ The Lord commissioned

²⁷⁸ Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis, Chapters 1–17*, 138–9.

²⁷⁹ Hoekema, *Created in God’s Image*, 97.

²⁸⁰ Bonhoeffer, *Creation and Fall: A Theological Exposition of Genesis 1–3*, 83

²⁸¹ Theodore Hiebert, “Rethinking Dominion Theology” *Direction* 25, no. 2 (Fall 1996): 16–25, 17, <http://www.directionjournal.org/25/2/rethinking-dominion-theology.html>.

²⁸² Beale, *The Temple and the Church’s Mission: A Biblical Theology of the Dwelling Place of God*, 88.

²⁸³ A. Sachs, trans., “Ritual for the Repair of a Temple,” in *ANET*, text c, lines 24–37, 341–2. Italics mine.

²⁸⁴ Walton, *Genesis*, 136.

Adam and Eve to expand Eden until paradise covers the whole earth, so that everyone could see that the Lord rules through the work of his images (Eph 3:8–10).²⁸⁵ By procreating, they would create additional images of God to fill the earth, God’s temple (Isa 66:1).²⁸⁶

Yet humans do not possess absolute dominion. Our rule must align with God’s intentions for the earth and its creatures. He intended for us to fill the earth and rule as benevolent kings and queens (Ps 8:3–9).²⁸⁷

In the same way that God blessed the animals in Gen 1:22, he immediately granted the first humans with the ability to reproduce.²⁸⁸ Genesis often repeats this blessing of fruitfulness (Gen 9:1; Gen 17:2, 20; Gen 28:3; Gen 35:11; Gen 48:4). Its genealogies bear witness that it came to pass (Gen 5, Gen 9, Gen 11, Gen 25, Gen 36, Gen 46).²⁸⁹ Since God directly endows humanity with the means to propagate life, this undercuts all rationale for fertility cults in which people engaged in ritual sex to entreat the gods to create and sustain life.²⁹⁰

Given that God described reproduction as a blessing in Gen 1:28, we should understand it as a privilege, rather than a command to obey. Those who choose not to have children do not violate Scriptural obligations. The Lord gave this blessing so humanity might fill the earth. How wonderful it would be if we succeeded in utilizing our spiritual privileges as well as we have this physical one (Matt 28:18–20).²⁹¹

The Lord also blessed humanity with the ability to “subdue the earth” and “have dominion” over the animals. Typically, the term “to subdue” (*kavash*) refers to subjecting someone to slavery, physically assaulting a person, treading underfoot, or subjugating people with military power (Jer 34:11; Esth 7:7–8; Mic 7:19; Num 32:29). However, in this context, the word likely described creating civilizations and fostering agriculture and animal husbandry (Gen 2:5–6, 15).²⁹²

Other cultures within the ANE viewed these tasks as the prerogative of the gods and their offspring, the kings.²⁹³ For example, Sennacherib, who ruled from 705/704–681 BC, claimed: “I greatly befriended the gods of Assyria, who exalt the great gods in their shrines...[I am the] maker of Assyria, who completes its metropolis; [I am the] *subduer*...[who makes obedient] the enemies’ land, destroyer of their towns; who digs canals, opens wells, runs irrigation ditches, who brings plenty and abundance to the wide acres of Assyria, who furnishes water for irrigation to Assyria’s meadows—engineering and construction such as none had seen in Assyria in the days of old.”²⁹⁴ People in the ANE viewed enabling agricultural use of previously unfruitful land as one facet of subduing it.

²⁸⁵ Beale, *The Temple and the Church's Mission: A Biblical Theology of the Dwelling Place of God*, 81–2.

²⁸⁶ Dennis R. Venema and Scot McKnight, *Adam and the Genome: Reading Scripture After Genetic Science* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2017), electronic version, loc. 3035 of 5792.

²⁸⁷ Waltke and Fredricks, *Genesis: A Commentary*, 67.

²⁸⁸ Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis, Chapters 1–17*, 139.

²⁸⁹ Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 33.

²⁹⁰ Bird, “‘Male and Female He Created Them’: Gen 1:27b in the Context of the Priestly Account of Creation,” 147, <http://www.bhporter.com/Porter%20PDF%20Files/male%20and%20female%20he%20created%20them%20Gne%201%202027%20in%20the%20context%20of%20the%20priestly%20account%20of%20creation.pdf>.

²⁹¹ Walton, *Genesis*, 143–4.

²⁹² Hamilton, *Genesis 1–17*, 139–40.

²⁹³ Walton, *Genesis*, 135.

²⁹⁴ Sennacherib, “The Temple of the New Year’s Feast,” in *ARAB: 2:183–9*, 184, https://archive.org/stream/LuckenbillAncientRecordsAssyria02/Luckenbill_Ancient_Records_Assyria02#page/n191/mode/2up. Italics mine.

The word translated as “have dominion” or “rule over” (*radhah*) contains the nuance of using authority which one has been granted by another (1 Ki 4:24; Ps 110:1–2). It refers to priests and administrators fulfilling their duties, kings and tribes ruling over other people, and even shepherds with their sheep.²⁹⁵ God expected Israelite kings to uphold the welfare of their subjects, especially the poor and weak (Ps 72:12–14; Prov 31:4–9).²⁹⁶ He prohibited abuse and neglect (Ezek 34:1–10).²⁹⁷ Similarly, he calls us to rule over nature benevolently.²⁹⁸

Just as the Lord brought structure to the cosmos, our subduing and having dominion should bring order to the world.²⁹⁹ God intended Adam and Eve to expand Eden into habitable places for his glory.³⁰⁰

Consider the annals of Sargon II (722–705 BC):

“The site of this [new city] none among the 350 ancient princes who lived before me, who *exercised dominion* over Assyria and ruled the subjects of [the great god] Enlil, had thought of nor did they know how to settle it, nor did they think of digging its canal or setting out its orchards: to settle that city, to build its great shrines, the abodes of the great gods, and the palace for my royal abode, day and night I planned it. I gave the order and I commanded that it be built.³⁰¹ Ancient Assyrians associated the exercise of dominion with bringing order to the land. As God’s image-bearers, we must fulfill the privileges of subduing and wielding dominion as the Lord did when he formed the cosmos,³⁰² creating order from chaos and caring for the creatures he made.³⁰³ This includes domesticating and managing the animals which populate the earth.³⁰⁴ As the Lord’s representatives, we rule over them on God’s behalf.³⁰⁵

Since we are made in God’s image, he has conferred upon us his dignity, entrusted us with his authority, and endowed us with the capacity to imitate him. While all of humanity bears the image of God, the presence of the Spirit greatly enhances those capabilities within those whom the Lord has redeemed.³⁰⁶ As Christians, we tend to think of bringing healing to the world spiritually by extending God’s offer of salvation to others (Luke 7:44–50). However, the Lord also calls us to pursue physical healing, social justice, and environmental restoration (Luke 7:20–23; Luke 4:14–19; Rom 8:19–23).

While we wait expectantly for the ushering in of the new age, we must fully engage ourselves in the advancement of the cause of Christ. This involves pursuing the righteousness, equity, and eternal life which God intended from the beginning.³⁰⁷ If the Lord cares for creation enough to restore it in the age to come, then, surely, we who seek to align ourselves with him

²⁹⁵ Walton, *Genesis*, 132.

²⁹⁶ Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 33.

²⁹⁷ Walton, *Genesis*, 132.

²⁹⁸ Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 33.

²⁹⁹ Walton, *Genesis*, 136.

³⁰⁰ Beale, *The Temple and the Church's Mission: A Biblical Theology of the Dwelling Place of God*, 82.

³⁰¹ Sargon II, “The Display Inscription of Salon XIV,” *ARAB* 2:39–45, Section 83, 42,

https://archive.org/stream/LuckenbillAncientRecordsAssyria02/Luckenbill_Ancient_Records_Assyria02#page/n49/mode/2up. Italics mine.

³⁰² Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 33.

³⁰³ Beale, *The Temple and the Church's Mission: A Biblical Theology of the Dwelling Place of God*, 83.

³⁰⁴ Walton, *Genesis*, 135.

³⁰⁵ Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 33.

³⁰⁶ Walton, *Genesis*, 37.

³⁰⁷ Roy E. Ciampa, “Genesis 1–3 and Paul’s Theology of Adam’s Dominion in Romans 5–6,” in *From Creation to New Creation: Biblical Theology and Exegesis* (ed. Daniel M. Gurtner and Benjamin L. Gladd; Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2013), 115.

should nurture it as well. Nevertheless, we must remain cognizant that, although they are not in vain, our own efforts cannot bring a complete end to the groaning around us. God himself will accomplish that transformation (Ps 96).³⁰⁸

In the meantime, we function as stewards of the cosmos which God has created for himself. We manage it for the glory of the earth’s true owner.³⁰⁹ A key focus of biblical ethics consists of loving our neighbors as ourselves (Lev 19:18; Mark 12:28–34). The harsh realities of the ecological crises around the world force us to consider whether we can truly love our neighbors without caring for the environments in which they live.³¹⁰ For example, Noah, a uniquely righteous man among his neighbors, ensured the preservation of nonhuman life (Gen 6:9; Gen 7:1–5; Prov 12:10).³¹¹

People placed an image of a god in a temple to carry out the deity’s will and work.³¹² In keeping with this, Assurbanipal (668–626 BC) wrote, “The great gods, whose name I called upon, extolling their glory...commanded that I should exercise sovereignty [and] assigned me the task of adorning their sanctuaries.”³¹³ Similarly, Moses’s original readers understood that God created Adam and Eve to serve as his ambassadors. He authorized them to fulfill his purposes by faithfully tending, guarding, and governing the earth (Gen 2:15) while displaying the Lord’s glory and extending God’s kingdom.³¹⁴

To accomplish this cultural mandate,³¹⁵ God endowed Adam and Eve with his own gifts and abilities. He enabled them to function perfectly in full relationships with God and with each other as they carried out his purposes:³¹⁶ expanding the paradise in which they lived throughout the earth,³¹⁷ until the whole world serves as God’s temple.³¹⁸

Read Gen 1:28. What blessing and mandate did the Lord give to Adam and Eve? How can you fulfill it today?

The Lord Provides Food

e) Gen 1:29–30: Here we find another contrast between Ancient Near Eastern (ANE) belief and biblical teaching. In Enuma Elish, the gods tired of working to obtain their own food. Then Marduk announced, “Blood I will mass and cause bones to be. I will establish a savage, ‘man’

³⁰⁸ Moo, “Nature and the New Creation: New Testament Eschatology and the Environment,” 460–1, http://www.etsjets.org/files/JETS-PDFs/49/49-3/JETS_49-3_449-488_Moo.pdf.

³⁰⁹ Walton, *Genesis*, 141.

³¹⁰ Moo, “Nature and the New Creation: New Testament Eschatology and the Environment,” 461, http://www.etsjets.org/files/JETS-PDFs/49/49-3/JETS_49-3_449-488_Moo.pdf.

³¹¹ Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 33.

³¹² Beale, *The Temple and the Church's Mission: A Biblical Theology of the Dwelling Place of God*, 83.

³¹³ Assurbanipal II, “The Rassam Cylinder,” *ARAB* 2:290–323, Section 768, 292, https://archive.org/stream/LuckenbillAncientRecordsAssyria02/Luckenbill_Ancient_Records_Assyria02#page/n299/mode/2up.

³¹⁴ Walton, *Genesis*, 130.

³¹⁵ Per Beale, this promise of fruitful multiplying recurs in the OT fifteen times (*The Temple and the Church's Mission: A Biblical Theology of the Dwelling Place of God*, 265).

³¹⁶ Hoekema, *Created in God's Image*, 73.

³¹⁷ Kline, *Kingdom Prologue: Genesis Foundations for a Covenantal Worldview*, 70.

³¹⁸ Beale, *The Temple and the Church's Mission: A Biblical Theology of the Dwelling Place of God*, 97–8.

shall be his name...He shall be charged with the service of the gods that they might be at ease!”³¹⁹

The Lord grants food to needy people. God did not create humanity to feed him (Ps 50:7–15; Amos 5:21–24).³²⁰ He preserves the ones he creates. However, humanity’s dominion would not include the right to eat animals until after the flood (Gen 9:3).³²¹ At this point in Genesis, animals ate only plants, foreshadowing the day when “The cow and the bear shall graze together... and a lion with cattle shall eat straw (Isa 11:7; Isa 65:25; Hos 2:18).³²²

Several ANE creation myths report that people were initially allotted only vegetation for their food.³²³ For example, the Egyptian Hymn to Amon-Re says, “You are the sole one who made [all] that is...who made what exists, from whose eyes mankind came forth, and upon whose mouth the gods came into being. He who made herbage [for] the cattle and the fruit tree for mankind. Who made that [on which] the fish in the river may live.”³²⁴

Even after the flood, diets in the ANE were primarily vegetarian. People kept animals mainly for milk and cheese production.³²⁵ Only a few centuries before Christ, if a Jewish man journeyed away from home, he was required to provide his wife with wheat or barley, legumes, olive oil, and figs or some other fruit. Grain constituted about half of one’s diet, and meat was a rare luxury (*m. Ketubbot* 5.8).

Read Gen 1:29–30. Why does this passage contradict the prevailing ANE view of humanity? How did God’s decree regarding what Adam and Eve were permitted to eat indicate that he limited their dominion of nature? What does this suggest regarding our right to exploit the natural world?

God Evaluates His Creation

f) Gen 1:31: This verse provides us with God’s evaluation of all that he created.³²⁶ Moses wrote, “And God saw all which he had made, and behold, it was very good.” The Lord’s assessment differs from his previous statements in three ways. First, he proclaimed it “very good,” rather than “good.” While difficult to articulate in English, the expression of goodness here is a superlative:³²⁷ all was the very best it could be.

Moses continued, “And it was evening and morning, the sixth day.” A definite article (“the”) appears only here and on the seventh day.³²⁸ On each of the first five days, no definite article occurs before the number of each day (e.g. “a second day”). In Hebrew grammar, authors

³¹⁹“Enuma Elish (The Creation Epic),” in *ANET*, lines 6:5–8, 68.

³²⁰ Walton, *Genesis*, 136.

³²¹ Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis, Chapters 1–17*, 139–40.

³²² Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 33–4.

³²³ Claus Westermann, *Genesis 1–11* (CC; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1994), 162–3.

³²⁴ John A. Wilson, trans., “A Hymn to Amon-Re,” in *ANET*, 4:3–4, 366.

³²⁵ Edwin Firmage, “Zoology (Fauna),” *ABD* 6:1109–67, 1120.

³²⁶ Waltke and Fredricks, *Genesis: A Commentary*, 67.

³²⁷ Gesenius, *GKC*, 426, <https://archive.org/stream/geseniushebrewgr00geseuoft#page/426/mode/2up>.

³²⁸ Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis, Chapters 1–17*, 141.

employed the word “the” (*ha*) to denote a specific person or thing.³²⁹ This likely signifies that the events of the sixth day represented the apex of the Lord’s creative acts.³³⁰

God’s character shines forth from the harmony and perfection of the heavens and the earth.³³¹ The Egyptian Theology of Memphis makes a similar statement about the god Ptah: “Thus, all the gods were formed and his [nine major deities were] completed. Indeed, all the divine order really came into being through what the heart thought and the tongue commanded... And so *Ptah was satisfied*, after he had made everything, as well as all the divine order. He had formed the gods, he had made cities...he had put the gods in their shrines.”³³²

In contrast with biblical thought, only after creating the gods “Ptah was satisfied.” This fits with the subservient view of humanity which applied to all but the king.

Read Gen 1:31. Why would the addition of people cause God to pronounce his work the very best it could be? How does this affect the way you view yourself and others?

Blessings from the Father

3) Eph 1:3–4: Ephesians, a book which dates to Paul’s last imprisonment in 62 AD,³³³ reflects the height of his theological reflection. In the first chapter of this letter, the apostle gives us a glimpse into the heart and mind of God concerning his plan of redemption. Paul also enumerated some of the many blessings we enjoy as God’s people.

During the Greco-Roman era, this type of introductory prayer occurs only in the New Testament (NT),³³⁴ yet Paul regularly employed them in his epistles.³³⁵ Here the apostle praised God in a torrential list of his blessings.³³⁶ In fact, the Greek text of Eph 1:3–14 comprises one long sentence.³³⁷ Reactions by scholars range from, “The most monstrous sentence conglomeration...that I have encountered in Greek” (Norden) to, “One is struck by the fullness of the language, its liturgical majesty, its perceptible rhythm from beginning to end” (Masson).³³⁸

Ephesians explores the wonder of our salvation with a complex summary of God’s work in Christ. Indeed, the term “in Christ” appears eleven times. Nevertheless, this passage features the entire Trinity, with vv. 3–12 focusing upon the Father and the Son and vv. 13–14 upon the Spirit. Since we endeavor to explore God’s activity in eternity past, we shall end with v. 11.³³⁹

Verses 3–4 provide the theme of the entire letter,³⁴⁰ for Paul expressed adoration for Jesus as the main figure in God’s plan for all of history.³⁴¹ He wrote, “Blessed [be] the God and

³²⁹Gesenius, *GKC*, 407, <https://archive.org/stream/geseniushebrewgr00geseuoft#page/406/mode/2up>.

³³⁰Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis, Chapters 1–17*, 141.

³³¹Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 34.

³³²John A. Wilson, trans., “Theology of Memphis,” in *ANET*, lines 57–9, 5. Italics mine.

³³³Victor P. Furnish, “Ephesians, Epistle to the.” *ABD* 2:535–42, 541.

³³⁴Andrew T. Lincoln, *Ephesians* (WBC; Dallas: Word, 1990), 11.

³³⁵Klyne Snodgrass, *Ephesians* (NIVAC; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 43.

³³⁶Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 12.

³³⁷Snodgrass, *Ephesians*, 45.

³³⁸Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 11.

³³⁹Snodgrass, *Ephesians*, 44–5.

³⁴⁰Snodgrass, *Ephesians*, 45.

³⁴¹Arnold, *Ephesians*, 78.

Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly realms in Christ, even as he chose us in him even before the foundation to the world to be holy and blameless before him.”

We can currently appropriate God’s blessing through the gift of the Holy Spirit at work in our lives (Ezek 36:25–27; Eph 5:18–21).³⁴² The NT focuses upon our present lives “in Christ,” rather than emphasizing getting into heaven.³⁴³ Those who have been united with Christ by faith are already “seated in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus” (Eph 2:6).³⁴⁴ This new existence transforms every aspect of our lives, affecting our behavior as individuals, our interactions with other people of faith, and even our relationships with those outside the church.³⁴⁵

The age to come began with the resurrection of Christ and his enthronement at the right hand of the Father (Eph 1:19–23). Yet, powers hostile to God still lurk in the heavenly places (Eph 3:8–11; Eph 6:10–12).³⁴⁶ We participate in this unseen reality.³⁴⁷

That God chooses people for himself is nothing new. He did this with Abraham and then with Israel. In both cases, he desired to bless people-groups in all the world through them (Gen 12:1–3; Deut 4:5–8; Deut 7:6–8; Isa 2:1–3; Acts 17:26–30). As those made in the Lord’s image, being chosen by God constitutes a call to reach out to and serve others.³⁴⁸

God’s character, plan, and activity make us into the people of God. Our redemption has nothing to do with any of our own qualities (Eph 2:8–10). Sending Christ for our salvation was neither an afterthought, nor a response to an unforeseen tragedy (2 Tim 1:9–10). The Lord has always purposed to draw people to himself,³⁴⁹ calling individuals to form a corporate body.³⁵⁰ Due to his nature placed within us, we are “holy” (*hagios*) and set apart, the saints of God.³⁵¹ The life we now experience in Christ fulfills the plan which he determined in eternity past (Eph 1:7–8; Rev 13:8).³⁵² While this concept of being chosen by God before birth does not occur in the Old Testament (OT), we do find it in intertestamental writings.

In this first century BC–first century AD fictional account, the patriarch Joseph meets his Egyptian wife and prays this:
 “Lord God of my father Israel, the Most High and the mighty God, who quickenedst (brought to life) all things and calledst from the darkness to the light and from error to truth and from death to life, bless thou this virgin also, and quicken her, and renew her with thy holy spirit, and let her eat the bread of thy life and drink the cup of thy blessing, and number her with *thy people whom thou chocest before all things were made*, and let her enter into thy rest which thou preparedst for thine elect, and let her live in thine eternal life forever.”³⁵³ Joseph implored the Lord to include his wife among those chosen before birth to receive salvation.

³⁴² Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 19–20.

³⁴³ Snodgrass, *Ephesians*, 46.

³⁴⁴ Bruce, *The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians*, 254.

³⁴⁵ Arnold, *Ephesians*, 79.

³⁴⁶ Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 21.

³⁴⁷ Snodgrass, *Ephesians*, 47.

³⁴⁸ Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 23.

³⁴⁹ Snodgrass, *Ephesians*, 48–9.

³⁵⁰ Arnold, *Ephesians*, 80.

³⁵¹ Danker, et al., “*ἅγιος*” (*hagios*), *BDAG*, 10–1. Note that all three translations fit this word.

³⁵² Bruce, *The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians*, 254.

³⁵³ E. W. Brooks, trans., *Joseph and Asenath: The Confession and Prayer of Asenath, Daughter of Pentephres the Priest* (London; New York: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge; MacMillan, 1918), 8.9, 33, <https://archive.org/stream/josephasenathcon00broo#page/32/mode/2up>. Italics mine.

God chose us before time—as we know it—began. Therefore, we can remain confident that our salvation depends upon his grace.³⁵⁴ Our eternal fate does not rest upon anything that we do ourselves (1 Thess 1:2–5; 1 Thess 2:13). Since this passage consists of an outburst of praise, Paul did not attempt to answer questions concerning those whom the Lord does not include among the elect.³⁵⁵

Although our salvation does not depend upon our actions, God’s people do have ethical responsibilities. We must maintain lives characterized by holiness (Rom 6:1–2; 1 Pet 1:13–16).³⁵⁶ In the OT, the Lord required that whatever had been separated for him must have no defect (Num 6:14–16). God also demanded moral purity (Ps 17:1–5, 15).³⁵⁷

When we stand before the Lord, we must be blameless before him (Col 1:21–23; 2 Cor 5:9–10).³⁵⁸ However, Jesus achieved this standing on our behalf (Eph 5:25–27; 1 Cor 1:30–31). In Ephesians alone, Paul called his readers “holy ones” nine times (Eph 1:1, 15, 18; Eph 2:19; Eph 3:8, 18; Eph 4:12; Eph 5:3; and Eph 6:18), despite their obvious sin (Eph 4:25–32).³⁵⁹

a) Read Eph 1:3–4. How do we know that Christ’s sacrifice of himself to redeem humanity was not God’s “Plan B”? On what does our salvation depend? How must we live as a result?

Adopted as Sons

b) Eph 1:5-6: Scribes copied Greek manuscripts without punctuation, and no one supplied verse numbers until the 16th century. Therefore, scholars disagree whether the words “in love” refer to what precedes them in Eph 1:4 or to what follows them in v. 5. Since Paul focused upon the Lord’s action, the phrase fits best with v. 5.³⁶⁰ This results in the translation, “In love he predestined us into adoption as sons through Jesus Christ into him, according to his good pleasure and will.” All that God has done for us results from his great love (John 3:16–18).³⁶¹

Apart from Eph 1, the verb “to predestine” (*proorizō*) occurs in the New Testament only four times (Rom 8:29–30; Acts 4:27–28; 1 Cor 2:7). It carries the sense of “decide beforehand.”³⁶² God has already determined how people will respond to the events of salvation history (Jer 24:7).³⁶³ However, there is nothing cold and calculating about God’s election. He chose us because of his great love to be adopted as sons into the family of God (Rom 8:15–17, 23),³⁶⁴ even though we were once “sons of disobedience” (Eph 2:1–3).

³⁵⁴ Arnold, *Ephesians*, 81.

³⁵⁵ Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 24.

³⁵⁶ Bruce, *The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians*, 255.

³⁵⁷ Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 24.

³⁵⁸ Bruce, *The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians*, 255.

³⁵⁹ Arnold, *Ephesians*, 81.

³⁶⁰ Snodgrass, *Ephesians*, 50.

³⁶¹ Arnold, *Ephesians*, 82.

³⁶² Arnold, *Ephesians*, 82.

³⁶³ Karl L. Schmidt, “προορίζω” (*proorizō*), *TNDT* 5:456.

³⁶⁴ Arnold, *Ephesians*, 82.

In Greco-Roman society, a wealthy man without children could choose to adopt an heir, usually an adult male.³⁶⁵ This person could also be a slave, a woman, an orphan, or an illegitimate child.³⁶⁶ Roman law released an adopted man from the oversight of his birth father and granted him all the rights of a son born into the new family.³⁶⁷ This included a new name and status.³⁶⁸ Women could also inherit wealth. However, civil laws placed greater restrictions upon them regarding how they could use their inheritance.³⁶⁹ This is likely why Paul designates Christians of both genders as “sons” (*huios*) (Gal 3:28–29).

Emperors often employed adoption to ensure a smooth succession. For example, Julius Caesar adopted Augustus, the ruler at the time of Christ’s birth. Four of the five Roman emperors in the second century AD, ascended by adoption.³⁷⁰

Adoption comprised an important theme in the Old Testament (OT). After God promised to make Abraham into a great nation (Gen 12:1–2), Abraham complained that one of his servants would become his heir (Gen 15:2–3).³⁷¹ The people of Israel also enjoyed the status of adopted sons (Deut 7:6; Rom 9:4). In addition, the Lord vowed that he would treat David’s heir as his own son (2 Sam 7:12–16).³⁷²

According to Jubilees, a second century BC Jewish apocryphal book, this would occur: “Their souls will cleave to me and to all my commandments, and they will fulfill my commandments, and I shall be their Father and they will be my children. And they will all be called children of the living God, and every angel and every spirit will know...that these are my children, and that I am their Father in uprightness and righteousness, and that I love them.”³⁷³

Thus, election is relational. The Lord is forming for himself a family of sons and daughters in whom he takes great delight (Eph 1:18). This teaching provided great hope for those in Ephesus who had formerly relied upon astrology, magic, and the worship of Artemis to determine their fate (Acts 19:17–20, 27). Even before the world began, the God who created the universe chose them for himself and planned their future (Acts 13:48–49).³⁷⁴

Paul wrote that this is, “according to his good pleasure and will.” Our redemption results from the Lord’s delight in bringing people into relationship with him.³⁷⁵ God has done this “to the praise of the glory of his grace, which he has bestowed upon us in his beloved one.” This grace consists of the Lord’s unconditional acceptance of us as his people. Due to what God has accomplished on our behalf, we respond by giving him glory.³⁷⁶ By his grace, we receive salvation (2 Cor 6:1–2).³⁷⁷

“The one being loved” is how the Greek translation of the OT translates God’s nickname

³⁶⁵ Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 25.

³⁶⁶ Frederick W. Knobloch, “Adoption,” *ABD* 1:76–9, 79.

³⁶⁷ Trevor Burke, “Pauline Adoption: A Sociological Approach,” *EvQ* 73, no. 2 (04/01/2001): 124, https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/pdf/eq/2001-2_119.pdf.

³⁶⁸ Arnold, *Ephesians*, 82.

³⁶⁹ Lynn H. Cohick, *Women in the World of the Earliest Christians* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009), 43.

³⁷⁰ Cohick, *Women in the World of the Earliest Christians*, 104.

³⁷¹ Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 25.

³⁷² Arnold, *Ephesians*, 82.

³⁷³ Robert Henry Charles, trans., “The Book of Jubilees, or The Little Genesis” (Edinburgh; London: Black, 1902), 1:24–5, 6–7, <https://archive.org/stream/bookofjubileesor00char#page/6/mode/2up>.

³⁷⁴ Arnold, *Ephesians*, 83.

³⁷⁵ Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 26.

³⁷⁶ Snodgrass, *Ephesians*, 50.

³⁷⁷ Bruce, *The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians*, 257–8.

for Israel, Jeshurun (Deut 33:26).³⁷⁸ That nation initially formed the Lord’s beloved people (Isa 44:1–5).³⁷⁹ In the NT, the Father used this term for Jesus (Matt 3:17; Matt 17:1–5). Due to Christ being God’s especially chosen beloved one, those adopted by the Lord are also his beloved ones (Rom 1:6–7).³⁸⁰

Read Eph 1:4–6. How did adoption in Greco-Roman society differ from that of our culture? Why did Paul describe all Christians, both men and women, as “adopted sons”? What are the implications of your adoption as a son into God’s family?

Redemption through Christ’s Blood

c) Eph 1:7–8: Paralleling Col 1:13–14, Paul elaborated upon our present benefits of salvation in God’s beloved one,³⁸¹ writing, “In whom *we have* redemption through his blood.”³⁸² The word he used for “redemption” (*apolutrōsis*) rarely occurs in Greco-Roman literature, except in the New Testament.³⁸³ Elsewhere in this letter, Paul described our redemption as something which shall take place in the future (Eph 1:13–14; Eph 4:30). Here he emphasized that believers currently enjoy that benefit.³⁸⁴ Once again, we encounter the “now and not yet” aspect of the Christian life.³⁸⁵

Scholars continue to debate various aspects of the five major theories of our redemption, which they call the atonement.³⁸⁶ Nevertheless, we can affirm some truths based upon Scripture. Redeeming love and divine justice converged at the cross. No analogy can fully express what Jesus has accomplished through his crucifixion and resurrection. Therefore, we can best describe the atonement with several complementary metaphors.³⁸⁷

The first of these refers to images of combat and commerce. By the power of Christ’s blood, he ransomed us from the oppression and penalty of sin (Col 2:15; Mark 10:45; 1 Pet 1:18–19). This idea of a ransom has strong roots in the Old Testament (OT) concept of paying to deliver someone from slavery, captivity, or death (Exod 6:6; Isa 43:1–4; Job 5:20).³⁸⁸

A different metaphor utilizes the concept of OT religious rituals. Here the emphasis falls upon Christ’s sacrifice as a just restitution to mitigate our violations against God’s holiness (1 John 2:2). Scripture describes Jesus as our Passover lamb (Exod 12:3–13; 1 Cor 5:7), as a burnt

³⁷⁸ Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 26–7.

³⁷⁹ Arnold, *Ephesians*, 84.

³⁸⁰ Snodgrass, *Ephesians*, 51.

³⁸¹ Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 27.

³⁸² Arnold, *Ephesians*, 85. Italics mine.

³⁸³ Friedrich Büchsel, “ἀπολύτρωσις” (*apolutrōsis*), *TDNT* 4:351–6, 352.

³⁸⁴ Büchsel, “ἀπολύτρωσις” (*apolutrōsis*), *TDNT* 4:351–6, 352.

³⁸⁵ Snodgrass, *Ephesians*, 51.

³⁸⁶ Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 714–29, 744–52.

³⁸⁷ John Jefferson Davis, *Handbook of Basic Bible Texts: Every Key Passage for the Study of Doctrine and Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984), 79–81.

³⁸⁸ Snodgrass, *Ephesians*, 51.

offering (Eph 5:2), and as both our high priest and the sacrificial victim (Heb 7:27; Heb 8:3; Heb 9:11–14; Heb 10:12). Thus, Jesus absolved our sins with his blood (Heb 9:18–28; Heb 10:22). In addition, our legal status has changed. God now declares us righteous based upon Christ’s atoning sacrifice; a term called justification (Isa 53:11–12; Rom 4:25; Rom 5:19; 2 Cor 5:21).

Penal substitution comprises another aspect of our salvation. Before Christ came, God required the annual sacrifice of a scapegoat which imperfectly atoned for the sins of the people (Lev 16:20–22; 1 John 4:9–10). In his love, mercy, and grace, the Father sent his only Son to die in our place (John 1:29; Gal 3:13). As a result, Jesus appeased the wrath which we deserved (Rom 1:18; Rom 2:5–6; 1 Thess 1:10).

Reconciliation provides an additional metaphor. Due to Christ’s atoning work, he has restored our broken fellowship with God (Rom 5:8–11; Eph 2:13; Col 1:22–23; 1 Tim 2:5). As the Holy Spirit works in our lives, we can also experience right relationships with one another (Matt 5:23–24; 1 Cor 12:13; Eph 2:14–22). Indeed, God is reconciling all creation to himself, a process which he shall complete on the day of Christ’s return (Col 1:19–22; Rom 8:16–23).

To summarize, Jesus came to earth to give himself as a ransom (Matt 20:28; 1 Cor 6:20). Consequently, he liberates those enslaved to sin (John 8:34; Rom 6:11, 17–19, 22; Col 2:13–14). Christ accomplished this by offering himself as a sacrificial substitute for us to appease God’s wrath (Isa 53:6; 1 Pet 2:24; Rom 3:24–26). Thus, he removed our guilt and defilement (Rom 5:18; Tit 2:14), enabling us to enter the presence of our holy God (Heb 10:11–25).

The Lord did all this “according to the riches of his grace which he abundantly lavished upon us.” Paul emphasized the concept of God’s wealth in this letter (Eph 1:18; Eph 2:7; Eph 3:8, 16). That he applied the term to grace implies that we enjoy God’s favor in overflowing measure (Eph 2:4–5).³⁸⁹

Years ago, my daughters and I were standing in our front yard. A group of teens came by, introduced themselves as from a local church, and asked if they could speak with us. Curious about what my eight-year-old would say, I asked them to direct their questions to her. One of them said, “If God were to ask you, ‘Why should I let you into My Heaven?’ what would you say?”³⁹⁰ She responded, “Jesus died for me.” Speechless, after about a minute, they wished us a good evening and headed next door.³⁹¹

Due to the atonement, Christ confers an inexhaustible resource upon those belonging to him.³⁹² His sacrifice can cover the transgressions of the worst sinners (Rom 5:20; 1 Tim 1:15).³⁹³

Read Eph 1:7–8. How do these metaphors explain different aspects of our redemption?

Combat –

Commerce –

OT Religious Rituals –

³⁸⁹ Bruce, *The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians*, 259–60.

³⁹⁰ “Step One. Do You Know?” Evangelism Explosion, Accessed October 3, 2014, <http://evangelismexplosion.org/resources/steps-to-life/step-1-do-you-know/>.

³⁹¹ I’m grateful for my daughter’s permission to share this anecdote.

³⁹² Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 29.

³⁹³ Arnold, *Ephesians*, 86.

Penal Substitution –

Reconciliation –

How do you experience redemption in your life?

The Summing up of All Things

d) Eph 1:8–11: The last phrase of verse 8 fits best with this section of Paul’s prayer.³⁹⁴ Placed together, it says, “In all wisdom and understanding he made known to us the mystery of his will.” Paul used two words with similar meanings to emphasize his point. Even our ability to comprehend what God has planned for us consists of God’s grace, a gift of the Holy Spirit (Isa 11:2).³⁹⁵ Nevertheless, the Lord commands us to cultivate our wisdom and understanding in order to more effectively build God’s kingdom (Col 1:9–12).³⁹⁶

The “mystery of God’s will” refers to the unfolding of the plan of salvation (1 Cor 2:6–12). This contrasts with the rites of the mystery religions, such as those of the cult of Artemis or of Isis. Those rituals promised to yield greater spiritual insight and power,³⁹⁷ resulting in the initiate sharing in the fate of the god.³⁹⁸

However, in the Old Testament (OT), a mystery consists of a formerly hidden secret of God’s activity which is now being disclosed.³⁹⁹ For example, after King Nebuchadnezzar had a dream which troubled him, he threatened to kill any of his advisors who could not tell him both the content of the dream and its interpretation. Daniel requested extra time and asked his associates to pray for him.

The biblical author noted, “Then to Daniel in a night vision, [the] mystery was revealed.” The Aramaic word translated as “mystery” occurs seven times in Dan 2:19–30, 44–47.⁴⁰⁰ For Jewish people and early Christians, the term means a once-hidden plan now revealed by God, rather than our contemporary understanding of a mystery as something unknown (Eph 3:3–6; Eph 6:19; Col 1:25–27).⁴⁰¹

Paul asserted that this was “according to his good pleasure which he planned beforehand in him (Christ) toward the administration of the fullness of the times.” In other words, not only the Father devised the arrangement for our salvation. The preexistent Son participated in determining how to overcome the obstacle which sin would thrust into the human-divine relationship. God began to unfold this plan when the messiah came (Gal 4:4–5; Mark 1:14–15).

³⁹⁴ Snodgrass, *Ephesians*, 52.

³⁹⁵ Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 29–30.

³⁹⁶ Bruce, *The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians*, 260.

³⁹⁷ Arnold, *Ephesians*, 86.

³⁹⁸ Günther Bornkamm, “μυστηριον” (*mystērion*), *TDNT* 4:802–27, 803.

³⁹⁹ H. H. D. William III, “Mystery,” in *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology (NDBT)* (ed. T. Desmond Alexander and Brian S. Rosner; Downers Grove, IL; Leicester, England: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 674–5.

⁴⁰⁰ Arthur G. Patzia, “Mystery,” in *Dictionary of the Later New Testament and Its Developments (DLNT)* (ed. Ralph P. Martin and Peter H. Davids; Downers Grove, IL; Leicester, England: InterVarsity Press, 1997), 782–4, 782–3.

⁴⁰¹ Snodgrass, *Ephesians*, 53.

However, it shall not be completely fulfilled until the final day of our redemption (Eph 4:30; 1 Tim 6:13–16).⁴⁰²

This final state shall be “the summing up of all things into Christ, things in heaven and things on the earth in him.” Paul referred to the culmination of history when the entire cosmos shall once again come together under Jesus’s rule. Then the universe shall again experience its original harmony,⁴⁰³ when all shall be the very best it can be (Gen 1:31; Eph 1:18–23; Rom 8:18–23).

And that is not all: “In him also we were chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of the one who works out everything according to the purpose of his will.” The word “chosen” (*klēroō*) appears as a verb only here in the New Testament.⁴⁰⁴ Fortunately, it occurs regularly in the Greek translation of the OT, where it refers to the division of the promised land by casting lots (Num 26:55–56).⁴⁰⁵ “Chosen” also applies to the people of Israel, such as in Deut 9:29, where the Greek translation says, “and these [are] your people and your inheritance.”⁴⁰⁶

The Essenes in Qumran employed the same term to describe themselves as God’s people, while outsiders were “the lot of Belial” (the devil) (DSS 1QS 2:2).⁴⁰⁷ Thus, Paul applied language previously reserved for the Jewish people to all those who form the new family of God, both Jew and gentile.⁴⁰⁸

Read Eph 1:8–11. What is God’s ultimate plan? Why is Paul’s inclusion of gentiles significant? How has Chapter 3 affected your understanding of the image of God?

⁴⁰² Arnold, *Ephesians*, 87–8.

⁴⁰³ Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 33.

⁴⁰⁴ Danker, et al., “κληρώω” (*klēroō*), *BDAG*, 548–9.

⁴⁰⁵ Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 35–6.

⁴⁰⁶ Danker, et al., “κληρος” (*klēros*), *BDAG*, 548.

⁴⁰⁷ Vermes, *The Dead Sea Scrolls in English, 4th Ed.*, 1 QS 2:2, 71, https://archive.org/stream/pdfy-Uy_BZ_QGsaLiJ4Zs/The%20Dead%20Sea%20Scrolls%20%5BComplete%20English%20Translation%5D#page/n129/mode/2up.

⁴⁰⁸ Arnold, *Ephesians*, 89–90.