

Genesis 1:31

"God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good." Genesis 1:31a (ESV). This is one of my all-time favourite Bible verses. It says so little, and yet, says so much.

Today's little sermonette will just be looking at this one half of a verse. It will be brief, but I think this verse can help to shape a lot of the ways in which we think about and talk about ourselves and each other—the way we look at the world and at other people.

Obviously, this verse comes at the end of the creation narrative. God has completed his work at the end of the sixth day; he takes a moment to appreciate all that he has made and declares that it is "very good."

To start, I want to first explore some of the things notable scholars and theologians have said about this verse.

John Calvin said that

On each of the days, simple approbation was given. But now, after the workmanship of the world was complete and had received ... the last finishing touch, God pronounces it perfectly good, that we might know there is in the symmetry of God's deeds the highest perfection, to which nothing can be added.

Gordon Wenham wrote

The appreciation formula [of verses 4, 10, 12, 18, 21, and 25] is here modified ... to emphasize the perfection of the final work.

Each individual element of creation on its own was "good," but in its entirety, the finished creation is perfect.

As Wenham concludes:

The harmony and perfection of the completed heavens and earth express more adequately the character of their creator than any of the separate components can.

Finally, Tremper Longman III wrote

[Because] once God's creative work is finished the earth is described as 'very good,' [then] evil does not originate with God and his creation.

And this final comment is where I want to land with this sermon. "*Evil does not originate with God and his creation.*"

At the end of the sixth day of creation, before the fall of humanity, the world and all its inhabitants were not just "good," but *perfect*. That includes man and woman. We, as human beings, are therefore inherently good.

It may not feel that way sometimes—it may be easy to see things happening in the world; to see the horrors of warmongers, the greed of the wealthy, or the corruption of the powerful, even in our own country, and think to ourselves how cruel and evil people are.

And while it's true that humanity does have a great capacity for evil, and we are surely not blameless in our sins, we were made to be good, and it was declared by God to be true.

There's one term in modern English that always frustrates me. "Human nature." What is human nature, exactly? A quick internet search will tell you that human nature are the behaviors and characteristics that are shared by all humanity.

But most of the time, at least in my experience, when I hear someone talking about "human nature," they are usually referring to sin. 'It's only human nature to be cynical, or greedy, or selfish, or power-hungry.' Those are the kinds of things I hear of 'human nature.'

And believe me when I say that the topic of human nature is a philosophical can of worms that spans millennia. But I believe that human nature is inherently good. In fact, I dare say that human nature is what it means to be made in the image of God.

We are fallen and corrupt, yes, and every day we fight and strive to overcome our corruption. I would argue that when we do so, we are reaching back towards our original human nature, and away from a twisted and broken facsimile of our own nature.

As is made clear in Genesis 9:6, as the theologian John Walton will tell us, "The image of God is not lost at the Fall." Our corrupted existence does not change the fact that God's design for humanity, our divinely-ordained human nature, as a reflection of God himself, remains intact.

I love what Walton has to say about the image of God.

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.

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 ... was used in worship because it contained the deity's essence... The deity's work was thought to be accomplished through the idol.

In Mesopotamia a significance of the image can be seen in the practice of kings setting up images of themselves in places where they want to establish their authority.

So let this be an encouragement, to remind us all that we bear the essence of God in our very nature. We are capable of acting on God's behalf, establishing his authority on earth, and reflecting his very attributes—divine and perfect.

Let it also be a challenge, to think more critically about how we perceive the world and its inhabitants. Let us be reminded that every man, woman, and child born on earth is made with the essence of the divine creator.

No matter what sins a person may commit; no matter what kind of life they have led, we are all innately, by God's design, in his own words, "very good."

Bibliography

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