

Day 1 – Introduction to the Text

Genesis 1:26-31

In my study of the Doctrine of God, and in particular, God's unchangeableness, I was introduced to Process Theology, also known as panentheism. "Rather than viewing God as the infinite, unchanging sovereign Creator of the world who brought it into existence, panentheists think of God as a finite, changing, director of world affairs who works in cooperation with the world in order to achieve greater perfection in his nature" (Geisler, 576).

Among panentheist's beliefs is the view that the world is God's cosmic body and that the creatures in the world make up the cells of his body, "hence the world and God are mutually dependent. Moreover, the creatures in the universe contribute value to God's life. The inclusive aim or goal of all creatures is to enrich God's happiness and thus help him fulfill what he lacks" (577). Naturally then, when it comes to human beings, panentheists believe that "humanity as a whole is co-creator with God and of God. He not only helps decide the course of human and world events but also those of God" (ibid).

What would motivate someone to have such a warped and unbiblical view of God? Long time theologian Wayne Grudem aptly answers this question, stating, "The real appeal of process theology comes from the fact that all people have a deep longing to mean something, to feel significant in the universe" (Grudem, 166).

Obviously panentheists have not taken the time to seriously study Genesis 1:26-31, otherwise they would see the significance God has placed on mankind. There is more space dedicated to Day 6 in the creation account than to any other day of creation. Instead of the impersonal third person "Let there be..." spoken by God for bringing forth all of the other parts of creation, in regards to mankind, God says in the first person "Let Us make." Of all the creatures God creates, only mankind is made in His image and likeness. Finally, "only humanity has been given dominion in God's creation. Humankind's dominion is expressly stated to be over all other living creatures: those of the sky, sea, and land" (Sailhamer, 69).

Scripture Memory: Genesis 1:27

Day 2 – What Does the Text Say?

Read Genesis 1:14-31

1. What is the purpose of the “lights in the expanse of the heavens?”
2. How is the end of Day Four different from the end of Day Five?
3. What are the three categories of living creatures God creates at the beginning of Day Six?

Read Genesis 1:26-31

1. How does God set mankind apart from all of the other living creatures He has created?
2. How is the blessing God gives on Day Six different from the one He gave on Day Five?
3. What does God give to mankind and all the other living creatures?
4. How is the end of Day Six distinguished from all the other days?

Day 3 – What Does the Text Mean?

Read Genesis 1:26-31

Verse 26: *Let Us make...* Scholars are divided over the use of “Us.” Of the multitude of ways that the plural pronoun can be understood, there are two views which appear to be the most plausible. First, the traditional view held by the Church Fathers, and later by the Reformers, was that the plural refers to an intra-Trinity dialogue. However, those who hold to a divine plurality today recognize that the first audience would not have had the ability to understand “Us” in a Trinitarian sense. “Although the Christian Trinity cannot be derived solely from the use of the plural, a plurality within the unity of the Godhead may be derived from the passage. . . . The plural indicates an intradivine conversation, a plurality in the Godhead, between God and his Spirit” (Mathews, 163).

On the other hand, “The primary difficulty with this view is that the other four uses of the plural pronoun with reference to God (3:22; 11:7; Isa. 6:8) do not seem to refer to the Trinity. The explanation that better satisfies all such uses of the pronoun is that God is addressing the angels or heavenly court (cf. 1 Kings 22:19–22; Job 1:6; 2:1; 38:7; Ps. 29:1–3; 89:5–6; Isa. 6:8; 40:1–6; Dan. 10:12–13; Luke 2:8–14). It seems that in the four occurrences of the pronoun “us” for God, God refers to “us” when human beings are impinging on the heavenly realm and he is deciding their fate” (Waltke, 64).

...likeness... “The important addition of ‘likeness’ underscores that humanity is only a facsimile of God and hence distinct from him. Whereas the image of the deity is equated with the deity itself in the ancient Near East, the word *likeness* serves to clearly distinguish God from humans in the biblical worldview” (66).

Verse 27: *in the image of God...* “In the ancient world an image was believed in some ways to carry the essence of that which it represented. An idol image of deity, designated by the same terminology used here, was used in worship because it contained the deity’s essence. This does not suggest that the image could do what the deity did or that it looked the same as the deity (even though the idol was a physical object). Rather, the deity’s work was thought to be accomplished through the idol.

The Hebrew word *selem* (“image”) is a representative in physical form, not a representation of the physical appearance. . . . The image is a physical manifestation of divine (or royal) essence that bears the function of that which it represents; this gives the image-bearer the capacity to reflect the attributes of the one represented and act on his behalf” (Walton, 130-131).

Verse 28: “Throughout the remainder of Genesis and the Pentateuch, the divine ‘blessing’ remains a central theme. The living creatures were blessed on the fifth day (v. 22); thus the author’s view of the blessing extends beyond humankind to all God’s living creatures. In v. 28 humanity is included in God’s blessing. The blessing in these verses consists of ‘posterity’: ‘Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth.’ Thus already here the fulfillment of the blessing is tied to humankind’s ‘seed’ and the notion of ‘life’—two themes that will later dominate the narratives of Genesis” (Sailhamer, 70-71).

Verses 29-30: “In the Babylonian tradition man is created to alleviate the manual burden of the gods and provide food for their sustenance; men and women are mere slaves who survive at the whim of the deities. Biblical creation shows that God honors the human family by specifically addressing them (“you”) as he gives them charge over the terrestrial world (v. 29). Moreover, ‘every’ and ‘all’ (vv. 29–30) emphasize the availability and generosity of God’s provision. For this reason the specific dietary restriction of the ‘tree of the knowledge of good and evil,’ which is central to the garden episode (2:17), is not included in this description” (Mathews, 175).

Verse 31: “God saw His work, and *behold it was all very good*; i.e., everything perfect in its kind, so that every creature might reach the goal appointed by the Creator, and accomplish the purpose of its existence. By the application of the term “good” to everything that God made, and the repetition of the word with the emphasis “very” at the close of the whole creation, the existence of anything evil in the creation of God is absolutely denied, and the hypothesis entirely refuted, that the six days’ work merely subdued and fettered an ungodly, evil principle, which had already forced its way into it” (Keil and Delitzsch, 41-42).

In your own words, identify the main thrust of the passage

Day 4 – What Difference Does the Text Make?

Review and reflect on the information provided in Day 3

1. We live in an atheistic culture where the prevailing view is that things “just happen” with no apparent purpose. How does Genesis 1:26-31 help you to overcome that view?
2. How does it make you feel to think that you, as a human being, are more like God than any other creature in the universe?
3. How does an understanding of the image of God change the way you think and act toward people who are racially different, or elderly, or weak, or unattractive to the world?
4. Paul says in Colossians 3:10 that all believers have “put on the new self who is being renewed to a true knowledge according to the image of the One who created him.” As a believer in Jesus Christ, how do you “image” God in your life?

Day 5 – What Must I Change?

Review and reflect on your answers to the questions on Day 4

1. How will you treat other people this week, especially those who do not think or act like you do?

2. List the resources God has given you and explain how you plan to manage and use them differently in light of this study.

3. In which areas of your life are you now likely to make more progress in likeness to God?

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Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture references are taken from the New American Standard Bible, 1995 Update.

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