

## **Full-Bodied Faith:** *Implications from a Corporeal Creation*

### **Created and Cursed** *Genesis 1:24-31, 2:4-9, 3:1-6*

#### **Introduction:**

I know many of you watched some of the recent Olympic Games on television. There were many moments of drama, surprise and suspense. It was great to see the performances and the teamwork. We were able to witness expressions of great excitement and shattering disappointment. But for nearly every athlete who competed in any of the myriad of sports and competitions, one thing was true for each of them. They had worked tirelessly to prepare for this spectacular and this display. They had taught, trained, and perhaps even tortured their bodies in anticipation of being able to provide the best performance possible at that time. Even the less “physical” of events requires their participants to be in their best shape and focus. Those of us watching were witnesses to people who were the most powerful, the swiftest, the best reflexes, the quickest, the most focused; nearly any superlative you can use with respect to human performance that you can think of could have been applied.

We watched bodies in activities that at times seemed to be without limitations. Then we get up to prepare for bed, and we look into the mirror as we brush our teeth or wash our faces. The bodies in the mirror often remind us of the true limitations these bodies have. Many of us in our own small community here at Clearcreek Chapel have clear, frequent, if not persistent reminders of the limits, the frailties, the pains of the body. We often long for a day when our limits will be eliminated. But will all limits be removed? What will be the face of the future in eternity? Do we have promise or a hope? And what exactly is that hope? And even more pertinent, does the nature of that hope have any implications for how I should regard my limits, pains and temptations even today?

With Pastor Russ travelling, Pastor Devon and I will be delivering a short series on the nature of our human existence. Each of us is faced with pain, trial, and temptation of bodily or physical dimensions. In the face of these situations we need a Biblical framework that provides the raw materials for a Christ-centered, Christ-oriented response. That is our goal for the next two Sundays. We will not be exhaustive in the scope of our presentations (there are book-length treatments available) nor will we provide the detailed analysis that is possible. We will, however, introduce several Biblical texts and summarize some implications derived from their interpretation.

In today’s morning and evening sermons, I will lay some background material. This will prepare us to listen carefully next week as Pastor Devon brings more

practical exhortations in both the morning and evening regarding our thinking “day-to-day”. Follow with me this morning as we look succinctly at three related texts from the early chapters in the book of Genesis.

## **Purposed**

The first concept I want to stress is that our created identity involves one of *purpose*. The particular form and function of our existence was shaped to provide the most effective means to accomplish its intention. Turn in your copies of the Scriptures to the Book of Genesis. I want to focus our attention to three texts in these first three chapters. The first is Genesis 1: 24-31.

*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.*

*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.”*

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

*And God blessed them. And God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth.” And God said, “Behold, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is on the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit. You shall have them for food. And to every beast of the earth and to every bird of the heavens and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything that has the breath of life, I have given every green plant for food.” And it was so. And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.*

## **Intention (verse 26):**

One of the first observations I want us to make is in noticing the small phrase, “Let us make” that is found in verse 26. There is *intentionality* in this language. It is not an accident that humanity found its way onto the stage of history. There is an

understanding of deliberation and pause just prior to this creative act. Regardless how one wishes to understand the use of the plural (it could be a prototypical reference to intra-trinitarian communication, a plural of majesty or a reference to all present in a “heavenly” court), there is intentional, conscious determination involved in the “making” of the next item in this narrative. This introductory phrase precedes only this creative act, here at the end of the chapter, alerting the reader to something special in the following account.

### Design (verse 26):

Not only is the reader to notice this particular intentionality, but there is a uniqueness in the *design*. It is described as being “in our image, after our likeness.” We read this phrase in verse 26 as well. Image and likeness are often discussed as pointing to various qualities and attributes that somehow define the human experience. I have on other occasions suggested a more functional perspective in understanding this idea. The concept of “image” is that which represents the original in a physical form. Ancient Near Eastern kings would circulate their image establishing boundaries where their authority extending. Putting the face of a king or Caesar on coinage establishes an “authority” over that currency. Old Testament scholar John Walton puts it this way: “The image is a physical manifestation of divine (or royal) essence that bears the function of that which it represent; this give the image-bearer the capacity to reflect the attributes of the one represented and act on his behalf.” So rather than viewing “reason, conscience, self-awareness or spiritual discernment” as defining the nature of image, they are “tools provided so that we may accomplish that goal.” The nature of this creation (mankind) is uniquely suited, indeed designed to serve that goal.

### Context (verse 24):

We should not let the *context* of this event go unnoticed however. The details of this act of creation are set in relationship to the rest of the creation activities of “day six.” Back in verse 24 we read, “let the earth bring forth.” It should not surprise us to notice then relationship with the other created entities of the 6<sup>th</sup> day. Similarities in structure, function, reproduction, and community are not evidences of some evolutionary history but rather the intentioned context and setting of this event. So the analysis and application of the world around us is not somehow less honorable or useful than other, more directly “religious” pursuits. In fact, the proper consideration for all of life involves the perspective of a creational purpose.

### Purpose (verse 28a):

In fact this earth-bound, biological limit is seen in the means of which the intention is to be enacted. The idea of “be fruitful and multiply” is more than merely a charge for increasing numbers, but rather a *purposeful* challenge to

expand the divine design of imaging the creator. “Multiplying” extends the authority of the creator in a way that is tangible and contextual to the rest of the creation.

### Position (verse 28b):

Which lead us to the last point from this passage, notice the phrase, “have dominion.” There is a specific *position* given to this created being. Again, do not read this as a dominion that is somehow detached from the intention of image seen in verse 26. The dominion, or authority or rule, is extended as the means that humanity follows to accomplish its purpose.

Hopefully the manifold New Covenant connections have been seen. Time does not allow a comprehensive discussion this morning. But think of the role of Jesus, the express image of the Godhead, commissioning his followers as “his body” with the authority given to him to extend the image and kingdom in ways that are congruent with reality. Christ completes his work with a message to reconcile man to God and allow sin to be defeated in its wake.

## Provisioned

It is clear that not only was there clear purpose in the formation of humanity as the capstone of creation, but exquisite *provision* was made for its success. In the next chapter we find a more detailed account of this event with this particular issue highlighted. Now lets read in Genesis 2:4-9.

*These are the generations of the heavens and the earth when they were created, in the day that the Lord God made the earth and the heavens. When no bush of the field was yet in the land and no small plant of the field had yet sprung up—for the Lord God had not caused it to rain on the land, and there was no man to work the ground, and a mist was going up from the land and was watering the whole face of the ground— then the Lord God formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living creature. And the Lord God planted a garden in Eden, in the east, and there he put the man whom he had formed. And out of the ground the Lord God made to spring up every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food. The tree of life was in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.*

### Process (verse 7a):

The first part of verse seven gives us insight in that there was *process* in the creation of these image bearers. We read he “formed the man from the dust.” There is an element of continuity to the remainder of creation again highlighted in

this section. But also I think there is a sense of frailty and weakness present here. It is important to notice from the outset the dependence of the man upon God for his ability to accomplish his purpose, seen even in the very character of his substance.

### Animation (verse 7b):

The position the man occupies is not of a purely derivative nature though. He is directly and intentionally *animated* or given his life and awareness. This is carried in the term further in the verse where we read he “breathed into his nostrils.” Mankind, even though related to the remainder of creation, does not owe its life or its intention and function from the merely physical processes of the creation.

### Association (verse 7c):

But again, we keep circling in the presentation between a discontinuity and continuity with the totality of creation. There is still real *association* with the remaining creation. I think this is intentional to the function of these texts for us. They give insight as to the scope and grandeur of God’s work in the display of his handiwork, and yet also let us recognize the detail and intention that also finds its source in the creative energies and designs of the Creator. Allow the text to take you from large scale to detail, from connectivity to uniqueness. Humankind is no different in this regard, directly given life and yet they are regarded as being another “living creature.”

### Provision (verse 9):

As we move down to verse 9, the text has been pointing out the use of the creation as *provision* for the well-being and work of man. Because mankind’s purpose is to be the image of God in this setting, the remainder of creation allows and actually provides for this activity. In so doing though it involves more than a utilitarian focus. All that God has made for mankind could be described in this manner, that it is “pleasant to the sight and good for food.” It has both aesthetic and practical purposes. It does what it is supposed to do, that is it is good, fitting, appropriate for food, sustenance, satisfaction. And yet it has an artistic quality, it is pleasant, beautiful and even alluring to sight (and may I say the other senses as well). This will become important to our next text in chapter 3.

## **Promised**

This third point could just as easily have been titled, Punished. But I wanted to point out and highlight the continuity left in the text. To be “punished” seems to

give a sense of finality to the action. But there is more to the “curse” than merely the execution of judgment. If we see the flow of history as occurring as planned then the lessons of chapter 3 should not lead us to an “if only” type of speculation. There is a sense of *promise* contained in the fall. These events are as necessary to display the glory of God as were the happenings of chapter one. Turn to Genesis 3:1-6 and read along with me.

*Now the serpent was more crafty than any other beast of the field that the Lord God had made. He said to the woman, “Did God actually say, ‘You shall not eat of any tree in the garden?’” And the woman said to the serpent, “We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden, but God said, ‘You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it, lest you die.’” But the serpent said to the woman, “You will not surely die. For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.” So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate.*

### Awareness (verses 1,2):

There are many “take-home” messages from this portion of Scripture, but I want to highlight just a couple pertinent to our flow of logic this morning. What we should see first of all from the first two verses is the presence of *awareness*. Both the woman and the serpent acknowledge the presence of the other and are aware of their own individuality and relationship to the setting and context surrounding them. They are able to communicate in a relational way that involves a broad context and grasp of the reality they are involved in. Often the naïveté of Eve is so stressed that it is thought of as though she was duped or tricked in this situation. I would counter that the text puts both main characters fully in control of the dialog and action that takes place.

### Assessment (verse 1):

In fact there is a clear practice of *assessment* taking place in the analysis and critique of God’s intention. The words “did God actually say” involve recall, discernment and the placing of value on the activity that was unfolding. Deception and failure come to play in the story, but do not underestimate the thought process involved in the interchange.

### Weakness (verse 6):

But as we arrive to verse 6 we become painfully aware of Eve’s (and by implication Adam’s) *weakness* and failure. Yes it was an act of rebellion, a full-scale insurrection on the authority of the king for whom they were to act as image

bearers. And yet it was mediated in a very physical context. We read “when the woman saw.” She could perceive the value of this object. It was aesthetically pleasing, it had qualities that were desirable and it was after all, able to be sustenance as well. Why not? The resultant sin and shame was experienced on the plain of the creation. It occurred in the reality of the purpose and limitations of the human existence. And yet had serious implications.

### Judgment (verse 3):

For we see from verse three the “promise” was that they would surely die. *Judgment* brought to the created order was intimately associated with the failure of the image-bearers to accomplish the task and purpose for which they were designed. And yet this was necessary to display the grace and glory of the Son who would fully image the glory of the Father in his obedience and sacrifice in the same and yet more limited circumstances in human existence.

### **Reflect and Respond:**

Let us review several key points and implications from this morning that will be important to keep in memory for the full series. The first of these is that our bodily existence brings us limitations. We were created as localized and finite creatures. Our abilities although great and wondrous are still dependent restricted.

But although limited it is yet intentional and adequate to accomplish its spiritual purpose. The nature of humankind was created to do its work and to do it well.

Humankind fulfills this intention as a singular entity. We did not read this intention as having a two-fold activity. It was not stated that there are multiple aspects to man’s purpose that require fulfillment with various “parts” of his being. We were also introduced to the fact that revelation and relationship are mediated through and to this “singular entity.” Therefore the affirmation of the body or material nature of our existence does not weaken any additional emphasis on the spiritual or perhaps immaterial aspects of our existence. In doing so, we are then reminded that our bodily actions, habits, patterns will impact and affect, in essence be a part of our ability to image God in Christ.

But we only accomplish this as we stand “in Christ” who took on this same existence and demonstrated the glory of God in its fullness by living without sin, and then sacrificing Himself to remove the curse to unfold the full promise of relationship with the Father. We must embrace the power of the Gospel...

Resources:

For additional reading:

Cooper, John W. *Body, Soul and Life Everlasting: Biblical Anthropology and the Monism-Dualism Debate*. Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans, 2000.

This is an in-depth theological-philosophical analysis of Biblical texts and philosophical concerns.

Anderson, Matthew Lee, *Earthen Vessels: Why Our Bodies Matter to Our Faith*. Minneapolis: Bethany House, 2011.

A very readable discussion, begins with some of the exegetical and philosophical underpinnings but goes on to explore many implications. Quite thoughtful and thought provoking.