

Week 1 “God made them male and female: A Fresh Look at Biblical Personhood”

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Word of the year (4): By, or, “standing beside” ἐκ (ek) 'out from' of, out of; from, away from. Spatially: extension from a space to a goal outer in reference, separation; logically: the means or source of an activity, disassociation or separation

This 6-week sermon series will explore the concept of personhood as God designed it in the Bible, examining how it relates to sex and gender, race, roles and responsibilities, marriage, family, and the various pursuits and passions that shape our lives. Each week will build upon the foundation of God’s creation of humanity, focusing on specific aspects of biblical personhood in a holistic, culturally relevant way.

OUTLINE

Week 1: “Created in God's Image: Understanding Sex and Gender”

1. **Scripture:** Genesis 1:26-27, Genesis 2:18-25, Galatians 3:28
2. **Main Focus:** Explore the biblical foundations of human identity as male and female, made in the image of God.
3. **Key Themes:**
 - The meaning of being made in God’s image.
 - The distinctiveness and complementarity of male and female.
 - How biblical personhood transcends modern cultural debates about gender, while affirming both unity and diversity in God’s creation.
 - Addressing gender confusion and affirming the biblical truth of sex and gender.
 - Considering race, ethnicity, and culture.
4. **Application:** Call to honor and uphold God’s design for gender identity, rooted in His creative purposes.

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What is a person?

It seems like a simple question, but we are living in a time of confusion where what it means to be a person is not always clear.

For example, philosophers, theologians and scientists say that a person must be a rational being, capable of complex thought. We can see this work out in the fields of mathematics, physics, and philosophy. Many people are capable of very complex thinking and reasoning. But what about computers or AI systems? They are capable of performing the function of thinking through processes and computations. Many of you would be hard pressed to beat a computer in a game of chess. There are even robots who very much look and act like we do. However, you wouldn't call them a person because they lack certain other qualities that we would consider necessary for "personhood" such as a spirit, soul, or personality.

What about someone who has suffered a brain injury or who possess a disability that has impaired their thinking or processing. Are they a person even though they cannot perform complex thinking? We would certainly not say that a person laying in a hospital bed in a vegetative state is not a person because they lack certain qualities like agency, or reasoning. Or that a disabled child is not a person because they lack the skill to think and reason and perform simple tasks. But on what basis? Because they have a past, or have potential? Or because they have a body? What about God, God does not have a body? Is God a person?

What about unborn children? Unborn children have bodies very much like an adult human, but many do not consider them persons. At 5 weeks in utero the brain rapidly develops, forming the forebrain, midbrain, and hindbrain. Early brain waves can be detected. At 9 weeks all major organs, including the liver, kidneys, and intestines, are formed and continue to mature. In fact at 22-24 weeks, a baby can survive outside the womb with medical help, very much like a person on a ventilator or other life support machines. But under law, many states do not consider unborn babies "persons" and therefore they are considered expendable based on the interests of the mother. Yet for many people, it doesn't seem right to say that an unborn child is not a person.

Psychologists and sociologists claim that a "person" must possess agency, or the ability to perform tasks or functions such as working or creating art. Such performative functions demonstrate behavior which accompanies complex thought and reasoning and demonstrate personhood. But what about the great apes such as gorillas, bonobos, or chimpanzees? They share so much of our sapien DNA and also possess the ability to think and process. Apes have been known to paint, solve puzzles, and perform other cognitive functions that resemble complex thought and agency. They can learn sign language, they can procreate and nurture children in conditions that humans would struggle to live in. But we wouldn't call them "persons", though we might recognize them as higher thinking animals like ourselves.

Does personhood require a gender or a race? There was a time in American history where black people were not considered "persons". They were treated like animals and packed in ships like sardines to be transported to slave auctions. Thank God we do not have that detestable practice anymore. What about procreation? Isn't having children a sign of personhood? There is wide agreement in the biological sciences that fully functioning person must be capable of reproducing. This is problematic for many people, including those in the LGBTQ+ communities who are in a same sex relationship that cannot produce children.

Is the concept of a "person" is complex? Or have we made a simple human quality die the death of a thousand qualifications?

Over the next 6 weeks, we are going to take a close look at personhood from a biblical perspective. Using scripture and other sources such as academic, or pop-culture we are going to explore "personhood" and all its outworking such as sex, gender, race, marriage, family, parenting, work, purpose, passion, calling, etc.

My goal is to help lead an exploration of what the Bible says about human personhood.

If you have your bibles this morning, I want to invite you to turn with me to Genesis chapter 1 as we prepare to read verses 26-27

This is probably not surprising, but I take as a starting place the order of Creation described in Genesis. I am not as concerned with the aspect of time, such as how old the earth is because the text does not require that. But I do accept that macroevolution because it does not adequately satisfy the explanation of species. The fossil record does not show any evidence of gradual change from one species to another, only gigantic leaps. Or as the scientific historian Stephen C. Meyer states, *"Neo-Darwinism lacks the creative power to produce the biological novelty we see in the history of life. The mutation and selection mechanism simply does not have the ability to generate the genetic information necessary to build new forms of animal life."*

The only explanation for how there are snakes, birds, and dolphins, is intelligent design. This does not mean I have closed my mind to new information however. But it will need to be pretty darn convincing.

Now that you have found that passage of Scripture would you stand with me if you are willing to and able as we read Genesis 1:26-27.

Week 1: “Created in God’s Image: Understanding Sex and Gender”

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1. Scripture:

- **Genesis 1:26-27:** *“Then God said, ‘Let us make man in our image, after our likeness...’ So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.”*
- **Genesis 2:18-25:** *“Then the LORD God said, ‘It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him.’ Now out of the ground the LORD God had formed every beast of the field and every bird of the heavens and brought them to the man to see what he would call them. And whatever the man called every living creature, that was its name. The man gave names to all livestock and to the birds of the heavens and to every beast of the field. But for Adam there was not found a helper fit for him. So the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and while he slept took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh. And the rib that the LORD God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man. Then the man said,
“This at last is bone of my bones
and flesh of my flesh;
she shall be called Woman,
because she was taken out of Man.”
Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh. And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed.”*
- **Galatians 3:28:** *“There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.”*—this passage highlights the unity believers have in Christ, which transcends cultural divisions, including gender.

2. Main Focus:

This week aims to explore what it means to be created as human beings—male and female—in the image of God. The lesson will cover biblical views on identity, gender, race and how this understanding forms the foundation for Christian perspectives on personhood.

3. Key Themes:

1. The Image of God (Imago Dei)

Being made in the *image of God* (Genesis 1:26-27) is central to human identity. Here are some specific aspects to expand on:

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- **Reflecting God's Nature:** The image of God (*imago dei*) in humanity includes rationality, morality, creativity, relationality, and spirituality. These characteristics reflect certain aspects of God's nature. Humans, as image-bearers, are designed to represent God in the world by stewarding creation, engaging in relationships, and living in communion with God. The *imago Dei* gives each human being inherent dignity and worth.

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- **Relational Aspect:** In Genesis, the image of God is expressed in the creation of both male and female, indicating that human beings are relational creatures. Just as God exists in a relationship within the Trinity, human beings are created to exist in relationships—with God and with one another. The man and woman are complementary, reflecting God's relationality in their mutual dependence and equality.

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- The Holy Trinity by **Andrei Rubilev** 1411 or 1425–27



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- **Theological Implications:** The idea of being created in God's image has theological implications that impact all discussions of human worth, rights, and roles in society. It is this *imago Dei* that grounds the Christian view of the sanctity of life, justice, and equality. It also provides the foundation for understanding why all human beings, regardless of gender or other distinctions, possess equal value before God.

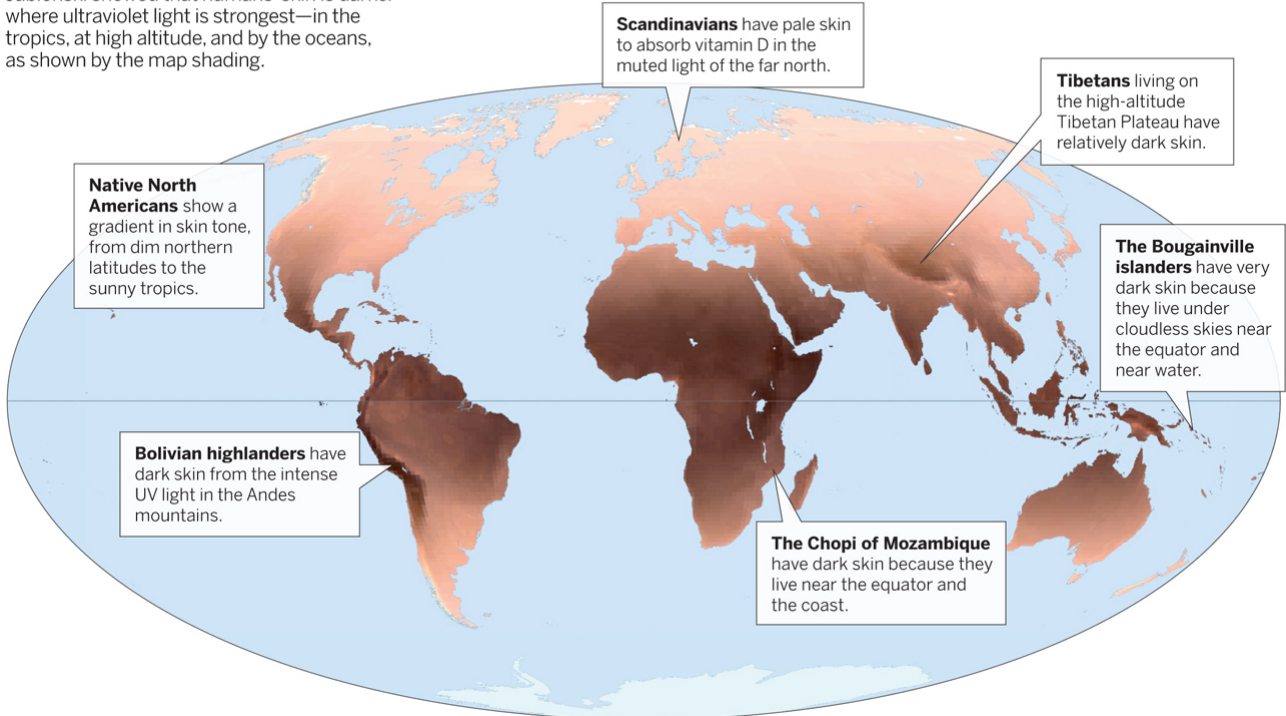
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- **Concerning Race:** From the perspective of the **imago Dei**—the belief that all humans are created in the image of God (Genesis 1:27)—the sacredness of skin color is rooted in the inherent dignity and value of every person. Skin color, like other aspects of human diversity, is part of God’s intentional design and reflects the beauty and richness of His creation. Each shade of skin carries divine significance, as it manifests God’s creativity and the unity of humanity in its diversity. In this view, all races and ethnicities embody the imago Dei equally, affirming that no skin color is superior or inferior but all are sacred expressions of God’s image in humanity.

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Sunshine and skin color

Jablonski showed that humans’ skin is darker where ultraviolet light is strongest—in the tropics, at high altitude, and by the oceans, as shown by the map shading.



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- **Concerning Race:** Skin color is deeper however. It is genetic and has helped humans adapt to a climate that is brutalized by UV exposure. But also, it is often closely linked to culture, as it frequently serves as a visible marker of a person’s ethnic background and heritage. While skin color itself is a biological trait, the cultural significance attached to it has been shaped by historical, social, and geographical factors. Different skin tones are often associated with specific cultural practices, languages, and traditions, forming part of the collective identity of a people group. These connections between skin color and culture can foster a sense of belonging and pride in one’s heritage.

2. The Distinctness of Biological Sex and Gender

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- **Biblical Understanding of Gender and Sex:** According to Genesis 1 and 2, biological sex is divinely created, with male and female representing two distinct but complementary expressions of humanity. In the biblical framework, sex is not simply a biological or cultural construct but is part of God's good design. Genesis 1:27 emphasizes that both male and female together bear God's image, showing the importance of their equality and difference.
- **Whereas race does generally work out on a spectrum, according to biologists, biological sex is almost unequivocally binary. Our biological sex is coded into our DNA.**

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- **Complementarity:** The creation narrative in Genesis 2 provides more detail on the complementarity between man and woman. Eve is created as a helper suitable for Adam (Genesis 2:18), highlighting that the distinctiveness of male and female is not about hierarchy but about partnership and unity in fulfilling God's purposes. They complement one another physically, emotionally, and spiritually.
- I will say more about this in the message on "Roles and Responsibilities"

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- **Modern Cultural Challenges:** In today's culture, gender is often seen as fluid, and the distinctness of male and female is sometimes blurred or questioned. Biblical teaching, however, maintains that while gender roles can vary culturally, the biological distinctions between male and female are rooted in God's creation. This has profound implications for how Christians understand identity, gender dysphoria, and the broader debates about gender in society. The Bible calls Christians to both uphold God's design for sex and gender and respond with compassion to those struggling with gender confusion (Psalm 139:14).
- **So, what if someones starting place is different?**

3. The Uniqueness of Humans as Male and Female

- **Human Uniqueness:** Humans are unique in all creation because they alone are made in the image of God. Unlike animals, which are created according to their kinds, humans are made to reflect God's nature and to relate to Him personally. This distinct status sets humans apart from the rest of creation, with the capacity for moral responsibility, creative expression, and meaningful relationships.

- **Male and Female Together Reflect God's Image:** The distinction between male and female is not incidental but fundamental to human identity. Both sexes together reflect the fullness of God's image. While both men and women share equal dignity and worth before God, they also bring different strengths and characteristics to their relationships and roles in creation. This uniqueness is designed to be complementary, not competitive.
- **Unity in Diversity:** Galatians 3:28 shows that in Christ, the spiritual unity of believers transcends all human distinctions, including gender. This doesn't erase the differences between men and women, but it highlights that their ultimate identity is found in Christ. Unity in Christ allows for gender distinctiveness without falling into the traps of inequality or sameness. This challenges both traditional stereotypes and modern attempts to eliminate gender distinctions.

4. Application:

Call to Honor God's Design:

- **Embrace Biblical Identity:** Christians are called to honor and affirm the distinct roles of male and female as part of God's good design. This includes respecting the value of both genders while rejecting any form of gender-based oppression or discrimination. Gender identity is rooted in creation, and we are called to live out this identity in a way that glorifies God.
- **Responding to Modern Challenges:** In a culture that increasingly promotes fluidity in gender identity, Christians can uphold the biblical truth of male and female while showing love and grace to those who struggle with gender confusion. This balance of truth and compassion requires wisdom and sensitivity.
- **Living Out God's Purpose:** As image-bearers, both men and women are called to reflect God's character in their lives—whether through leadership, servanthood, creativity, or nurturing relationships. Embracing God's design for our bodies, roles, and relationships is a key aspect of living faithfully as His people.

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Closing 1

Galatians 3:28-29, *"There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise."*

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Closing 2

Matthew Shepard was born on **December 1, 1976**, in Casper, Wyoming, to **Dennis** and **Judy Shepard**. He was the eldest of two sons, with his younger brother, **Logan**, following a few years later.

Matthew's family described him as a kind, sensitive, and empathetic young man who always had a smile for those around him. He was known for his ability to connect with people, often going out of his way to make others feel included. His parents have shared that Matthew had a strong sense of fairness and justice from a young age, and his compassion extended to a deep desire to help those who were marginalized or in need.

Matthew attended high school in Casper but also spent time abroad when his father's job took the family to **Saudi Arabia**. While there, he attended the American School in Switzerland, where he developed a love for different cultures and people. He was passionate about languages and dreamed of becoming a diplomat. After graduating, Matthew enrolled at the **University of Wyoming** in Laramie, where he studied political science, with aspirations to work in human rights and international relations.

As an openly gay man in a conservative community, Matthew faced challenges, including discrimination and bullying. Despite these difficulties, his friends and family recall him as someone who maintained a hopeful and positive outlook, committed to making the world a more accepting place. He became involved in LGBTQ+ advocacy and was vocal about the importance of tolerance and equality.

On the night of October 7th, 1998, in Laramie, Wyoming, Shepard was brutally beaten, his arms stretched out on a split rail fence, and left for dead by two men, Aaron McKinney and Russell Henderson. The attack was motivated by Shepard's sexual orientation. He was discovered 18 hours later and died from his injuries on October 12, 1998, at the age of 21.

Whatever his sexual orientation, his choices did not deserve death.

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Additional Resources

1. [Stephen C. Meyer](#)
2. [God's Word, God's World](#)
3. [Home - Matthew Shepard Foundation](#)
4. [Jackie Hill Perry](#)
5. "Talking About Race" Isaac Adams, Pastor, Iron City Church, Birmingham, Alabama.
6. Sermon Notes will be provided here:

