

## RETHINKING THE BIBLE—WITH JACK PELHAM

### Episode 5: What It Means to be Created, Part A

Welcome to Rethinking the Bible with Jack Pelham. This is an audio podcast, where we apply Reality-Based Thinking to interpreting the Bible. Reality-Based Thinking is my name for a philosophy that seeks to make constant use of honesty, rationality, and responsibility in seeking out the reality of things. And I define reality as the state of things as they actually exist, as opposed to one's perceptions, beliefs, or wishes about them.

Let me remind you before we get started that you'll find show notes for today's podcast on our website at [rethinkingthebible.com](http://rethinkingthebible.com). Those notes will always include a listing of all the scripture excerpts used in the show, so that you can conveniently read along if you care to listen to the podcast from the website. But even if you listen to the podcast through one of the podcast aggregator sites like iTunes or Spotify or Blubrry, just know that you can always come back later to find the list of scriptures---and whatever other notes there may be---at [rethinkingthebible.com](http://rethinkingthebible.com).

Today's episode is a difficult one to write because there is so very much material to be considered. The title I chose is "What It Means to be Created", but it could just as easily have been called by any of these other titles:

- God is the Creator and you are the Creature
- Understanding the Proper Relationship Between God and Man
- Reflecting on Our Place in God's Creation, or
- What is the right view to have of ourselves in light of the fact that God created us?

The topic can be very exhausting, and I suppose that this is because, the way we are built, it's a stretch for us to do this kind of thinking. On the one hand, we have to be the sort of people who are willing to crank up the Algorithmic and Reflective minds to ponder a thing thoroughly in the first place. It's a voluntary process that requires both care and effort for the duration. So that's a problem for us---not an insurmountable problem, mind you, but it is a problem. That's why, for example, we do better to study when we are well rested, than when we are tired. And we have that problem with all manner of topics across many different fields of study, and not just in religion.

But if you're the sort to enjoy this podcast, you've probably already learned that study is a useful endeavor, even if it's not always an easy and convenient one. And interestingly, this is going to filter some people out of a discussion like this, because they lack the level of interest and care that is required to push through to the end of a matter. And that would be true if this podcast were about math or nutrition, or any other topic that requires active thinking.

But we have a second problem when it comes to examining this topic of what it means to be created, and that is that we don't see God face to face like we can see each other, or like we can consider a tree or a mountain or a doorknob. So we have to use our imaginations if we want to consider God for any extended period of time. The imagination, however, requires a higher energy burn than does mere experience. Let me explain what I mean. When Billy and Larry have a conversation, they take turns talking---and hopefully, listening attentively. Perhaps one or the other will offer some information, or perhaps a question is asked. And along the way, each one makes some decisions or draws some

conclusions, and eventually, they consider the matter to be completed—or at least, to be completed enough for now.

This is not difficult for us to follow, because we've each been in a great many conversations. Experiencing a conversation is fairly easy, but try imagining one. Take a couple of minutes and imagine a conversation between you and some other person. You have to decide how it would go. You have to make up the script for BOTH people. It's not as easy as you might guess. You can try this when you go to bed and if you're like me, you'll keep losing track of the conversation you're imagining, and you'll have to start over. It takes a lot of deliberate energy to keep it going, and to keep track of it all. Try it sometime and see if you don't have the same experience.

So, similarly, here we are wanting to ponder what happened at a creation event we did not witness, by a Creator whom we do not see face to face---and then, we're trying to get a philosophical handle on what it all should mean to us, and what our attitude about it should be. And that's a pretty tall order, as far as thinking goes. That's much different from trying to decide which kind of milk to buy or what to watch on TV. And even so, I think it's a terrific question—and one that all humans should ponder again and again as we go through life. This is a long-term topic, and not just a short-term topic. It's a life-long consideration, and not just a momentary one.

And on that note, I have to confess my trepidation about whether I am very well qualified to be discussing it here in a public forum, for I'm not done considering it myself. I suppose, however, that I have pondered it enough at least to put up a worthwhile conversation about it for your consideration. And if you think at some point that I have got it wrong, please let me know and I'll give it more consideration myself.

So let's dive in.

What does it mean to be created? That is, what does it mean for us that we were created?

Let's start at the beginning of the human story and look at a few details. We'll start in Genesis 1, which is the focus of much of my own Bible study, and has been for years. This chapter is—or should be—one of the most controversial passages in the Bible, but people tend not to think very much about it when they read it, so they often fail to grasp the implications of the details in it. And the very best questions about it all tend not to occur to them if they aren't really reflecting on it.

But here we have this account of the beginning of something or other---and we're not told about what, if anything, had happened *before* this. But we can certainly deduce a few things. For example, and most easily, we can deduce that God already existed before the curtain rises on Genesis 1. So, as far as we know, there may have been a great many fascinating events that had taken place, but that we aren't told about. And if some think that idea is outlandish, I'd like to suggest that its opposite is also outlandish. That is, the idea that God, having always existed, just sat around forever doing nothing, until one day the notion struck him to start creating the things of Genesis 1---that's a pretty crazy idea, too.

But we simply are not told. And that really tests us. Perhaps it angers us not to be told. Or perhaps it intrigues us. Perhaps it piques our curiosity, or perhaps we just shut down any wondering about it. But we are not told what happened before these Genesis 1 events began to take place. And I suspect that throughout the Bible, we are given some information here and there, but much of it is not easy, so we

have to work at it. It would certainly be much easier if a short essay had been inserted into Genesis 1 to tell us what had happened before, in clear and concise terms.

But that's not the nature of what has been passed down to our generation. And I suspect that God may well have had it written this way on purpose. I think that to mentally healthy people, this is very intriguing and that God had it done that way to bless us. But alas! This episode is not about all that---not exactly---not most directly, anyway. So we'll skip ahead to the latter part of the chapter---to the events of the sixth and final day of this creation account.

I'm going to read the entire section from verse 26 through the end of the chapter in verse 31:

<sup>26</sup> Then God said, "Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, <sup>[a]</sup> and over all the creatures that move along the ground."<sup>27</sup> So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.

<sup>28</sup> God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground."<sup>29</sup> Then God said, "I give you every seed-bearing plant on the face of the whole earth and every tree that has fruit with seed in it. They will be yours for food. <sup>30</sup> And to all the beasts of the earth and all the birds in the sky and all the creatures that move along the ground—everything that has the breath of life in it—I give every green plant for food." And it was so.<sup>31</sup> God saw all that he had made, and it was very good. And there was evening, and there was morning—the sixth day.

So, what do we see here? Earlier in the chapter, God seems to be preparing a habitat for man, and then he creates them and puts them in that habitat. And he seems to have a ready-made role for them in it. They're supposed to be starting a society of humans---that is, where it says "be fruitful and increase in it". And they're supposed to be rulers over the fish and birds and other living creatures. And again, the plants seem to have been created for them---as well as for the animals.

So it seems that the habitat God had created was custom-made for the humans. They were not an afterthought. They were not an accident. They were not a spur-of-the-moment whim. It was all planned. And that, of course, raises the question, what WAS the plan? What was it all about? What was God starting? What would be the conclusion of it? What was the purpose of it? What would be the challenges and obstacles? Was the plan vulnerable to any particular dangers or circumstances?

On and on we could go in wondering about all this. And I think we should---as people, that is, I think we should wonder about these things to see what, if any of it, can be figured out. Indeed, isn't being mindful of the reason we exist a worthy activity?

Now before we move on, let's be sure to notice the most spectacular thing in this passage. That is, that God created man in God's image. Whatever that means, surely it has to be of major importance. In fact, this is the first thing that the Bible tells us about mankind---that they were created by God, and that he had created them in his own image.

Here's a question: Do YOU think that this is the most important fact about humankind? That is, do you think that the most important things about humankind are that God created us and that he did it in his own image? Or let me turn it around: What do you think is more important about humans than is the fact that God created their species and did it according to his own image?

It may be hard to think of some other answer than that, but it hardly seems to be the case that many humans spend much time pondering just what it means to be the created beings of a Creator—or to have been created in his image. I can demonstrate this by asking this question: Since we are created by God in his image, what are the primary implications of this for our lives?

If you're like most people, you probably don't already have an answer in mind. You probably haven't thought about it enough to have an answer ready. Now, maybe you can come up with one really quickly by thinking on the fly. And maybe what you come up with will be a pretty good or a pretty bad answer. But most of us did not have an answer already in our knowledge set, or in our set of beliefs. And this probably tells something about us. This probably says something about the lack of deliberacy with which we view our own lives---and with which we live it. If you're like most people, you probably did not wake up this morning thinking, "Well, I've lived to see another day as a creature having been created in the image of God—and I wonder what will become of today in that regard."

No, if you're like a lot of us, you wake up wondering what's for breakfast, or you wake up heading for the bathroom. Yet neither breakfast nor the bathroom are details that made it into this short account of the creation of humankind. But this detail of having been created in God's image made it in there as the very first detail in a very short list of details.

But what does it mean?

A few recent Bible scholars are pretty excited about the idea that to be created in God's image is to be a representative of God. They'll even talk about that word "image" in verb form, calling people "imagers"--as in ones who go around imaging God. I find this idea both dissatisfying and unsettling, however. Let me demonstrate with one question that could use some really good answers:

**If humans are representatives of God, to whom are we supposed to be representing God?** To each other? "Hello, fellow human—it is my privilege to represent God to you today!" "Ah, and it is my privilege to represent God to you, too." I don't understand how that would work, nor what would be the need for it. If God needed a representative to humans, why not send an angel? Or why not appear to them in person? Or why not just publish more information about himself? Why is appointing humans as representatives a good idea? Are they all going to do a good job of it? And what is supposed to be the **point** of it? What purpose does it serve? Didn't God appoint prophets and judges and apostles in Bible times to communicate certain things to certain humans? Why not just use the entire body of humanity for that, if they were all, in fact, created as representatives of God?

Some would reply to all this by asserting that humankind all met a catastrophic moral fate in what they consider to be "the Fall" of Genesis 3. They would reason that man failed to live in the image of God, and were thus, not good representatives after all—and that this is why God needed to appoint certain people along the way as prophets and judges and eventually as apostles, who were also judges. It's

curious though, that if all humans were in this “fallen” state, how ANY of them could have been qualified to be prophets or judges, representing God to the rest of humankind, who themselves, were defunct representatives.

Now, these things have been debated for many centuries, and I have neither the time nor the inclination to get into it all here---nor am I qualified even to summarize the debate for you very well. But I want to show you a few more things the Bible documents say about all this, and then I’ll suggest what I think is a better idea about what it means to have been created in God’s image than the idea that it means that we’re all supposed to be representatives of God to other representatives of God.

The first passage that comes to mind is

[Ecclesiastes 7:29](#)

See, this alone I found, that God **made man** upright, but they have sought out **many** schemes.

This is Solomon’s conclusion to a passage that he introduces by talking about how much reflecting he had been doing on things. He had begun in verse 25 by saying

<sup>25</sup> I turned my heart to know and to search out and to seek wisdom and the scheme of things, and to know the wickedness of folly and the foolishness that is madness.

He’s wondering about how it all fits together---about humanity and God and wisdom and foolishness and wickedness and madness. He’s wondering about how it began and how it seems to have been progressing in general, and he comes up with this solution---which I’ll read again from Ecclesiastes 7:29

[Ecclesiastes 7:29](#)

See, this alone I found, that God **made man** upright, but they have sought out **many** schemes.

God made man upright, but man—at least, generally speaking---had something else in mind for himself. That is, that he had in mind many schemes. Now, this is the English Standard Version, and the New International Version has “inventions” here, instead of “schemes”, which may shed some more light on the idea in the Hebrew. In other words, God made man to be upright---that is, with uprightness in mind---but man had sought after making a different way for himself.

Well, this is a major, major theme in the Bible---this idea that God has a way in mind for man, and that man has his own ideas in the matter and goes off and seeks his own way. We’ll study that soon in an episode I’ll probably call “God’s Way vs. Your Way”. We see here in Solomon’s conclusion that God seems to have had one upright way in mind for man to live, but that man has since devised **many** variant schemes for how to live.

And this raises a very interesting and important question: **Who says that we have to live God’s way?** Who says that we have to be upright as God created mankind to be? Who says we owe God anything? After all---and be sure to get this---who among all the billions of humans who have ever been born has ASKED to be born? Has anyone asked for this?

And what about the **situations** into which we each are born? Sure, one human might be born healthy into a very nice family with plenty to eat---but another might be born to abusive parents, or with some disease, or into a war-torn country---or all three, even? Nobody asked for that. So who says that we

have to have some certain upright attitude and character about it all, now that we've discovered ourselves here in this real world?

Now we're really getting up against some of the fundamentals of what it means to be created beings.

If we ourselves were creators---if we could create other beings---I wonder whether we would do it, and how and why we would do it. Would we have a plan for them---as it seems God did in Genesis 1? Would we provide for them? Would we create them in our own image? Would we create them upright of character?

I would imagine that most never---or hardly ever---contemplate such things. But here we are, having been created as humans, and set into whatever are the realities of our lives. And God has a purpose in it, whether we care to seek out that purpose or not, or whether we decide just to invent our own schemes for being here---to wing it as we go.

So, are we in a free-play period, having been set loose in this world? Or is there some point to being here? Is there some reason we were created?

We have already seen that God created man upright---regardless of what man, or of what some men and women, have done in response to that. And we have seen that God created mankind in his own image---and I'm going to suggest that this image and this uprightness are likely the same thing. That is, that making man upright and making man in his own image were references to the same thing. So, let me build on this idea today.

We're going to fast-forward from the creation of mankind in Genesis 1 to the early years of the nation of Israel, which God decided to choose for his own nation among the nations. It's a fascinating story about how all that worked out and why God would pick out one nation in the first place. But it's about this time when the earliest of the scriptures we have seem to have been written down in the form in which they come to us. Many believe, for example, that Moses was the one who penned Genesis 1---and I don't know if that's true or not, but it seems at least plausible to many that he did. And if that's true, we have Moses writing about God having created mankind in his own image. And this fact is mentioned several times throughout the first five books of the Bible---which are traditionally, at least, considered to be written by Moses---or perhaps by disciples of Moses. And I don't intend to get into all that investigation here, for it will suffice for our purposes just to point out that this culture of the Israelites---this chosen nation of God---had indeed chosen---at least in their leadership--- to keep this awareness alive---that God had indeed created or made or formed mankind in his image.

So we're going to read the first part of the Song of Moses, written by Moses at the end of his life. And I want you to keep in mind this creation, and whatever it means to be in the image of God, as well as Solomon's search to understand wisdom and wickedness and folly and madness---and his conclusion that God had created man upright, but that many had sought out other paths.

So here's the beginning of the Song of Moses, and I'm reading from the NIV.

Deuteronomy 32:1 Listen, you heavens, and I will speak;  
hear, you earth, the words of my mouth.

<sup>2</sup>Let my teaching fall like rain  
and my words descend like dew,

like showers on new grass,  
like abundant rain on tender plants.  
<sup>3</sup> I will proclaim the name of the LORD.  
Oh, praise the greatness of our God!  
<sup>4</sup> He is the Rock, his works are perfect,  
and all his ways are just.  
A faithful God who does no wrong,  
upright and just is he.  
<sup>5</sup> They are corrupt and not his children;  
to their shame they are a warped and crooked generation.  
<sup>6</sup> Is this the way you repay the LORD,  
you foolish and unwise people?  
Is he not your Father, your Creator,  
who made you and formed you?

Now, I had previously asked “Who says we have to live God’s way?” and “Who says we owe God anything?” But Moses here is definitely thinking that people owe God something, for he considers the foolishness of some to be the wrong way to pay back the God and Creator who made them and formed them.

And let’s not miss the form he uses here. He starts by extolling God’s perfection, justice, and uprightness, and then he talks about how certain corrupt humans were warped and crooked, and were no children of a just God. And he asks them about their corrupt lives, “Is this the way you repay the Lord?”

So, Moses definitely saw it that people owed something back to God for having been brought to life in the first place. And like Solomon, he counted it foolishness for humans to choose to corrupt their way. The particulars of how they were turning away in Moses’ day are fascinating, and we should get into that someday, but for now, it will do just to make general note of the turning away---that is, that they had been created in God’s upright image, and had turned from that, just as Solomon had noted that so many generally seem to do.

Now, if you know the Bible much, you’ll be aware that God frequently punished the bad behavior of the Israelites in various ways. It seems that while some among them were indeed faithful to him, and seemed interested in living upright lives, many did not. In fact, this was a constant aggravation throughout the whole Bible story.

Why did some people seem just fine with the idea of living upright lives as they had been created to live, where so many of the rest had little or no interest in that? Or, as Moses might have asked it, why did so many pay back God with evil living, where the right response was to pay him back with upright living? Let’s think about that---because there’s this idea in Deuteronomy 32 that you might have noticed---and it comes up elsewhere in the Bible---it’s this idea of a warped and crooked generation---and later down in verse 20, he calls them “a perverse generation, children who are unfaithful.”

Do you see here how God is making observations about types of people, based on their behaviors? Crooked, warped, perverse, and unfaithful. And he seems to be most displeased with this. It seems that

by being so, they are breaking some sort of rule or expectation. Well, that certainly fits if God created them upright, and they had decided to be crooked instead.

And there's something especially noteworthy about the choices of people at this time to be warped and perverse. Can you think of what it was? I'll give you a few small answers and then a really big one. One small answer is that in Moses' day, the people with him had very recently seen God destroy Pharaoh's army on account of Pharaoh's wickedness toward the Israelites (who were known as Hebrews at this time). They knew this about God, but they decided to ignore it and to behave wickedly anyway, as if God would not hold it against them.

And if you go back in time, there are some very famous stories of punishment in the Bible, starting with Adam and Eve being put out of Eden after disobeying God in a matter—and with Cain being sent off into exile for murdering his brother. Yet even with these stories on the record, still others would continue to ignore the facts and to live lives of their own invention, ignoring God's upright way for them. But I told you that there was one really big example of this, and I want to look at that now, because it has a lot to say about people, and about God, too. It's the flood of Noah.

So let me set this up very briefly. While Moses came over 2,600 years after Adam and Eve, Noah came just over 1,000 years after Adam was created. (And to give this some perspective, let me remind you that Adam lived to 930 years old. So Adam and Noah just missed each other by a century or so.) And by Noah's day, things had gotten exceedingly bad on the Earth. So I'm going to read from a section early in Genesis 6. Now remember, God had created humankind somewhere in the ballpark of 1,000 years before hand, and he had created mankind to be upright. But then it got to this:

Genesis 6: <sup>5</sup>The LORD saw how great the wickedness of the human race had become on the earth, and that every inclination of the thoughts of the human heart was only evil all the time.

<sup>6</sup>The LORD regretted that he had made human beings on the earth, and his heart was deeply troubled. <sup>7</sup>So the LORD said, "I will wipe from the face of the earth the human race I have created—and with them the animals, the birds and the creatures that move along the ground—for I regret that I have made them." <sup>8</sup>But Noah found favor in the eyes of the LORD.

And as the story goes, God has Noah build a boat to save one family and the animal species, so he starts over with man and animals after destroying the rest with a flood. Let me pause right here to acknowledge that some think that the flood story was intended to be an allegorical account, and was never intended to be taken as a literal event with a literal flood killing all humans but one family. Meanwhile, others insist that it should be taken extremely literally—and among them, some argue for a global flood, while others argue that a large, regional flood would strictly satisfy the language used in the account. Well, I don't want to get tied up in those particulars in this episode, but I'll say this much: I do not object to the idea that the Bible might have some allegorical passages in it. It certainly has parables and other symbolic passages in it, and I don't think it was unlikely that God or his prophets might make use of allegory at times. But having said that, it is difficult to imagine just what might have been the point of such an allegory in the case of Noah's flood.

The problem comes with trying to decide where to draw the line between reality and allegory. For example, let's assume that man's wickedness had really become that bad. OK, then what? If God didn't really send a flood of waters, then what did he do? Were people really destroyed somehow? If so,

how? Through fire? Through arrows? Well, don't we have accounts of just such events already in other places in the Bible? So, why not say so here?

I'm afraid that the most popular motive behind wanting the flood story to be allegorical is to try to escape dealing with the particulars of it. Many skeptics do not believe it really happened, while many at least want to be of regional size only, rather than a global flood, because large-scale miracles are hard for some to believe. I believe that either a global or a regional flood could satisfy what the texts tell us--- and I'd be happy to spell that out someday so that you can see how I reached and have maintained that conclusion so far. But I must admit that I don't find the allegory idea very convincing---though I'm still open to hearing more about it if someone can fill in some of the blanks.

So if the cat's not out of the bag already, I'm quite willing to believe that miraculous things have happened in the past of Planet Earth. And it seems to me that such possibilities should be at least on the table of any serious student of the antiquities, for who knows whether things now are as they have always been, or whether prodigious things might have happened then that do not happen now? Indeed, are there not many among us who believe that one day several billion years ago, and for no reason, nothing exploded and turned into everything? If that scenario is considered plausible, then on what account can we rule out a regional or global flood?

But I digress! I love to explore such things, but that's simply outside the scope of today's episode. So, where were we?

We had God creating mankind to be upright, and mankind---or most of them, anyway---deciding to do something else instead. And by the time Noah gets here, things had gotten so bad that God had begun to regret having made mankind in the first place. And we should note for the record that the words used are "regret" and "deeply troubled"—or other versions might say "grieved". What we don't see in this passage are words like "wrath" or "anger", or "the Lord burned against mankind". No, it says he was regretful and deeply troubled. So we need to resist the temptation to interpret this story as "And then one day, God got really mad."

No, it seems that he was grieved that so many humans had decided to live such ungodly lives. And it was such a problem that God, in his supreme wisdom, thought that the best way to deal with it was to start over---to wipe them out and start over with just one family.

Now, just like in the Moses story, it's not our purpose today to look into what **else** was going on in these two events. And it was some fascinating stuff to be sure, involving angels---some of whom were also rebels against God, just as some of the humans had generally rebelled against him, and just as the Hebrews had done. But today's study is about the humans and their hearts before God. But if you like, I'll toss in one little tidbit about the creation of humans and whether or not they would like the real world into which God set their lives when they were born. This passage tells us a little more than does Genesis 1 about where humans fit into the greater order of things that God established in Genesis 1, for it mentions the angels in straightforward fashion, where Genesis 1 does not.

Psalm 8: <sup>3</sup>When I consider your heavens,  
the work of your fingers,  
the moon and the stars,  
which you have set in place,

<sup>4</sup> what is mankind that you are mindful of them,  
human beings that you care for them?<sup>[c]</sup>

<sup>5</sup> You have made them<sup>[d]</sup> a little lower than the angels<sup>[e]</sup>  
and crowned them<sup>[f]</sup> with glory and honor.

<sup>6</sup> You made them rulers over the works of your hands;  
you put everything under their<sup>[g]</sup> feet:

<sup>7</sup> all flocks and herds,  
and the animals of the wild,

<sup>8</sup> the birds in the sky,  
and the fish in the sea,  
all that swim the paths of the seas.

Here we see that God cared about mankind when he made them, and that he set them just below the angels in the order of things—and that they were just above all the animals.

Some ancient texts tell us that the Ancient Near Eastern cultures in Bible times believed that some of the angels resented having to serve or look after mankind for God—and this is where we get the basis of the idea behind Satan’s constant interloping and interfering with mankind. So when an angel is assigned to a position, and he resents it and rebels, this is a transgression against what is right. And so with humans. When they rebel against the reality into which God has set their lives, this, too, is a transgression against God. Even in the case of animals, when one kills a human, do we not to this day exterminate the animal for having transgressed the order of things? (This was also taught in the Law of Moses for when a bull would gore a human.)

And so we see a bit more about the order of things into which mankind was created. We may wish we had more details—and I certainly do—but let us not miss what we *can* learn. God had in mind a certain order of things, and mankind was expected---at least somewhat---to fit into that order, just as were also the animals and the angels.

And all that sets the stage pretty well for our discussion.

- What if some human doesn’t like things here?
- What if he or she doesn’t like God?
- What if we don’t like the way the world works---such as that staying alive takes work, or that there can be bad consequences under the rule of cause and effect?
- What if we don’t WANT to be nice to others?
- What if we want to take what is not rightfully ours?
- What if we choose to fixate over what belongs to others?
- What if they are angry and irritated over all these things?
- What if they want to throw off all authority---as if they were not lower than angels, nor even lower than God himself?
- What if they want to hurt people---to be violent?
- What if they’re eager for war and bloodshed?
- What if they learn to hate the truth, and to lie against other humans?

- What if they choose to mock and scoff against what is right and true and just---and against WHO is right and true and just?
- What if they choose to become foolish, rather than wise?
- What if someone were not content to be a fellow among humans, but had to consider himself above everyone else---having super-rights and special privileges?
- What if someone were to shun the idea of win/win dealings with others---after which everyone considers himself a winner, and will gladly come back again to interact again later----what if someone were to shun that idea, and to adopt the idea of win/lose? That is, the idea that he himself should win in all his transactions and experiences with others, even at the expense of the others always losing? If you haven't figured it out yet, I'm talking about a cheater.
- What if liars, cheaters, scoundrels, crooks, tyrants, and violent people were to reject the upright image of God, and to choose to live as they please, hurting whomever they will in this world?

Isn't this pretty much how it goes in this world? Aren't there always people of this sort who serve as a menace to society? Well, yes, there are. We always have the world's example, ever-present from childhood onward. But we weren't created in the world's image, were we?

No, God created mankind in his own upright image. Is the choice not always before us? Don't we have to choose whether to be upright or to be crooked?

Yes, such choices are always before us---and even if we chose uprightness yesterday, we have a whole new set of choices that must be made today. It is a constant test of what kind of people we are, therefore. And in this, perhaps our situation isn't completely different from that of Adam and Eve, who found themselves in the Garden with both a tree whose fruit they were supposed to avoid, and a serpent (who was Satan) who did not have their best in mind.

For many of us, the idea would come as a shock that God deliberately puts humans in trying situations. For example, about the Garden of Eden, they will argue that the language of Genesis 1, where it says "And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good."---they'll try to argue that these words must be interpreted so as to rule out any possibility of sin or error or disease or discomfort, even. But that's a very irresponsible demand to make on language that could so easily mean something so much less. What I mean is that when God looks at it all and says "It is very good", he could just as well be meaning to say, "It's all arranged exactly as I had in mind."---which is to say, "I'm pleased with this."

And if I'm right about this, it would explain how Eden could still be Eden even with a serpent in it, how Adam and Eve's family could still be a family even with a murderer in it, how Israel could still be Israel even though it had so many inauthentic people in it, and so forth. In fact, I don't know of any time when God seems to have expected to have flawless people involved in something he was doing with humans--except for Jesus, of course. Even in the First Century, Jesus' ekklesia---which is commonly called his "church", although I wish people would stop doing that---and I'll explain that someday---even Jesus' ekklesia was not expected to be without its challenges and difficulties and threats. Nor was it supposed to be without its standards, either. And this really messes a lot of people up. It was not a free-for-all, but it was also not a relentless campaign of do-or-die perfection. And we'll look at this much more generally and broadly in a later episode, but I wanted to get into part of it now as we start heading into the end of this present episode.

We've been talking about having been created---apart from our own will in the matter—and about having been created in the image of God—an image we may or may not actually like in our heart of hearts. And we've been talking about what a test it presents to us even to be here in this world---and how it shows what kind of people we are. I've made the argument briefly that to be created in God's image is to be created upright---morally righteous. And this is where I'd like to merge today's study somewhat with Episode 4, which was about the proper response to God's grace.

If you recall, we showed how the true grace of God prompted an authentic and hard-working response from authentic believers. We looked at how Paul taught that that grace had taught him to say “no” to ungodliness, and how it had prompted him to “work harder than them all”. And today, we have Moses telling the ungodly people of his time, basically, “Is that any way to thank God for what he has done for you?” So I hope you see the connection---that this is really the same discussion, being had by godly men about 13- or 14-hundred years apart in this long Bible saga.

Remember, this is the same God who kept telling them, “Give careful thought to your ways” and “Each one should examine himself.” And now we begin to see a bit more of why. God had a certain upright lifestyle in mind, and they were each to be comparing themselves to it to see if they were missing the mark or not. And each person was responsible for his own life. This was why some of them in Israel could be doing well, while others were doing lousy. It was an individual thing. And it was the same way in the First Century ekklesia---that calling out or assembly that was made up of Jesus' followers.

We'll fill in more of the details in a later episode, but for now, let me assert that the goal for humanity did not change. They were created upright in the beginning, and were expected all throughout to be upright people. And if you know much about the Bible, you'll know there were lots of pretty dark times in the middle of that Bible story, with a particularly bright spot coming along in the First Century---in the books we popularly call “The New Testament” today. In those last few decades of Bible times, some exceedingly special things came about---far more numerous than I can even mention here. And part of that special time was about the people of God finally doing better than ever before at living up to the image of God in which they had been created. And this is not just my opinion; it's backed up with evidence.

So I want to read you a few New Testament passage about this, and I want you to listen very closely to what they were being taught about living their lives in that image:

I'll start the list with a short portion of a longer passage that I'll end the list with in a couple of minutes. We start in Colossians 3:10, where we pick up reading in the middle of a longer thought in progress. The passage makes reference to how the Colossian Christians had:

[Colossians 3:10](#)

“... put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after **the image of its creator.**”

Note this idea of continual renewal, based in knowledge, and patterned after---get this: “the image of its creator.” Now, we know that the Creator is just and righteous and kind and loving and so forth. And these Christians were being renewed in that image constantly, as part of their lives. Think about what it would be like to live in a community like that. It would be awesome if you like that sort of thing, and awful if you don't like that sort of thing.

And look at what Paul says in Romans 8, where he's talking about some certain people who had been predestined for something great.

[Romans 8:29](#)

For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the **image** of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.

Whoever these people were---and we'll discuss it fully at some future date---they were predestined for what? It says, "**...to be conformed to the image of his Son**". Well, that's the same thing as the image of God, as Jesus and God were the same person---in that mysterious way that the Bible talks about.

How does that sound to **you**? Does this make you happy, or sad, this idea of being conformed to be like Jesus, who is the very image of God? For some, this would be fantastic, even if it's difficult, and for others, it would be a nightmare---depending on what kind of people they were.

And then Paul tells the Corinthians this:

[2 Corinthians 3:18](#)

And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are **being transformed into the same image** from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.

See how they "all" were being transformed? And do you see how they all were being transformed into the "same image"? And do you see how they all were getting better and better at it? And do you see how this was described as moving from one degree of glory to another? This was not from one degree of mediocrity to another, but from one degree of glory to another. And they "all" were expected, it seems, to be part of this.

And then there's Paul's statement to the Ephesians, in the middle of his grace discussion in Chapter 2. We looked at this in Episode 4 and here it is again:

Ephesians 4: <sup>10</sup>For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

Do you remember how Solomon had said that God created man upright? Well, here Paul is attesting that they were also created "to do good works", which were prepared in advance. And again, Paul doesn't list any exceptions among them. This was for all the Christians, and not just for some special class among them.

And that brings me back to the first of these passages about being conformed to God's image. And I want to read to you a longer section from Colossians 3, so that we can really let it soak in what the institutional culture of that First-Century ekklesia was like. Let us notice what their paradigms were, and their standards for their thinking and their attitudes and their values:

Colossians 3:1 If then you have been raised with Christ, **seek the things that are above**, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. <sup>2</sup>**Set your minds on things that are above**, not on things that are on earth. <sup>3</sup>For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. <sup>4</sup>When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory. <sup>5</sup>Put to death therefore what is **earthly** in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and

covetousness, which is idolatry. <sup>6</sup> On account of these the wrath of God is coming. <sup>7</sup> In these you too once walked, when you were living in them. <sup>8</sup> But now you must put them all away: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and obscene talk from your mouth. <sup>9</sup> Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old self with its practices <sup>10</sup> and have put on **the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator.** <sup>11</sup> Here there is not Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free; but Christ is all, and in all. <sup>12</sup> Put on then, as **God's chosen ones**, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, <sup>13</sup> bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. <sup>14</sup> And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. <sup>15</sup> And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in **one body.** And be thankful. <sup>16</sup> Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God. <sup>17</sup> And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

This passage is so packed that there's no way we could work our way completely through it in this one episode, so I want to pull out this one main directive: "Set your minds on things above". If you're familiar with the rest of the First Century writings, you'll know that he's talking about qualities of godliness and about having eternal life with God, and the like. And he's telling them to set their minds there—to set their focus there. And what did they have to give up to do that? Well, they had to give up what he called the "earthly" things, such as **sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry.** This is not Paul's complete list of sins, and it's not his longest list, either. But it's a fairly representative sampling of the basic sins for which this world has long been known.

Do you see how it's like they're back in Eden, having to choose between doing what God said or doing what the serpent said? And between doing without a thing that looked somewhat desirable, and doing without obedience to God? In other words, they were supposed to be like God, even though they didn't see God. They didn't live with him, nor see him face to face, yet they were supposed to live so as to honor him—to live in the same character and virtue he himself demonstrated by his own actions. He was in another world from the one they were in, yet he had made it clear to them that they were to live in his image anyway. And if they did that—and **only** if they did that—they were considered "faithful", and they were considered his "children". (For both of these points, look back to the Deuteronomy 32 passage we covered earlier.)

The struggle of God's people has been the same from the beginning forward. And any person today who wants to do what is right in God's eyes has the same challenge. The way Jesus put it in his day, there was a wide road and a narrow road, and the narrow one was for the faithful children, where the wide one led to destruction. But this should neither surprise nor shock us—though many act shocked by it. For we know that God one time destroyed a world full of wicked people in Noah's flood. Should we now suddenly declare that the wicked are no longer doomed to destruction? Or that God is somehow unjust for destroying them?

So many in the churches today—not all, mind you, but very many—try to pretend a world in which wicked people become Christians and stay wicked and get to have eternal life in the end. But I see no such system as that in the Bible. Why should God feel any different about wicked people as he did back in Noah's day, of which it said:

Genesis 6:6 And the Lord regretted that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him to his heart. 7 So the Lord said, “**I will blot out man** whom I have created from the face of the land, man and animals and creeping things and birds of the heavens, for I am sorry that I have made them.”

Why wouldn't God give a crooked person today some time to repent, and then after that, blot him out from the face of the land if he doesn't choose godliness? Indeed, why would he take that person into eternal life in the Heavenly Jerusalem, that Holy City?

Surely there is grace and forgiveness for the crooked and perverse, but only if they repent of their sins---changing their mind and becoming conformed to the very image of God and Jesus. And they **can** repent of their sins. Anybody can.

And this is the choice that is set before us. This is what it's like to be a created being, having been created by the Creator, God. It's his world, and they are his rules. And what's very interesting about it is that a lot of people throughout the eons have become convinced that this is indeed a good thing---to go along with God and to learn his precepts---to learn to think and to judge things as he does. To learn to see things his way. Paul is a fantastic example of this, as he was not doing very well with God in his earlier years—even to the point of murdering authentic disciples of Jesus. But look what he did when he finally came clean about it all!

We're going to continue with Part B of this same lesson next week, and it may even get into a third week before it's all said and done. And when we come back next time, I want to circle back to that idea that's currently circulating among some that to be created in God's image means that we have been appointed as God's “representatives”, and I'll tell you some more about where I think that idea is lacking.

So that's it for this week. Please do share this podcast with your friends and families. We're working hard to get listed on all the main podcast outlets, and you'll already find us at iTunes, Spotify, and Blubrry. So please subscribe today if you're on one of those services. And if you're on another, please know that we plan to get signed up on the top twenty or so podcast sites and apps. Also, please take a minute to drop us a line and let us know your thoughts about the podcast. That helps us a lot to know!