

Dignity & Worth

Genesis 1:26-30

8/2/26

Thank you for allowing my family and I to go to the Chautauqua Institute for two weeks, where I heard speakers like Norah O'Donnell (senior correspondent for CBS News), Chuck Todd (former host of *Meet the Press*), Paula Kerger (CEO of PBS), Neil deGrasse Tyson (astrophysicist), and many more. Then my three best-friends visited Minneapolis. Then our family took a brief trip to Cedar Point. Finally, Hope and I celebrated 20 years of marriage on Wednesday, July 29th.

20 years because we see God's image in each other. We see dignity and worth. What does it mean to be made in the image of God? Some theologians like Augustine (354AD-430AD) and Aquinas (1225AD-1274AD) argue it is consciousness, moral awareness, free-will, creativity, rationality. Others like Karl Barth (1886AD-1968AD) argue that the image of God means that we are created for loving relationships. Others emphasize that the image of God is the command that God gives, "Be fruitful and multiply"...and care for the earth.

Nicholas Wolterstorff's monumental book written in 2008, *Justice: Rights and Wrongs* argues that the image of God is simply God giving us God's own worth and dignity. Every human being has rights because rights are grounded in the worth God has given us. Rights flow from worth. Justice then is protecting everyone's worth and rights. Dignity comes from God not human ability.

Now let us hear how God solidifies humanity's worth by becoming one of us as we read the Good News in Colossians 1:15 & Ephesians 2:10.

Can something gain the image of God? I listened to an interview with Elon Musk this week in which he makes the bold prediction that by 2036 work will be voluntary because AI models and bots will be producing an economy of super abundance (more goods and services than humanity can possibly consume). He also predicts the end of needing money because what do you need money for other than buying goods and services. In just 5 years he believes AI will be infinity more intelligent than humanity combined. The intelligence gap between AI and humans will be infinity greater than between chimpanzees and humans. Can AI gain the image of God? Maybe, if we deem AI an extension of us. Christianity has the process for the answers. Next year at Chautauqua will be AI & applied Christian ethics.

Can someone lose the image of God? No, but it can be damaged. If we keep reading the book of Genesis a serpent shows up and tempts us to choose not keeping the Lord as our top priority. When we choose the knowledge of good and evil, sin enters our lives. What was in order, a proper relationship with God and with neighbor, becomes disordered. If we are honest with ourselves, most of us bring children into this disordered reality. When we look at societal problems and individuals' problems, most stem from disorder. Restoring order then becomes the goal of life and living well.

Christians bring to the world the good news that God doesn't give up on us. God enters this disorder to reestablish order but only if we choose. God doesn't force us. Love is not force. Love is an invitation. Even though sin damages our image of God, God never stops seeing our inherent worth. In fact, God becomes Jesus Christ to show how much we are worth. God becomes Jesus Christ to show us the

proper order. Jesus Christ perfectly shows what the image of God looks like. If you want to know who God is, look to Jesus. If you want to live well ordered life, look to Jesus.

Whoever you are, whatever you have done, yes, we are damaged but fixable. Anyone is fixable. The boys and I were having a devotion in Chautauqua talking about knowing the TRUTH and doing the TRUTH. Plato believed knowing the TRUTH was the hard part, so all of society should be TRUTH seeking. Aristotle, Plato's student, believed knowing the TRUTH was the easy part. It's doing the TRUTH that's the hard part. Thus, all of society should be teaching habits to practice the virtues. Christians came along and believe the TRUTH, the WAY and the LIFE who is Jesus Christ. Not only does Jesus show Truth, He is Truth. Following Jesus' Way is how Christ's Holy Spirit restores us to Christ's likeness. And this has a goal, an endgame, how we treat others reflects how we honor God and invites others to be fixed in Jesus Christ.

More than ever we humans are dividing ourselves into categories, tribes, and opposing groups. No matter how damaged or wrong we believe a person is, Jesus commands us to see the image of God. This is the reason Jesus commands to love your enemy. This is the reason Jesus commands to feed the hungry, visit the imprisoned, offer hospitality to the immigrant.

As Christians, we must first see people as God's precious children, not as labels. The best way I have found to do that is simply talk to people. We will find more things in common than differences. But when we do have differences, why? Can we celebrate and explore the differences? Can we learn how to live better by understanding the differences and then choosing to live how we believe is better?

Not only does Jesus want to save us from our disordered lives, Jesus shows us the way to order. Jesus shows us the way to live well. This is where we come in, this is how you can best honor God, how we treat others reflects how we honor God.

Once an expert in the law came to ask Jesus how to inherit eternal life. Jesus asks us, "What do you read in God's law?" You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind and your neighbor as yourself." ²⁸ And he said to him, "You have given the right answer; do this, and you will live."

"And who is my neighbor?" ³⁰ Jesus replied, "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho and fell into the hands of robbers, who stripped him, beat him, and took off, leaving him half dead. ³¹ Now by chance a priest was going down that road, and when he saw him he passed by on the other side. ³² So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. ³³ But a Samaritan while traveling came upon him, and when he saw him he was moved with compassion. ³⁴ He went to him and bandaged his wounds, treating them with oil and wine. Then he put him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. ³⁵ The next day he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said, 'Take care of him, and when I come back I will repay you whatever more you spend.' ³⁶ Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?" ³⁷ He said, "The one who showed him mercy." Jesus said to him, "Go and do likewise." -Luke 10:25-37



August 2026 Sermon Theme: "Masterpieces: Uniquely Made, United in Christ"

Theme: Every person has God's inherent dignity and worth.

Sermon Notes:

1. What does it mean to be made in the image of God?
2. In a culture that often divides people into categories, tribes, and opposing groups, Scripture begins with a remarkable truth: every person is made in God's image. Before politics, professions, accomplishments, or opinions, we share a common identity as image-bearers of God.
3. See others first as God's creation, not as labels.
4. Celebrate differences as expressions of God's creativity.
5. Practice speaking about others with dignity, especially those with whom you disagree.