

## RETHINKING THE BIBLE—WITH JACK PELHAM

### Episode 6: What It Means to Be Created, Part b

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.

#### ANNOUNCEMENTS

Before we get into Part B of our discussion of what it means to be created, I want to touch on a few subjects about the podcast.

First of all, as much as I wish I could publish weekly, that's just not going to be possible at this time. As it turns out, each episode can take somewhere between 10 and 16 hours to produce, and I just don't have the time to do this regularly. In case you don't know, I write out each episode word by word, and then my wife, Kay, and I go through an editing process. Then it's time to record it all, which involves me reading it line for line. And after that, I edit out all the stuff you never hear---the coughing and swallowing, and the particularly-loud breath taking when that happens, and the times the words come out garbled---and you might just be surprised to know how often that happens. Then there's the process of uploading the audio to the podcast server, and creating a new post on the website for the new episode, and loading in all the scriptures used, and the other show notes, if there are any.

I've wondered about saving time by just turning on the microphone and talking extemporaneously, but then the quality of the content would go way down! Indeed, it's the examination of the scriptures and the process of writing and testing each line in a reflective setting that hopefully saves YOU the time it takes to sort through the fluff that is so often published elsewhere. So, the lengthy process has to stay. And between my day job, which pays the bills, my nonprofit school, and this podcast, there's just not enough time in the week to get it all done. Perhaps we'll look into some sort of Patreon solution as we continue to grow in our listenership---and who knows? Maybe someday this podcast will have enough following that a mass of donors pitching in could help displace that day job requirement.

And that's a sweet idea. But I'm not holding my breath on that one!

Meanwhile, I'll keep plugging away with a goal of about one podcast per month. And believe me, that's torturous on my end, because there are so many episodes I'm so eager to write. But patience is still a virtue, so I'll still aspire to being patient about it all.

Also, I wanted to elicit some feedback about the intro and outro music on this podcast. We haven't had any feedback about that yet, so if you wouldn't mind, please let us know what you think about it.

And one more thing before we get to Part B. One of my friends said he likes all the "hooks" that I've been throwing in, about things I ought to talk about in future episodes, or things I promise to tell more about soon. And he says to me, "I hope you keep those promises and talk about these things." Well, the promises were made in good faith, of course, but I do take it to heart what he said, because I can see how it would be very easy to put off that kind of task until it's far too late to keep up good faith with the promises I've made. So, I'm looking at doing periodic episodes where I explain these things---trying

not to get too far behind in the promise keeping. So, thanks for that feedback, Murdoch, and please know I'm taking it to heart.

I also want to start creating the occasional episode that addresses hermeneutics somewhat. In case you don't know the word, hermeneutics refers to a certain set of standards and best practices for how we ought to interpret the scriptures. And this is a huge topic, of course---and even if some of the best practices aren't debated all that much, there's certainly the problem of PRACTICE. That is, we may KNOW some of the best rules, but we aren't always good at following them in our own Bible work. So, I want to start putting in even short segments about that along the way.

And if you were wondering what I meant when I said it was torturous to publish only once a month---this is part of it. That is, that it's such a methodical plodding along as the months go by, to have so many exciting ideas for episodes, and yet to have to go so slowly in bring them into being. But I'm very thankful to have finally established a podcast at all. So, with that, let's hop back on the slow train and get to today's episode:

### **Episode 6: What It Means to Be Created, Part B**

In Part A, we discussed several things, including the fact that God created mankind, and that he made us in his own "image"---and we discussed how not everyone agrees about what that "image" idea means. And speaking of promise keeping, I told you that I'd tell you more this time about why I think that the folks who say that being created in God's image means that humans were supposed to be God's "representatives" in this world. So, let's pick it up right there---and you can consider this the first promise-keeping episode if you like!

If you recall, the idea is that we are all---or are all *supposed* to be---God's "imagers", or representatives. And my immediate question to that idea is "How's that supposed to work?" That is, how's it supposed to work if a planet full of humans are supposed to represent God? To whom are they supposed to represent him? To each other?

Now, I recognize that such a hypothesis might also include two other possibilities---those being that we are supposed to represent God to the animals, or that we're supposed to represent him to the angels---for man was created "a little lower than the angels" and above the animals. And other than the plants---that seems to have been all the life that was ever on Planet Earth, as far as we are told. But again, if either of these were the case---that is, the animals or the angels--- I find it quite instructive that I've never run across a Bible passage with any manner of explanation as to how this assumed "representative" role is supposed to work. Is there even a paragraph about how we are to represent God to the animals or the angels? Is this something we're supposed to speak to them about? So, are we supposed to talk to them with some message from God? If so, then what's the message and where is it written? And if not that, then what? Is it merely by our example in living that we represent God to the animals and/or the angels? Well, if that's the case, do we have even a single one-liner from scripture that suggests as much?

I don't mean to make fun of the idea, so I hope my tone is not sarcastic or condescending.

So, if we're supposed to be representatives of God on the Earth, I'd sure like to see some evidence for that before I start believing it. But I can, on the other hand, show you lots of evidence in the Bible about how we are supposed to conduct ourselves as humans. Just by way of example, these two passages

come to mind, so let me put them in the record here just to show that I'm not making this up. Here's a one-liner from 2 Peter 3:11b, where Peter instructed the believers in his own day:

... what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives...

And then this one from Micah is probably more famous yet:

Micah 6:8 He has shown you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you?  
To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.

Passages like these are fairly famous and come to mind readily—even if not every believer is highly concerned with taking them to heart.

So there are two examples, and I'm sure we could find others, but I think this suffices to make my point--that you can find instructions in the Bible about what kind of person you ought to be, but not about how to be a good representative to animals or to angels. And I submit that this should inform our examination of the hypotheses that man was supposed to be God's representative to angels or to animals.

So that brings us back to the question of whether we were supposed to be God's representatives to other representatives of God---that is, to other humans, who were also created to be his representatives. In my view, this idea is difficult to defend. Imagine a society in which everyone was a doctor or a house painter, or more to the point, where everyone was a sales representative for Kirby Vacuum Cleaners---or were a representative in the US House of Representatives.

Again, it just doesn't make much sense to me.

So, let's let that point sit while I examine one more idea about it. And that is this:

Some things that the Bible says really put us to the test in various ways. For example, when the Bible tells us that we have a Creator—even though we don't *see* the Creator---well, that puts us to the test. That is, it shows what kind of people we are. The rash skeptic might respond sarcastically like this: "**Sure**, we have an invisible Creator—and he probably lives in the North Pole with Santa Claus." Meanwhile, the more rationally-minded person might say, "Well, it's certainly inconvenient for us that God is invisible to us, but this does not logically rule out his existence, and there's no logical cause in it to decide he does **not** exist. Indeed, it was only recently that mankind saw images of the backside of the moon, yet it was reasonable all along to believe it to exist, even if we couldn't see it."

And to give an example on the far opposite end of the spectrum---that is, this spectrum with the rash skeptic on one end, and the rational person in the middle---we find on the far end, perhaps, someone like the irrational believer in Jesus, who might say something like, "Oh, you can't tell me that God is invisible, for I see him every day. In fact, I saw him as he and I had breakfast together this very morning! God was in the grain of the wood of my table---and he was in the rays of sunlight streaming through my curtains---and he was in the very sounds of the breath coming out of my nose."

Do you see how these three varied examples of people are all put to the test somehow by the mere assertion that an invisible God does indeed exist? When you throw out an idea like that in front of people, you're going to learn something about what kind of people they are. You just have to see how they respond to the idea.

So, let's talk about a case in point. Let's throw out another assertion to people and see how they respond to it. I want to talk about the assertion that humankind was created in God's image. And I want us to focus on how different types of people might respond to that idea. So, to help us in that exercise, I've made up a short story about two guys, Billy and Larry, each of whom got promoted into management on the same day in two different companies in the same town.

Both men, upon being informed that they were being promoted, were happy about the pay raise that they knew would accompany the promotion. But beyond that, their attitudes were considerably different. Let me tell you about what each of them was thinking.

Billy thought to himself: "Well, it's about time! Finally, my abilities have been seen for what they are, and I can finally start to get the respect I deserve around here! I will be the face of the company to all my employees. When they think of Tri-State Pipe and Supply, they'll think of me. I'll be the one around here who is to be heeded, and what I say goes. Yep, there's a new sheriff in town!

Meanwhile, Larry was promoted to be the General Manager at Piper Pianos. Larry thought, "This is really great! Now I'll have the clout to make things run more smoothly for most of the employees here--and to make our delivery process smoother and faster for the customers---oh, and I'll be able to allocate the man hours to see that the warehouse stays clean, so that employees and customers alike can enjoy a cleaner and safer environment in there."

Both men got similar promotions, but they think quite differently about it. Billy is thinking about what he thinks is best for him, and Larry is thinking about what he thinks is best for other employees, for the company, and for the customers. Both are excited to be managers, but they have considerably different points of view about what that means.

Now, before they got promoted, we might not have known this about them---this difference in what kind of people they are. But the circumstances of the promotion presented a test of their characters, and their responses reveal what kind of people they are. The one is much more focused on himself and on other people's view of him---and the other is more focused on helping and taking care of people.

And I think it's like this when we consider what it means to be created in God's image. A guy like Billy might start to get excited about being God's "representative"—for that's the way **he** sees it, while a guy like Larry would get more excited about being someone who is morally upright like God---because that's what's important to a guy like Larry.

And let me remind you here of a passage we looked at last time, where Solomon said this about humans:

[Ecclesiastes 7:29](#)

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

Larry's the sort to see this passage and say, "Hmmm, I'm supposed to be upright as a person because that's how God wants it". And Billy's the sort to see it and say, "Yeah, people are always screwing stuff up, and that just goes to show you that they need strong leadership---and they need strong representatives of God, like me, to help guide them in the right way."

Larry sees himself primarily as a creature of the Creator, and wants to please the Creator with how he lives his creature life. But Billy sees himself primarily as a great person, and is deeply concerned with being seen by other humans as a great person.

And we could see these differences come out if we knew these two people and got to see them go through it all. Imagine, for instance, if Billy and Larry were each offered elderships at their various churches. Each one---assuming they accepted the position of elder---would handle it from a very different philosophical starting place than the other. It's a huge test of what kind of people they are---and if you know how to observe people, you'll learn a lot about them. And of course, if we want to, we can give careful thought to our **own** ways, too. And, of course, I'm referring back to where we started in Episode 1, with

Haggai 1:5 Now this is what the Lord Almighty says: "*Give careful thought to your ways.*"

Larry is the sort to be quite apt to give careful thought to his ways, but Billy is more the sort to give careful thought to his **position among humans**. The type of person each one of them is is revealed after being tested with whatever event we're talking about---whether it's a promotion to management, or to leadership in a church---or simply being informed that they were created in God's image. The one wants this "image" business to be some sort of promotion---or perhaps a trophy or a badge or a medal or an appointment or some manner of commission---while the other is quite content to have it mean that God made him to be upright in character like God himself is upright in character.

Larry is interested in learning to be like God and Jesus as much as he can, and Billy is interested in having as many people as possible look up to Billy as a leader.

So, let me make a case for this idea of being created in God's image and likeness being much more about being like God, than about being a representative of God to others. Let me remind you briefly of the language we examined in

Genesis 1:26a Then God said, "Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness,..."

He says "in our image, in our likeness". This double statement that includes both "image" and "likeness" is worth some pondering. We could ask ourselves what the author is getting at here. And in our American sensibilities regarding writing, we might well expect that the author is telling us two distinct things by using these two distinct words---*image* and *likeness*. So, we might run off to study the language in search of something really concrete that we can learn about just how man was created---not only in God's image, but **also** in his likeness. But I have come to believe that this sort of conclusion is unwarranted in this case. The author of this passage simply didn't come from our culture. Rather, he came from the Ancient Near Eastern Culture---and from even a smaller subset of that culture---the Hebrew culture. And the Hebrews had a literary device we call parallelism, whereby they emphasized a matter by repeating the same thing in two different ways. Where we sometimes use a rhyming of sounds, as in many of our poems, they would use a rhyming of **ideas**. And they did this for emphasis and/or for making the point more certain.

That's what I think is happening here---and you could examine both the Hebrew words here---the one for "image" and the one for "likeness"---and study them all throughout those books that were penned in Hebrew---and I don't think you'd find enough information to make a case that they were definitely talking about two different things here in this passage.

So, let me get into an example here---one that you may have wondered about yourself---and I suppose that this gets at least a little bit into talking about hermeneutics---remember, that's the standards and best practices for how to interpret the scriptures. The example I have in mind is in

[Deuteronomy 6:5](#)

You shall **love** the **Lord** your God with all your **heart** and with all your **soul** and with all your **might**.

This is written down by the Hebrew named Moses, many believe. And Jesus himself---who was also a Hebrew---discussed this passage often, it seems. We find it in Mark's gospel, for example, where it says:

[Mark 12:30](#)

And you shall love the Lord your God with all your **heart** and with all your **soul** and with all your **mind** and with all your **strength**.'

These verses really excites the investigator in me. I remember a couple of years back thinking, "Ooh, look at all these terms to go study! I've got "heart" and "mind" and "soul" and "strength". And I was thinking like an American---thinking that Jesus was really laying out some great information here to be studied and examined, and maybe "decoded" isn't quite the right word---but I had the idea that I was very likely to learn something very valuable if I would invest the time to dig into it.

Well, I did learn something very valuable---even though it was a frustrating study and the conclusion wasn't as exciting as I had expected. I'd look in the Bible dictionaries under the word for "heart", for example, and they would use other words to define it, as if by its synonyms. That is, I'd look up "heart" and the entry would say "mind" or "soul". So, I'd look up "soul" and the entries would say "heart" or "mind". And I'd look up "mind", and guess what they'd say? You guessed it; they'd say "heart" or "soul".

Now, to be fair, that's not ALL they said. There were some other details. But I did not find enough data from which to be able to construct a model in which these words carried distinct meaning in the original languages---that is, in Hebrew and in Greek---such that I could tell you what were the differences and why Jesus would use these particular words---or as to why Moses---if that's who wrote Deuteronomy---would have used them.

So, my conclusion seemed necessary---even if a bit anticlimactic---that this was a case of Hebrew Parallelism---or of something quite similar, that might have a more distinctive technical name than parallelism. And this was one of those great moments for a note to self: "Jesus and Moses did not always communicate in the same style that I normally use---so I should be careful not to assume that the way a passage might most naturally make sense to me is the way they intended it to make sense."

So there's your hermeneutical moment---and that particular point, that "Jesus and Moses did not always communicate in the same style that I normally use," will indeed come up again and again in these podcasts, for there are many occasions where I have discovered that passages I had always assumed that I understood---because they made sense to me when interpreted as if they were written in the same way that Jack writes---were not stated by the authors in the same style of speaking or

writing that Jack typically uses. So, I'll just toss out that theme, and we'll keep track of it from here on out.

So, where were we?

I was discussing how the heart, mind, soul, and strength passage turned out to be some sort of parallelism, where Jesus was using a redundancy of terms to emphasize a point about how they were to be wholly devoted to God, and not just partially devoted to him. And that brings me back to the Genesis 1 idea of humans having been created in God's *image* and *likeness*.

I'm now of the opinion that this, too, is parallelism, and that the two words are referring to the same thing. So, we're not being told two things about the creation of man in this passage, but we're being told one thing twice. And this was a very common device for Hebrew writers---so we should get used to it when we study and interpret their writings.

And that brings me to yet a second point regarding hermeneutics, for we have to tackle the question of whether this word for "image" was intended **literally**---as in a picture, or perhaps a carving designed to mimic the looks of something else---or whether it was intended **figuratively**---such as in the case that God meant man to be like God in character---rather than to literally be in the physical likeness of God.

And I don't think it means that we were literally created in the physical likeness of God---as in that we all look like God looks. I find that highly unlikely, even though these words certainly **could** mean something like that---all things being equal.

We've been reading in Genesis 1 about man's creation, but Genesis mentions it again in passing, a mere four chapters later. Let's look there, and I'll show you something else that's relevant to our discussion. The author reminds the reader that mankind had been created in the likeness of God.

Genesis 5:1 This is the written account of Adam's family line.  
When God created mankind, he made them in the **likeness** of God.

That word for "likeness" there---in the Hebrew it's the same word used for "likeness" in Genesis 1:26, which we read earlier. But here, the author goes on to tell us something very intriguing just two verses further. In verse 3, he says:

Genesis 5:3 When Adam had lived 130 years, he had a son in his own **likeness**, in his own **image**; and he named him Seth.

These words for "likeness" and "image" are the same Hebrew words used in Chapter 1. So here, we see them being applied to Adam's son, just as they had previously been used in telling us about the creation of Adam himself. But there's a difference: Adam had been **created** in **God's** image and likeness, but Seth had been **born**, in **Adam's** own image and likeness.

Hmmm.

There's something to ponder for a while.

The author uses the likeness word just 2 verses prior, mentioning Adam's creation in passing, and then two verses later, he's using it to tell of a human son born to a human father---and for good measure, he

throws in the “image” word, too---scoring a point for Hebrew Parallelism! And certainly reminding us of Genesis Chapter 1.

But what are we to make of this?

Perhaps we could assume that the writer was relying on his audience to know that the first “likeness and image” were figurative, but that the use of those terms in reference to Seth were literal. No, he doesn’t say that, but perhaps he thought that the well-informed Ancient Near-Eastern person---or at least the subset of those who were well-taught Hebrews, would understand this. And we can explore that idea.

Or perhaps he’s implying to the reader that just like Seth actually looked like Adam in his appearance, Adam actually looked like God in his appearance. That’s a possibility, I suppose---though I’m not a fan of that hypothesis. (And that’s because man seems to have been made to live on this planet, while God himself doesn’t seem to “live” here in the most normal sense of that word. So, it’s hard to see why there would be any expectation that God would make humans to look like God in regard to their literal physical appearance.

But there are two possibilities, anyway---that the author’s telling his audience that Adam and Seth and God all literally looked alike,---or that his audience was simply supposed to understand that the first “looking alike” was figurative in some way, and that the second one was literal.

But there’s a third possibility, and I’ll share it with you so that you can ponder it if you like.

Upon seeing that the Adam/Seth lineage also uses the words for “image” and “likeness”, I went looking to see whether these terms were used in any other father/son passages in the Bible texts. For example, let me read you a couple of paragraphs, starting again in Genesis 5:3, where we just left off:

Genesis 5: <sup>3</sup> When Adam had lived 130 years, he had a son **in his own likeness, in his own image**; and he named him Seth. <sup>4</sup> After Seth was born, Adam lived 800 years and had other sons and daughters. <sup>5</sup> Altogether, Adam lived a total of 930 years, and then he died. <sup>6</sup> When Seth had lived 105 years, he became the father<sup>[b]</sup> of Enosh. <sup>7</sup> After he became the father of Enosh, Seth lived 807 years and had other sons and daughters. <sup>8</sup> Altogether, Seth lived a total of 912 years, and then he died.

Did you notice that we’re told that Adam had other sons and daughters, but that we aren’t told that they were “in his likeness”, as it told us about Seth?

And then we’re told that Seth had Enosh, but no “likeness” language is used there. In fact, the Hebrew word for “likeness” here appears 25 times in the Hebrew books of the Bible, but only in three of them does it refer to the creation or birth of a person. And we’ve read all three of them already. That is to say, that there is no other place in the Bible where this word is used to describe a creation or birth of anybody.

And what about the word for “image”? Well, it’s used 17 times, and in only four of those places does it refer to the creation or birth of a human. Three of them, we’ve already looked at, and the fourth time is a little later, where it says in

Genesis 9:6b ...for in the image [H6754](#) of God made he man.

So only in Genesis 5:1-3 does it talk about any human having been born in the image and/or likeness of another human.

And I find this very intriguing.

Indeed, why are we being told this about Seth?

Wasn't Seth Adam's **third** son? What about his first two sons? Were they also born in Adam's likeness and image?

Well, perhaps they were, but we are not told any such thing. Here's all it says about the births of Cain and Abel:

Genesis 4:1 Now Adam knew Eve his wife, and she conceived and bore **Cain**, saying, "I have gotten a man with the help of the Lord." And again, she bore his brother Abel.

It's intriguing that three chapters before this, we're told of Adam being created in the likeness and image, and one chapter after this, we're being told about Seth being born in the likeness and image. But neither the story of Cain nor of Abel mentions the likeness or image language at all.

And the enquiring mind, of course, wonders why this is. Just what are you telling us, Moses?

Well, if you don't like a good mystery, you should probably learn to like mysteries if you're planning on being a Bible student.

Note to self: Maybe not everything in the Bible is something we're going to be able to understand completely with the information we have.

So, here's a mystery: Why is Seth the only human born in the image and likeness of somebody---as far as the authors went out of their way to mention? Is this just a meaningless quirk of how the authors happened to choose to tell the stories? Or is Moses actually giving us a clue here? Is he pointing to something? That is, were we, as good mystery readers, SUPPOSED to notice this and to examine it as a clue?

Well, if you're like me, you'll be pondering this for some time. But while I've got your curiosity piqued---if it is piqued---let me throw out some more evidence---at the risk of either shedding some light on all this, or of muddying the waters further.

Let's look at a genealogy from Luke. It runs backwards from Jesus to Adam, and it ends up with this fascinating language, after Luke has already gone back in time, past King David, and past Noah, and past Enoch, he finishes up the list like this:

Luke 3:<sup>37</sup> the son of Methuselah, the son of Enoch, the son of Jared, the son of Mahalaleel, the son of Cainan, <sup>38</sup> the son of Enos, the son of Seth, the son of **Adam, the son of God.**

OK, stop the presses, folks! Here, in what seems to be a rather routine genealogy, talking about one human being the son of another, it ends up with Adam—whom many take to be the first human---being the “son of God”. We can see how Enoch was the son of Jared---in quite literal fashion, for Jared was Enoch’s father. And we get that fact from

[Genesis 5:18](#)

OK, so this seems to be quite literal language. But it doesn’t follow all the way down Luke’s list, for when it gets to Adam, who had no human father, it says “Adam, the son of God.”

So, we end up asking questions about Luke’s intent as an author, quite similar to the questions we asked about Moses earlier, when in the same breath, he speaks of Adam having been created in God’s likeness, and Seth having been born in Adam’s likeness and image.

In both cases, the one is responsible for the bringing into existence of the other. This is plain to see. So, we could use the words “son” and “father” a bit more loosely in figurative fashion, in order to show some similarity between Adam and Seth’s coming into existence as the result of someone else doing something.

Or perhaps we could try to work into our understanding of all this the concept of the lineage of Christ. Indeed, that’s what Luke’s list was purporting to do: to show us the human lineage from God to Jesus, through Adam and his various descendants, starting with Seth. But let’s not miss this. Where Moses was careful to note for the record that Seth was indeed born in Adam’s likeness and image, and Adam created in God’s likeness and image, Luke’s account starts at the Jesus end of the historical line and works his way all the way back to the divine origin of Adam, whose Creator was God.

We could wonder, then, whether this business of lineage and even of the image and likeness is somehow supposed to be Messianic in nature. Indeed, there’s likely *something* to that, and there is much more to be explored than I have yet ventured to do. But I’d like to focus for a bit on one more aspect of this whole business. It could be that the emphasis of the whole image business isn’t really on the genealogy of Jesus, but on the idea of being a “child” of God. Let me explain.

Look how Luke here uses the word “son” to describe Adam as the “son of God”, I wanted to bring back to our attention a passage we considered last time. I’m reading from Deuteronomy 32---this super-packed chapter that we could spend a year on---and I’m starting in verse 4, where Moses starts talking about the righteousness of God, and then suddenly shifts to going off on corrupt humans who prove by their bad behavior that they are not God’s “children”.

Deuteronomy 32:

<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?

Generally speaking, we can gather from Moses here that corrupt people are “not his children”--- meaning “not God’s children.” But again, we have to ask, “Moses, in what manner are you speaking here?” Of course, the Hebrews in Moses’ day were not the literal children of God, for they were the literal children of older Hebrews---of their own parents. So, we can rule out the possibility that Moses is speaking literally here when he uses the word “children”. Rather, he’s focusing not on their lineage, but on their **behaviors**---their shameful and “warped and crooked” and “foolish and unwise” ways. Obviously, he blames them for their choice to be like that, for he says “Is this the way you repay the Lord”? So, he implies they had a choice to repay God with righteousness, rather than with their corruption. It is this behavior that rules them out as “children” of God in this manner of speaking.

Now, Paul deliberately brings this very verse to mind many centuries later, when he tells his audience in the First Century that if they stay faithful, they will be “children of God”. Listen to

Philippians 2: <sup>14</sup> Do everything without grumbling or arguing, <sup>15</sup> so that you may become blameless and pure, “**children of God** without fault in a warped and crooked generation.” Then you will shine among them like stars in the sky <sup>16</sup> as you hold firmly to the word of life.

Here, Paul has the righteous shining like stars against the dark background of that “warped and crooked generation”. He’s referring to the humans on the earth, who were generally corrupt---yet he’s talking to the Christians, who had been called to become the children of God. They had been called out of the world in which they lived, and into a different kind of life that actually honored the Creator and his ways.

And we could look up lots of passages about this. For example, John has something to say on this subject in

[1 John 3:10](#) This is how we know who the **children of God** are and who the children of the devil are: **Anyone who does not do what is right is not God’s child**, nor is anyone who does not love their brother and sister.

Let’s not miss the fact that John takes the same position as did Moses when Moses wrote “they are not his children”, regarding the bad behavior of the Hebrews. And here John stated that anyone not doing what was right is not God’s child.

So, let me set up a question. Now we’re talking about right and wrong, and good and evil, and children of God vs children of the devil.

I get the strong idea here that these writers aren’t intending to be understood literally when they use words like child and children, or sons and daughters, in passages like this. Yes, there are certainly many Bible passages that do use such words literally, but when they’re talking to humans about being a “son of God”, it seems they’re most often talking about behavior. It’s the behavior that separates the children of God from the rest. And the children of God act like whom?

Like God, of course.

And that means like Jesus, too. In fact, Jesus makes quite a similar point in yet another showdown with the Pharisees. He mentions the fact that they are **literally** the offspring of Abraham, yet he also gives a twist on all this by telling them that Abraham was definitely **not** their father! And how could this be? Well, he's speaking literally the first time, and figuratively the second time. That is, at first, he's talking about the genetic lineage, and the second time, he's talking about their behavior. So, listen to this passage:

John 8:<sup>37</sup> I know that you are offspring of Abraham; yet you seek to kill me because my word finds no place in you. <sup>38</sup> I speak of what I have seen with my Father, and **you do** what you have heard from your father."<sup>39</sup> They answered him, "Abraham is our father." Jesus said to them, "**If you were Abraham's children, you would be doing the works Abraham did,**"<sup>40</sup> but now you seek to kill me, a man who has told you the truth that I heard from God. **This is not what Abraham did.**<sup>41</sup> **You are doing the works your father did."** They said to him, "We were not born of sexual immorality. We have one Father—**even God.**"

Let me interrupt here to point out what a bad rhetorical move this is. People often do this foolishly when they think they're losing their footing in an argument. They make an unjustified escalation to the next level. They double down, or dig in further, so to speak. Or in logical terms, it's like the sunk cost fallacy—where they continue investing in a fruitless venture, precisely because they have already got so much invested in it. So here are these guys trying to claim the heritage of Abraham, and Jesus is insinuating—though he hasn't fully spelled it out yet, that their philosophy is coming from Satan—or the devil—and we'll see that specific language from him momentarily. So, they try to strengthen their position with a bolder claim than that of being descendants of Abraham. They claim now that God is their father. Well, obviously, they didn't really understand who they were talking to, for there was no one on the planet more imminently qualified to know whether God was their father or not. But again, he turns it back on them—and he focuses on what when he does it? On their BEHAVIOR.

So, I'll continue. They had said,

We have one Father—**even God.**"

And then it continues...

<sup>42</sup> Jesus said to them, "If God were your Father, you would love me, for I came from God and I am here. I came not of my own accord, but he sent me. <sup>43</sup> Why do you not understand what I say? It is because you cannot bear to hear my word. <sup>44</sup> You are of **your father the devil**, and **your will is to do your father's desires**. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks out of his own character, for he is a liar and the father of lies. <sup>45</sup> But because I tell the truth, you do not believe me. <sup>46</sup> Which one of you convicts me of sin? If I tell the truth, why do you not believe me? <sup>47</sup> **Whoever is of God hears the words of God.** The reason why you do not hear them is that **you are not of God.**"

To him, it's just a matter of fact. He can look at them and tell immediately that they are not God's people. Rather, he associates them with Satan because the kinds of things they do are the kinds of things that Satan was known for doing. And I don't want to get off topic here, but it's a fascinating question to consider just what he was referring to. Did these men have some actual allegiance or

agreement with Satan himself? Or were they just engaging in Satan-like sins, and Jesus is just generalizing here? Perhaps we'll get back to this question someday.

But continuing on, how interesting it is that Jesus saw people so plainly like this—and that he would size them up, and then say it out loud. He did not take a knee here and say something like, “Well, I’m sure all of you guys have some really good qualities, and that you all have your strengths—and I admire you for that...” No, he flat-out calls them sons of Satan. And surely, he was right. But this kind of thing tends to offend our American sensibilities, doesn’t it? In our culture, it’s more acceptable to lie than to call the liar a liar. We’ve gotten ourselves so far out in the weeds that being at odds with other people is more important to the average American than is being at odds with God. Let a person call us a liar, or call us evil, and that’s a bigger deal to us than if the Bible calls us a liar or evil. So, this is an example of where our American culture has certainly got itself some bad habits that are contrary to what God taught in Bible times.

But I think that what’s driving Jesus here in this argument with the Pharisees all goes back to Genesis 1--back to the idea that all of humankind was created in the image and likeness of God—that man’s very purpose is to be righteous as God is righteous—to be loving and kind and fair and just and honest and so forth. And these guys were denying that image into which they had been created---just as they were denying Jesus himself, who was absolutely perfect in the way he lived out God’s image while he was in the flesh on this planet.

They argued that they were sons of Abraham---and while he would admit that this was true in the literal sense---that they were indeed his physical offspring---he flatly denied that they were his sons in the figurative sense of sharing his philosophy---his outlook on life---and his behavior. And when they were foolish enough to up the ante, and to claim to be sons of God himself, Jesus demolished that argument, too. He didn’t just keep quiet about his disagreement and walk away---as so many people do today, even in the churches. No, he confronted them directly about it.

And what’s worse is that these guys would eventually prove for everybody that Jesus had been right about them, for these are the crew who would be complicit in his murder. He looked them right in the face—I imagine—and told it like it was: “You are not of God.”

And even to this day, there are so very many people who think they are “of God”---that they’re on God’s team, or that they’re operating in the same spirit about things that God and Jesus have---who are actually denying God and Jesus by their habitual actions. And these people, in my experience, hate being corrected or confronted about any of this, just as these Pharisees did. And here they were, arguing with Jesus over the moral status and the authority of their own characters.

But, of course---and they didn’t understand this---Jesus would be the world’s foremost expert on this subject. Jesus was himself, the epitome of God’s image. Hebrews 1:3 puts it this way:

Hebrews 1:3 The Son is the radiance of God's glory and **the exact representation of his being,**

And here’s Colossians 1, talking about him

[Colossians 1:15](#) **He is the image** of the invisible God, **the** firstborn of all creation.

So, these Pharisees, claiming to be the real deal---to be righteous devotees of Abraham's way---nay, of God himself---stand up to Jesus. And Jesus basically says, "Na, I don't think so."

And he left. And they probably stood around huffing and puffing---or as my father-in-law used to say about certain preachers getting carried away in the pulpit, "a'rarin' and a'snortin'". But he was right and they were wrong. And they would see.

I think that the argument that day was as much about the Genesis 1 *image* idea as anything else. Not that they were disagreeing about the text of Genesis 1, but that these men had been created to be in the image of Yahweh himself---which just happens to be the same thing as this man Jesus to whom they were talking---and yet they rejected that image while claiming to be living it out. And that rejection seems to have been what made them a crooked and perverse generation in the eyes of Jesus and God and Moses and Paul.

Look how John put it in his gospel, when he talks about Jesus as the "light":

[John 3:19](#) And this is the judgment: the light has come into the **world**, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil.

That "light", or Jesus, came as the exact representation of God---the exact image of God in which the humankind had been created---but people ---generally speaking---loved darkness rather than Jesus. In other words, these people did not like the reality into which God had set their lives.

And again,

[John 7:7](#) The **world** .... hates me because I testify about it that its works are evil.

And again,

[John 8:12](#) Again Jesus spoke to them, saying, "I am the light of the **world**. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."

Note to self: People who do not like the fact that they were created to be righteous are generally not going to enjoy conversations with Jesus. Nor presumably, conversations with God. And naturally, they don't enjoy conversations with people who are willing to point out to them the differences between their own unrighteous philosophy, and that of God and Jesus.

I think that the "image" business of Genesis 1 is indeed about being created "upright", as Solomon put it. It's about being created to behave like God and Jesus, as opposed to like Satan. And even if I'm wrong about the "image" business, it's fairly obvious that Jesus sizes people up by their behavior again and again---and it's also obvious that he himself was considered to be that very image of God. So, in one way of looking at it, it's as if these Pharisees were standing side by side---corrupt and perverse versions of the image---alongside the exact representation of God. And that certainly proved to be a test of what kind of people they were that day---for whose level of righteousness could have been any higher than that of Jesus---against whom their unrighteousness could be the most clearly shown for what it was?

These guys were busy going about what they thought was their own business. And then Jesus shows up as a reminder that all humans are supposed to be going about the business of being upright like God. And this upset their world---and they wanted the reminders to stop. Solomon was right indeed, that God **made man** upright, but they have sought out **many** schemes. Jesus exposed their schemes, standing before them as the perfect example of the alternative.

And this is part of what it means to be created: That the Creator might just have something to say about what the creatures do in their time on Earth. This may be a scary or troubling thought to many, but no matter how it strikes you, it is certainly a test of what kind of people we are. Some people, upon hearing or realizing this, will “turn themselves in,” so to speak, while others will try to keep pretending that nothing is wrong with how they’re living---and others, still, will double down in their errant ways. If it’s true, though, that everybody has a post-life appointment with God, then it’s just a matter of time until someone can’t avoid the truth of the matter any longer---and they find themselves face-to-face with the Creator after all, and they have to deal with the reality of it all, and can no longer spin it as they wish.

Some may find this all an un-cheery line of thinking, but let me suggest that we might do well to give God the benefit of the doubt. That is, if he’s the sort to insist that we ought to live in the way he designed for us, perhaps we should examine that way and find out whether there’s anything good about it. Who knows? We could actually be wrong about it---couldn’t we? That is if we’re the sort to be pessimistic about God, couldn’t it be that we’ve got him wrong? Or are we beyond making errors, and above correction?

I think there’s lots to love about God and about the way he had in mind for humans to live out their lives. And so, I’ll be eager to continue looking at such things in future episodes.

Next up is a short promise-keeping episode. I’ll address why I wish people would not use the terms “Old Testament” and “New Testament. It’s a fairly short topic, so maybe I can manage to get it published sooner than later.

And while I’ve got you, I hope you’re not too disappointed that I didn’t completely settle the whole business with Adam and Seth and the *image* and *likeness* language. Perhaps I’ll figure out more of it later, but this is how it goes when you study the Bible deeply, and you’re trying to be honest, rational, and responsible about it. You’re just not going to understand it all well enough to nail down what the writer meant by each and every thing he wrote. But I do hope you enjoyed the discussion, and I’m glad to be able to highlight some of the kinds of reckoning that goes on in trying to understand these amazing and intriguing texts.

Thanks for joining in!