

Vocation: Labor and Leisure in Christian Perspective
Beverly Heights Presbyterian Church
Dr. T. David Gordon

II. Genesis 1: Cultivating the image of God within

A. Image of God: Attributes, Actions, or Both?

1. Attributes. Humans have traits, qualities, or attributes unique to them.

- a. Religion. *Sensus divinitatis*, “although they knew God, they did not honor him as God, or give him thanks...” (Rom. 1:21). “There is within the human mind, and indeed by natural instinct, an awareness of divinity. This we take to be beyond controversy. To prevent anyone from taking refuge in the pretense of ignorance, God himself has implanted in all men a certain understanding of his divine majesty.... From this we conclude that it is not a doctrine that must first be learned in school, but one of which each of us is master from his mother’s womb and which nature itself permits no one to forget, although many strive with every nerve to this end.” (Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Battles trans., 43, 46.)
- b. creativity (whether artisan or artist)
- c. personality (awareness of self, distinct from others)
- d. gregariousness (the social sense, e.g. Tom Hanks and “Wilson”)
- e. language
- f. imagination
- g. rationality
- h. aesthetics (a sense of, and attraction to, the sublime)
- i. music (Nicholas Conard of Tübingen discovered a vulture-bone five-hole flute that is 40,000 years old—five thousand years older than the famous cave-paintings at Chauvet, France—that plays a pentatonic scale. Dr. Daniel J. Levitin, a Toronto neurobiologist, says the human brain is the only one that can discern musical interval, without which melody and harmony are impossible. *This is Your Brain On Music: The Science of a Human Obsession*. New York: Penguin, 2006).

These traits are all either exclusively human or nearly so. They distinguish the human, as image of God, from other forms of animate life. These attributes/capacities are not virtues; they may be employed virtuously or not. Those made in his image welcome the opportunity to develop such capacities.

2. Actions. God’s four great acts are creation, judgment, providential care, and redemption. Those made in God’s image welcome opportunities to be more skilled in these areas.

B. “Good” in God’s creational purpose: repetition, escalation, and negation.

Gen. 1:4 And God saw that the light was *good*.

Gen. 1:10 God called the dry land Earth, and the waters that were gathered together he called Seas. And God saw that it was *good*.

Gen. 1:12 The earth brought forth vegetation, plants yielding seed according to their own kinds, and trees bearing fruit in which is their seed, each according to its kind. And God saw that it was *good*.

Gen. 1:16 And God made the two great lights—the greater light to rule the day and the lesser light to rule the night—and the stars. 17 And God set them in the expanse of the heavens to give light on the earth, 18 to rule over the day and over the night, and to separate the light from the darkness. And God saw that it was *good*.

Gen. 1:21 So God created the great sea creatures and every living creature that moves, with which the waters swarm, according to their kinds, and every winged bird according to its kind. And God saw that it was *good*.

Gen. 1:25 And God made the beasts of the earth according to their kinds and the livestock according to their kinds, and everything that creeps on the ground according to its kind. And God saw that it was *good*.

Gen. 1:31 And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was *very good*.

Gen. 2:18 Then the LORD God said, "It is *not good* that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him."

C. The first commandment is repeated for emphasis: "*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"

D. Dominion over the created order

1. cultural/corporate, not individual: "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." The human's gregarious/social nature equips him alone to exercise such dominion.

"One way to answer the question 'What makes us human?' is to ask 'What makes us different from the apes?' ... 'Chimps do a lot of smart things,' Michael Tomasello, who heads up the institute's department of developmental and comparative psychology, told me. 'But the main difference we've seen is 'putting our heads together.' If you were at the zoo today, you would never have seen two chimps carry something heavy together. They don't have this kind of collaborative project." Elizabeth Kolbert, "Sleeping With the Enemy," *The New Yorker* (Aug. 15 & 22, 2011), p. 71.

2. includes dominion over both animate (fish, birds, livestock, creeping thing) and inanimate ("over all the *earth*," וְכָל־הָאָרֶץ) parts of the creation.

3. "Dominion" does not mean "destruction," but is the ordinary term for regal activity in the Scriptures; it is attributed to the king in Israel:

"Give the king your justice, O God, and your righteousness to the royal son! 2 May he judge your people with righteousness...May he defend the cause of the poor of the people, give deliverance to the children of the needy, and crush the oppressor! ...May he be like rain that falls on the mown grass, like showers that water the earth!...In his days may the righteous flourish, and peace abound, till the moon be no more!...May he *have dominion* from sea to sea, and from the River to the ends of the earth!... May desert tribes bow down before him, and his enemies lick the dust!" (Psa. 72:1-10)