

GENESIS—WEEK 2

IN HIS IMAGE



F. Michael Slay
A DEEP Study

The Fellowship of Ailbe

*The Cover Picture is The Creation by Michael van der Borch (~1300 – 1370)
On display at the Museum Meermanno in The Hague, Netherlands*

In creation days 4 through 6, God finishes His creation, culminating with Him creating man (male and female) in His own image.

We're pleased to provide *the DEEP* studies in PDF format at no charge. We hope you will find them helpful and encouraging as you press on in your journey toward spiritual maturity in the Lord.

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We are a spiritual fellowship patterned after the Celtic Revival. Our goal is to promote revival, renewal, and awakening, following the teaching of Scripture and the example and heritage of our forebears in the faith.

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Thank you.

Genesis 1:14–31 — In His Image
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1 Genesis 1:14–19 (ESV)

And God said, “Let there be lights in the expanse of the heavens to separate the day from the night. And let them be for signs and for seasons, and for days and years, and let them be lights in the expanse of the heavens to give light upon the earth.” And it was so. And God made the two great lights—the greater light to rule the day and the lesser light to rule the night—and the stars. And God set them in the expanse of the heavens to give light on the earth, to rule over the day and over the night, and to separate the light from the darkness. And God saw that it was good. And there was evening and there was morning, the fourth day.

The most significant thing about this passage (at least when it was written) is something we don’t even notice today—the sun and the moon aren’t gods. Back then, there were as many creation stories as there were civilizations. These creation stories were typically polytheistic dramas with lots of personality conflicts. They made for great storytelling but not much else.

Moses delivered an insulting contrast. There is no sun god or moon god or rain god. The sun, the moon, and the rain were all created by the one true God.

This was a tough sell. People look to their gods for protection. They want life to be safe and controllable. In a drought they need to be able to bring rain by sacrificing to the right god. That’s comforting; life is under control. Polytheism gives everyone a reason for why bad things happened—a reason they can manipulate.

But Moses wrote of a creator who isn’t safe—a creator who’s far less controllable than the “characters” everyone else is worshipping. The one true God embarrasses us with His power and His goodness. He cannot be comprehended, and He cannot be controlled.

That’s intimidating.

We’re not immune to the natural human tendency to believe in the God we’d like to have instead of the real one. That’s why so much of modern Christianity is that syrupy, “Smile. God loves you” bumper sticker religion.

We hear all the time that we need to accept Jesus as our savior. What happened to, “Lord”? Aren’t we supposed to swear fealty to Him as our Lord? Aren’t we also supposed to act like He is our boss? Isn’t heaven reserved for the ones who take His lordship seriously?

“Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.” — Matthew 7:21 (ESV)

We need to rid Christianity of the ways that we distort our view of Him to suit our wishes. We must stop being in denial about who He is. The church needs to take the real LORD seriously.

But the solution isn’t just trying harder; we need the Holy Spirit to intervene. We need a revival.

2 Genesis 1:20–25 (ESV)

And God said, “Let the waters swarm with swarms of living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the expanse of the heavens.” So God created the great sea creatures and every living creature that moves, with which the waters swarm, according to their kinds, and every winged bird according to its kind. And God saw that it was good. And God blessed them, saying, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the waters in the seas, and let birds multiply on the earth.” And there was evening and there was morning, the fifth day.

And God said, “Let the earth bring forth living creatures according to their kinds—livestock and creeping things and beasts of the earth according to their kinds.” And it was so. And God made the beasts of the earth according to their kinds and the livestock according to their kinds, and everything that creeps on the ground according to its kind. And God saw that it was good.

This all seems simple enough, but to the ancient mind it was a radical departure from their view of the creatures—especially the big ones. Here the creatures are neither Gods nor monsters. There’s no Neptune, and there’s no great evil creature that will become a big part of the plot. (Of course, there is the devil, but he’s not a “creature” nor is he introduced in this section.)

And God saw that it was good. And God blessed them.

When God blesses the creatures He affirms their goodness. But He also affirms their subservience to Him. They’re not a threat to God; He owns them.

This is setting up the great theme of the Bible. The creatures are fine. The problem is us.

The Bible keeps saying *that it was good*. This could mean any number of things, but one obvious candidate is that it was beautiful.

Take a moment to ponder how majestic this world is. There are whole networks devoted to displaying its wonders (Animal Planet, National Geographic). Telescopes produce images of astonishing beauty.

<http://apod.nasa.gov/apod/astropix.html>

We tend to underappreciate the great work God did in creating this universe. More specifically, we underappreciate the Earth. We take our world for granted, and thus we often don’t take great care of it.

Just think of the amazing variety of things that are buried in the ground. We built our civilization from the minerals, metals, and fuels we dig up. They are treasures. Even in the secular world, there is great appreciation for these treasures. There is compelling evidence that the Earth is unique among planets. This is known as “The Rare Earth Hypothesis.”

<https://www.astronomy.com/science/rare-earth-hypothesis-why-we-might-really-be-alone-in-the-universe/>

3 Genesis 1:26 (ESV)

Then God said, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.”

When we read that *God created man in his own image*, we learn two things:

- 1) We’re created in His image.
- 2) He made a point of telling us this. It’s something He wants us to know.

God has planted in His creation a wonderful clue about Himself. We can learn about God by looking in the mirror. This can’t mean God has ten fingers and ten toes—it’s something more important—but what?

Of all the possibilities, one stands out—creativity. We are like the creator in that we are creative. It’s the most profound and relentless difference between us and the animals. Our innate creativity is why restaurants give crayons to children.

We can learn a lot by studying our own creativity. For example, consider what happens when we write fiction. When we play the role of creator, we see the other side of the relationship between created things and their creator. While there are differences between our creations and God’s, this analogy is useful.

Because analogies are dangerous, let’s look at the differences first. Obviously, God’s creation is vastly larger and more complex than a novel or a play. Also, there is no communication between us and the characters we create. Also, incarnation is impossible in a work of fiction. You can write yourself into a novel but that’s not incarnation; if “you” in the novel suffers, there’s no real pain. Lastly, your characters cannot get promoted out of the novel into the real world. They can’t get out of their fictional universe.

But the similarities are intriguing. First, a creator doesn’t live in created time and doesn’t need to create things in chronological order. You can write the ending of a novel first. Also, a creator lives in a higher level of reality and has higher purposes.

Imagine Romeo wondering if Shakespeare is on the side of the Montagues or the Capulets.

This is a lot to chew on. We can learn from meditating on these concepts, but they’re dangerous too. We must never stop being humbled by the magnitude of all this. If some analogy gets us thinking we actually understand the things of God, we’ve lost our bearings. An analogy can move us from saying, “I can’t imagine how ...” to, “I can imagine how ...” but never to, “I know how ...”

Never stop seeking God’s guidance. Meditating on tough issues pairs well with prayer.

That can be a very productive quiet time.

4 Genesis 1:27 (ESV)

*So God created man in his own image,
in the image of God he created him;
male and female he created them.*

Here we're told, two more times, that we're created in God's image. *God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.* In Hebrew, you can emphasize things by repeating them. This image of God thing must really be important, but there's a twist.

In the next chapter, Moses describes the creation of Eve from Adam's rib. Here he just describes them being created *male and female*. Why does he write the same thing twice from two different perspectives? Is that just repetition for emphasis too?

No. We learn a lot from seeing both points of view. For example, without both descriptions some might conclude that only Adam was created in God's image. That would cause no end of problems. Sex discrimination is bad enough as it is.

These two contrasting descriptions also suggest that the chronology of events from God's point of view may not be the same as from ours. This isn't something that we're going to fully understand (this side of eternity, anyway) but CS Lewis illustrated it beautifully in *The Chronicles of Narnia*.

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Chronicles_of_Narnia

In *The Chronicles of Narnia*, the characters jump between our world and the world of Narnia, discovering that time in one world doesn't track with time in the other. The two worlds aren't synchronized chronologically.

In English, you can emphasize things by putting them in the title.

In a wondrous irony, Lewis's lesson on time has acquired a new layer. Read the above link all the way to the end and you'll see that people now debate the chronology of the books of *The Chronicles of Narnia*.

The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe was written and published first, but the sixth book (*The Magician's Nephew*) is a prequel to *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*.

Some folks say that the books should be read in the order they were published. Others say they should be read in "internally chronological" order. Some single volume collections of *The Chronicles of Narnia* have them in internally chronological order. I don't think Lewis saw that one coming.

So, God extended Lewis's lesson in a way he wouldn't have guessed. How awesome is that?

God's dominion over time is a subject you can spend a lifetime studying.

Our being created in His image is no less wondrous.

5 Genesis 1:28–31 (NIV)

God blessed them and said to them, “Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground.”

Then God said, “I give you every seed-bearing plant on the face of the whole earth and every tree that has fruit with seed in it. They will be yours for food. And to all the beasts of the earth and all the birds in the sky and all the creatures that move along the ground—everything that has the breath of life in it—I give every green plant for food.” And it was so.

God saw all that he had made, and it was very good. And there was evening, and there was morning—the sixth day.

In Monopoly, there’s a Chance card that reads, “You have been elected Chairman of the Board. Pay each player \$50.” This strikes many folks as ridiculous. Shouldn’t the Chairman of the Board get to collect from each player instead of having to pay them?

But it’s not ridiculous; it’s an object lesson. Monopoly has an educational element to it. Leadership isn’t a privilege; it’s a responsibility.

When God commands us to *rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground*, He isn’t telling us to plunder His creation. We’re commanded to nurture it.

The Bible is filled with condemnations of greed, especially greedy leadership. Jesus taught just the opposite—servant leadership.

This connects to another lesson in this passage. When God finished creating the universe, He didn’t just say, “*it was good.*” He said, “*it was very good.*”

The world God gave us is worth treasuring.

The command to care for everything isn’t as specific as the command to care for widows and orphans, but it’s all over scripture. Abraham, Jacob and Joseph are all examples of excellent managers. The prodigal son of Luke 15 is a prime counterexample.

Caring for God’s creation isn’t just a good idea; it’s commanded in today’s passage. As ambassadors of God, caring for His creation reflects well on us and on our Lord. Just as charity opens hearts to the gospel, being good stewards of the Earth builds respect. Being bad stewards kills it. People notice.

So, just as Christians are commanded to love our neighbor, we should love our neighborhood. Good stewardship of our community, including the plants and animals, matters. It seems a stretch to think that a butterfly bush or a bird feeder in our backyard could have an impact on how we share the gospel, but it all counts. Beautiful things glorify God, sometimes in ways we cannot measure.

But our fallen sinful nature tends to interfere with our role as stewards. Every gift can be exploited, and our natural inclination is to just use it rather than nurture it for everyone’s benefit.

We need to recall God’s command to be stewards of our planet and fight our natural, sinful inclination.

Questions for reflection or discussion

1. What can we do to help bring revival?

2. What about God's creation most awes you?

3. What the greatest lesson have you learned from fiction?

4. Who is you favorite fictional character? Who's your favorite bad guy?

5. There are many ways that we can care about our "neighborhood." Which ones are most important?