

THE BEGINNINGS
GENESIS 1

INTRODUCTION

This week a new president was inaugurated in a ceremony protected by 25,000 National Guard troops. This was in the aftermath of a riot the week before in which the Capitol was invaded. That in turn followed a bitter presidential election. A good case can be made that both presidential candidates were seriously flawed. President Trump has now been impeached twice. There is evidence that President Biden has been involved with his son and brother in making money off of agreements with companies from other countries because of their name. That is called influence peddling.

Meanwhile, closer to home, we are all dealing with government restrictions on our daily lives. We have to wear masks in public buildings. We can't go to a lot of restaurants because they are shut down. We Christians can't even meet as a church in normal fashion. What are we to make of all of this? How should we be relating to our civil government? What should be our expectations of civil government? If there are limits to our obedience, what are they?

Minnesota pastor and Bethel University professor Greg Boyd writes, "**Functionally, Satan is the acting CEO of all earthly governments.**" (*The Myth of a Christian Nation*, p. 21) That sounds pretty bad. If that is the case, we perhaps should have as little to do with government as we can.

Many of us know and respect John MacArthur and his teaching. He says, "**The ideal human government can ultimately do nothing to advance God's kingdom, and the worst, most despotic worldly government in the end cannot halt the power of the Holy Spirit or the spread of God's Word.**" (*Why Government Can't Save You*, p. 7) His recommendation is that Christians should stay out of government as much as they can. He says, "**Using temporal methods to promote legislative and judicial change... is not our calling--- and has no eternal value.**" (*Why Government Can't Save You*, p. 130) It seems ironic to me that MacArthur and his church in recent weeks have been embroiled in a legal battle with government over whether or not their church can remain open for large groups of people. How does His perspective fit with Jesus' challenge to His followers to function as salt and light in the world?

There is a lot of confusion about the role that government should play in our society. Should it be bigger? Should it be smaller? Should it provide free health care for everyone? Should it not? What are the limits of problem solving that it should have? This confusion extends even to Christians.

So it is that we need clear thinking about the role which civil government should have in our lives. We Christians need Biblical thinking. Thus it is that I have felt provoked to undertake a topical study of what the Bible tells us about the proper role of civil government. We are going to begin at the beginning.

I.

(PROJECTOR ON--- I. INTRODUCTION TO THE GOVERNOR) We will start at the beginning of the Bible with an INTRODUCTION TO THE GOVERNOR. If you have a Bible with you, you can turn to the beginning, to the Book of Genesis. Genesis #1 v. 1 (GENESIS 1:1) reads, "**In the beginning God...**" *Bereshit Elohim*. The Book of John in the New Testament also addresses the

beginning in #1 v. 1 (JOHN 1:1): "**In the beginning was the Word...**" *En arche en o logos*. We find out later in the chapter that the Apostle John is referring to the Son of God.

Two weeks ago Mary Jo got a new car. (MARY JO AND NEW CAR) Her old Kia had acquired a lot of miles as the result of commuting to work in Las Vegas every day for a number of years. So she and Don visited a Subaru dealer, and they found a car that they liked. It is almost impossible these days to get a new car without a lot of bells and whistles. So this car came with a thick owner's manual, actually I think that it is several books. If Mary Jo and Don master this owner's manual, they will be assured of having a good driving experience.

For some strange reason the Subaru company discovered that a lot drivers of new cars don't read the owner's manual. Sometimes they mistreat their cars because they were ignorant of the operational rules. Sometimes they may have known the rules, but they didn't follow them. That leads to problems.

So the Subaru company decided that the best thing to do is to send a personal representative to new owners to show them how to operate the new car correctly and to teach them the most important things that they need to know about it. A week ago Saturday Don and Mary Jo met with this representative to find out the most important things they need to know about operating this new car.

You see, we also have a Manufacturer, and we also have been provided with an owner's manual. It is called the Bible. But the problem is that over the course of many years our Manufacturer saw that many people didn't read His owner's manual and others directly disobeyed its operating instructions. So He sent His personal representative, Jesus Christ, to show us how to do things right.

The foundational thing that we humans need to know is that we do have a Manufacturer. There is a God, and He does rule. We do best when we respect His authority. (PSALM 89:11) Psalm 89 v. 11 tells us about Him: "**The heavens are yours; the earth also is yours; the world and all that is in it, you have founded them.**" According to Daniel #2 vv. 20 & 21 (DANIEL 2:20), "**Blessed be the name of God forever and ever, to whom belong wisdom and might.** (DANIEL 2:22) **He changes times and seasons; he removes kings and sets up kings; he gives wisdom to the wise and knowledge to those who have understanding...**"

Much of the success of our American experiment with representative democracy has come from the recognition that we have accountability to a sovereign God. So it is that our currency declares that "In God We Trust." So it is that our Pledge of Allegiance declares that our nation is under God. So it is that government meetings often begin and end with prayer. So it is that our government has paid chaplains. All of this is good. It would seem to me that this must have some benefit to our country.

Our text from Genesis goes on to make a more specific claim: Not only is there a God in the beginning, but He is also our sovereign Creator. (GENESIS 1:1) Verse 1 says, "**In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.**" *Bereshit bara Elohim et-shemayim veet-haeres*. There are at least two very important implications from this simple statement. The first is that we have some accountability to the One who created us. If He indeed created us, then probably we have some kind of responsibility to Him. Probably He has some say over our lives.

The second implication is that what our Creator says about how we should live should be treated as very important. Our Manufacturer knows something about how we should operate. It would seem to be wise to pay attention to what He has to tell us.

The problem is that some in our culture who call themselves scientists have decided that God did not create us. We are the result of the Big Bang. The physical universe and the living things within it are the result of immutable physical laws and long periods of time and perhaps chance.

Since God is excluded from this thinking, there must be an alternative explanation for the world of life which we see around us. These scientists call it evolution. The heart of hard science is the scientific method, which requires repeatability in order for theories to be recognized as true. That is impossible when it comes to the origins of life. But many scientists declare that evolution is a scientific certainty. Traditional Darwinian scientists say that life is the result of long periods of time with slow genetic changes. The fossil record is lacking in key changes between species. There are rather sudden appearances of dramatic changes.

So some scientists argue for the theory of punctuated equilibrium, the idea that there were sudden and dramatic biological and genetic changes. Many geneticists say that this is unlikely. Professor Goldschmidt from the University of California argues for the "hopeful monster" view, that there were sudden appearances of new creatures. Paleontologist Richard Dawkins says that he thinks that life on earth came from aliens who seeded the earth. With evolution a supposed certainty, it is fascinating to see such uncertainty and disagreement among evolutionists about the exact mechanism of evolution which has produced the life that we see around us.

The implication for human government is that if there is no Creator, then there is no divine accountability. There is no ultimate judge for the violation of laws. We fear only the judgment of others. We are also free to question and doubt the reason for laws and traditions.

Part of the success of the American experiment in representative democracy is the basis of our government upon the premise that we have a Creator. In the Declaration of Independence we find this significant statement (DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE), which finds its human origin in the Virginia Declaration of Human Rights, authored by George Mason: **"We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these, are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness."**

Civil government is not supreme. Our political rights do not come from government. They come from our Creator. That is part of the reason why life in our country is different from that in China, in North Korea, in Cuba, in Vietnam. Civil government is not sovereign. If we wish to maintain a successful government in our nation, we need to work and pray that this divine basis for government is maintained. When government is permitted to take the place of god, we are in trouble. Perhaps we citizens need to be careful about expecting government to provide things that only God can provide, or that we should provide for ourselves.

II.

(II. INTRODUCTION TO THE GOVERNED) Also in Genesis #1 we find an INTRODUCTION TO THE GOVERNED. What are we humans like? What kind of governing do we need? Verses 26 & 27 provide us (GENESIS 1:26) with a key bit of information: **"Then God said, 'Let us make man**

in our image, after our likeness. and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.' (GENESIS 1:27) **So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them."** Notice that there is a hint of plurality here within the Godhead.

The Lord says that we humans are created in the image of God. We are not gods, as our LDS friends argue in their theology. We are not the ultimate determiners of what is good and just as secular humanists would argue. We are images of God.

We are not provided with a definition of the "image of God." in the Bible. Theologians have written books and articles and essays in their effort to describe what this means. They tend to mention things like personality and a spiritual and moral nature. They argue that we have been provided with the communicable attributes of God. In other words, we are capable of exercising love and justice and mercy and wisdom and holiness and patience and truthfulness and holiness. God possesses these attributes perfectly. We possess them imperfectly. We also have a conscience.

A German theologian by the name of von Rad points out that in many ancient lands kings would set up statues of themselves on the borders of their nations to show that the land which people were entering was the domain of a particular king. In a similar way, we humans serve as representatives of the domain of the sovereign God of heaven. We bear His image.

Notice also that we are created as male and female, not as a gender to be determined later. Dr. David Mackereth worked for 26 years for the national Health Service in the UK. He was regarded as an excellent doctor. In 2018 he was assigned to the Department for Work and Pensions as a disability assessor. He was told in his training that he was required to address transgender people by their preferred pronoun. Dr. Mackereth told the official in charge that, as a Christian, he could not in good conscience refer to patients in that way. He was fired.

In his appeal Dr. Mackereth cited Genesis 1:27 and said that for religious reasons he could not refer to "any six-foot tall bearded man" as a "she" or a "her." The tribunal rejected the appeal, saying, **"Belief in Genesis 1:27, a lack of belief in transgenderism and conscientious objection to transgenderism in our judgment are incompatible with human dignity and conflict with the fundamental rights of others."** Without the divinely implanted image, the only dignity which anyone possesses is what others are willing to give them. It is the Judeo-Christian tradition pointing to our creation in the image of God which has been the source of individual rights in our Western culture. (Breakpoint, 10/21/2019)

A.

This is by no means an exhaustive list, but I find three takeaways that we should derive from our creation in the image of God that have relevance for the proper understanding of civil government. The first is that **THE IMAGE OF GOD MEANS THAT HUMAN LIFE IS VERY VALUABLE**. (II. A. THE IMAGE OF GOD MEANS... VALUABLE)

If human beings are indeed God's image bearers, then a fundamental responsibility of civil government is to protect and defend all human beings. This responsibility extends from the conception of life to the end of life. Human beings have not needed modern medical science to tell them that life begins in the womb. Yet 48 years ago this past Friday the US Supreme Court decided that women have a right to kill their babies in the womb right up into the third trimester of pregnancy. This has been described as part of a woman's reproductive right, but it is evil.

Many politicians have defended this supposed right by claiming that they are personally opposed to abortion, but they do not want to impose their beliefs on others. This is terrible reasoning. Either abortion is right, or it is wrong. I will qualify that to point out that if the physical life of the mother is truly threatened by pregnancy, there is a case to be made for the defense of the mother's life for an abortion to be made. That is a very rare case. But imagine if we applied this line of reasoning to other crimes: I am personally opposed to murder, but I do not want to impose my beliefs upon others. I am personally opposed to sex trafficking, but I do not want to impose my beliefs upon others.

In India and China and other parts of the world, females are destroyed in the womb at a much higher rate than are male babies. What a sad and terrible irony! Abortions are done in the name of women's rights, yet when women in many parts of the world discover that they have female babies, they are destroyed simply because they are females. The culture places a higher value on having boys.

Our creation in the image of God has implications for the end of life. People struggling at the end of life also bear the precious image of God. Yet our culture is looking for new ways to kill off these people under the guise of compassionate euthanasia. The duty of government is to protect these people as well.

Then there is life in the image of God between the beginning and the end. Our text specifically makes reference to this image being represented in males and females. In the sad history of the world, women have so often been treated as less than God's image bearers. For centuries Hindus taught that when a man died, his wife should be burned on the burial pyre with him. Still today in much of the Muslim world a woman who becomes a victim of rape is shunned by her family and sometimes even killed.

Then there is the sad and horrible blot in our own nation's history of racism. Blacks and slaves were treated as less than human. Some who called themselves Christians perpetrated this horrible crime in the name of the God of the Bible. But also in our history Americans have looked down on the original inhabitants of our continent, on the Irish who came over in the midst of the Potato Famine. Some did not want to acknowledge the image of God in the Italians who later came here in large numbers. We must be careful today not to show the same disrespect toward immigrants coming from the south of our borders.

Then there is the long history in the world of anti-Semitism which reached its low point in the gas chambers of Auschwitz. Even in more remote parts of Africa and South America I have read stories about tribal groups who regard other tribes as less than human.

Then there are the homeless and the incarcerated and the disabled. In Iceland there are no people with Down Syndrome. Why is that? They are universally destroyed when genetic warnings are discovered in the womb. They may be created in the image of God, but the determination of that society is that they are not fit to live.

A basic responsibility of government is the protection of life. All of us humans are created in the image of God. We have inherent value and worth. When we attack or denigrate that image and the ones who bear it, we attack the One who created them. Good government will protect life from the womb to the tomb.

B.

The second implication that I notice from this passage is that THE IMAGE OF GOD MEANS HUMANS HAVE THE RESPONSIBILITY TO RULE. (II. A. B. THE IMAGE OF GOD MEANS....) Verse 26 says that man is to have "dominion... over all the earth." In v. 28 God tells man and woman that they are to "**be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth.**"

Here is the Biblical responsibility which man is given to have civil government. We are to rule upon the earth. There is a hint in this charge that the task will be difficult. The physical world will not always be cooperative. There will be floods and earthquakes and hurricanes and tornadoes and volcanic eruptions and blizzards and heat waves. Animals will sometimes attack humans. There will be plagues and diseases. It will be work to get the earth to produce food for human consumption.

There are some environmental extremists who call upon humanity to serve mother earth as Gaia, a kind of goddess. According to the Social Issues Research Centre, "**...for the Gaia theorist ecology that starts and ends with the human perspective is, for want of a better word, BAD.**" The thinking is that we should serve the earth, not that the earth should serve us.

Consider the advice of this radical environmentalist: "**If you haven't given voluntary human extinction much thought before, the idea of a world with no people in it may seem strange. But, if you give it a chance, I think you might agree that the extinction of Homo Sapiens would mean survival for millions, if not billions, of Earth-dwelling species.... Phasing out the human race will solve every problem on earth, social and environmental.**" (Les Knight, *Wild Earth*, Summer 1991, p. 72) The possession of the image of God means that we humans are to rule upon the earth. The earth is to serve us, not the other way around.

C.

The third implication which I find coming from our two verses is that THE IMAGE OF GOD MEANS HUMANS SHOULD CREATE. (II. A. B. C. THE IMAGE OF GOD MEANS...) Part of that responsibility means reproducing ourselves. According to v. 28, God said, "**Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth...**"

When I was finishing high school and entering college, a very popular book was *The Population Bomb*, by Stanford professor Paul Ehrlich. He argued that in the next decade hundreds of millions of people around the world were going to starve. The answer to this looming disaster was limiting human population growth. Now with the earth's population having more than doubled, there is less starvation around the world than probably any time in history.

The problem today is falling fertility rates. Most of the developed countries of the world have looming challenges of decreasing populations. Even in the US the primary reason for our population growth is the influx of immigrants. Good government will encourage the flourishing of families.

What marks out the activity of God in #1 is His creative work. The image of God in human beings is not simply physical reproduction. Animals can do that. It is the ability of human beings to make and create things, to progress and develop and invent.

Good governments foster this creative activity. How do they do that? They provide opportunity and freedom. They promote education. They protect private property rights.

Why is it that the United States produces the most Nobel Prizes. Why is it that the brightest people in the world tend to come here to study and do research? Why is it that so many inventions come from the US? Why is it that the Internet and computers and cell phones have primarily had their origin in this country? Are Americans just smarter than everybody else? I don't think so. More likely it is because we have had a government that encourages creativity. We provide freedom and opportunity. We stress education. We allow people to make money from their discoveries.

China has a lot more people than we do in this country. What is the origin of most of their technology? The US. They have stolen from us. Why have they not made such discoveries on their own? Are they not as smart as us Americans? I don't think so. The reality is that they have a repressive government. They do not offer the same kind of freedom and opportunity as we do.

Creativity is also expressed in the fine arts. The Lord later commands that a certain kind of architecture and art be used to build the tabernacle and later the temple. He will command that Levites sing as part of their temple service. The Psalms of David were probably set to music. They were composed in the form of Hebrew poetry. In the New Testament Paul will indicate that worship includes singing. In glimpses of heaven in Revelation we see that music plays an important role in our heavenly home.

In terms of government then, it would seem that good government should encourage creativity in its various forms. Bad government will stifle creativity. We don't see a lot of great art and music coming out of North Korea or Mao's China. In Hitler's Germany any technological advance was only in armaments. Human flourishing involves creativity. Good government will encourage it. For creativity is a reflection of the image of God.

Now some among us have had the image of God in us attacked and assaulted. We have been the victims of prejudice or abuse. We have been rejected by parents or teachers or peers or mates. We may not feel all that special. Age may be wearing us down.

Yet God says that we bear His image. We are special, and each one of us is unique. The assurance of God's Word is that we are greatly valuable. It is because of that value that God sent His Son to earth to deliver us from the consequences of evil and sin. The God-man Jesus died on the cross to pay the penalty for our sins. When we put our trust in Him and what He did in dying for us, we are assured that we will go to heaven some day. We are promised that our bodies will one day be renewed. The image of God which is in all of us will shine forth with a great beauty. The starting point is making sure that we have put our trust in Jesus Christ.