

Good morning. Good to be here on this Friday morning to open the word and to continue this series on the family. Good to have guests here. Good to see all of you doing well. As was said, we are praying and here to support you and help you as we move through the spring semester. I'm really excited to be continuing this series on the family. If you were here last time, we introduced this series, Family Matters, discussing some biblical perspectives on the family, both in answer to something that I think is really problematic in the broader culture that we find ourselves in, but also essential for us to be thinking about with intentionality as Christians. Last time we were together and I opened this series, we were talking about the family as being foundational to creation, that in the very beginning, God establishes marriage and family according to his purposes for his glory, for the good of us as his creation and for the good of the world. I also tried to outline that this is important for us to think about, not just because it is part of our Christian faith and understanding and organic to our life in this world as human beings, but because we live in a day where there are subtle and not so subtle attacks on family, on specific individual families and the practice of it, and on the idea and institution of the family as well.

This ranges from actually radical ideological assaults on the family that actually undermine it, that identify it and attempt to label it as an autocratic, patriarchal, oppressive system contrived by Western civilization to make people's lives miserable, to something that is to be subservient to the state, to other entities that order our lives, rather than seeing it as God's basic building block for providing order and structure to the world in which we find ourselves, the world in which he placed us. The family is under attack. There are laws and policies that make it difficult for families to function, attempts to strip parents of parental authority, fail to uphold parental responsibility. All these things are happening in the world around us. The danger is that we start to buy in to some of the narratives and thoughts and ideas that are expressed in the culture around us and begin to our position and our view of marriage and the family. The Bible is very clear that this is by God's design for his glory and for the good of the world. I want to undertake this this semester to hopefully give us some things to think about, not just in terms of philosophical, ideological issues, but practical ways in which it impacts your understanding, your thoughts about marriage and family, directs your decision making, and the way in which you choose to live your life as you order it according to God's word.

But I do want to underscore that it would be naive for us to think that the family is not under attack, that there aren't forces attempting to undermine the family because those attempts are as old as the Fall. I pointed out last time that this is actually Satan's first thing to drive a wedge between the family and God and between family members, pitting husband against wife and brother against brother. We see this even in our world today, and it's part of certain social theories. All we have to do is look historically at a country like China's one child policy to see there are times when the state attempts to overtake and control the expression of family and make it subservient to the needs and the will of the state. This is actually essential in Marxist and socialistic thinking. Frederick Engels, the co-author of the *Communist Manifesto*, made a statement about the necessity of the abolition of the monogamous family as the economic unit of society. It's embedded in that philosophy to make the family subservient to the state rather than to create a condition in which families can flourish according to God's design. It would be naive for us to think these things aren't present in our world, and we have to think about them intentionally, and I think biblically.

This semester, I want us to think on the issue of family, to think about your participation in family, to uphold and value family, to find ways to defend and preserve the idea of family, particularly as the Bible teaches it. Today, in this installment, I want to talk about the family as being human, the family as human that is formed in the image and likeness of God. We're going to focus on the Genesis 1 passage that Dean Gordon read for us. It's important for us to understand when thinking about this passage where the word of God outlines for us all of creation, and especially and specifically, the creation of humankind. This is an essential element to Christianity. You know that if you're studying here, but it's more than just an element of our Christian theology or Christian worldview. It is an essential to the Christian faith and to living of the Christian life because it is embedded here creation by God's design with great degree of intentionality and purpose. It's an essential element of Christianity, not just the Christian worldview where we talk about creation, fall, and redemption. It is essential for us as the people of God and followers of Jesus Christ, to not just acknowledge, but to live in light of the truth that God is our creator.

He is the creator of the universe and the creator of humankind. And that doesn't just mean he's the manufacturer of it. It doesn't just mean he's the designer of it. It means he is the creator and sustainer of it. And over all creation, he has ultimate and perfect authority. God is not just the one who made something. He is actually the one who made it for his purposes, according to his will, and has complete authority over it. If you think about the ways in which we are divided in this world today, one of the most fundamental ways in which people are divided with one another over ideas and anything else that comes up is whether or not we acknowledge that there is a moral authority according to which we order our lives and according to which we should order our societies, our world. For the Christian, this begins fundamentally with the idea that God, by perfect authority in his righteous Holiness, speaks all things into existence and then forms humanity according to his own image and likeness. It's that vein that I want to dig into this morning, because in the Genesis 1 account, we see God creating humankind in his image and likeness, and we should keep forefront in our minds that he is our maker and sustainer.

He is righteous, holy, Almighty God. We shouldn't just think of in terms of conceiving of it, theologically and philosophically. We should live as though this is true every day and all the time. The passage that was read zeros in on the creation of humankind, but I'd like to read the preceding verses. In verse 24, the Bible says, "And God said, 'Let the earth bring forth living creatures according to their kinds, livestock and creeping things and beast of the earth according to their kinds.' And it was so."

There you have it. Whatever God wills, whatever God desires, whatever God says, and it was so. "God made the beast 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." In this immediate context for the verses I want to focus on this morning, we see that God created He creates the heavens and the earth. He separates the waters from the land. He fills the sky with light and with stars. He fills the earth with creatures and plants. The earth is full. The earth is beautiful.

And the Earth is, by God's own declaration, good. But this is a nail that I would like to drive very deep in your understanding. The Earth is full and beautiful and good and lacking. This is essential for us to have a high view of humankind and individual human beings made in the image and likeness of God, is to understand that the Earth is not It is not to be worshiped. It is created by God. It declares his goodness and his glory as the Psalmist tells us. The Earth is a good thing, and God made it full, and God made it perfect, and God made it beautiful, and God made it good. But in verse 26, we see that God does something else because the Earth is lacking. There are people who have walked this Earth, who have written in its universities and taught its people that the Earth would be much better off without humanity, but not according to God, because God made all of it full and beautiful and good and saw that something was still missing. And so in verse 26, we read this really important passage "And God said, then, 'Let us make man in our image after our likeness.'"

This is an incredible statement. If you actually think on it, you can actually understand why poets and songwriters have attempted to capture this. "God said, 'let us make humankind in our image after our likeness.'" The first thing I'd like to note is that this sets humanity apart from everything else. There is a degree of intimate intentionality expressed here. With everything else that we see in the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. The Earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the Earth, and the spirit of God was hovering over, and God said, "Let there be light." God said, "Let the waters under the heavens be gathered into one place, and let dry land appear." Here. God said, "Let the earth sprout forth vegetation, plants yielding seeds." God said, "Let there be lights in the expanse of the heavens." God said, and God said, and God said. But in verse 26, what we see something different. There's a conference, and God, the Godhead, the Triune God says, "Let us make mankind in our image." He doesn't say, Let this happen, and it happens. They confer, Let us make humankind.

The Earth is lacking, and we will create something in our image and after our likeness. This sets humanity apart. This is essential for us in defending the Christian worldview and the Christian faith. Why does humanity need redeeming? Why would it need saving when other philosophers down through the ages have said, Let it rot and let it go the wayside. We will destroy the Earth. It's better if

we weren't here. What makes humanity worth saving? Why would it need a redeemer? Why would God care enough to send a redeemer? Because he made it specially after his own image and likeness. It's different than everything else. There's an intimate expression of intentionality here that shouldn't be lost on us. Humanity stands apart as the only thing made in God's image and likeness and the only thing that he actually approaches with this degree of contemplation and conversation. There's a conversation. Let us make humankind after our image and after our likeness. It isn't just let us in conference There's an actual explanation of what will differentiate humankind from everything else. This element of creation will be after our image and likeness. That sets it apart from everything else.

We see this in the next chapter in Genesis, in verse 7 of chapter 2, that God forms man from the dust and breathes life into him. Then, as we looked at last time, then God says, not good for the man to be alone, so he makes woman from the flesh and bone of Adam himself. There's an intimate expression here that God is being intentional about what he does. Folks, that should cause us to want to defend this. You can talk about creation care, and you can talk about taking care of the environment and exercising good stewardship, keeping the air clean in the water, and caring for God's creatures on this Earth. But if you do that at the diminishment of your high view of humanity, you don't understand the priorities of God. All of that stuff is part of our responsibilities as human beings made after his image and likeness. God forms humankind according to his own image and likeness with his own hands and breathes his own life into it. What does this mean? Well, it means that we have a problem in the thinking of secular ideologies and philosophies that would come to the conclusion that because there are problems with humanity, that humanity is therefore the problem.

You have to follow that reading line of thinking. It's very insidious and it's very dangerous. We say, Well, there are problems with humanity, therefore humanity must be the problem. Look, we're going to talk about this in the next installment, the family and the Fall. It is clear that there are problems within humanity. We've been killing each other from the very beginning. Brother kills brother in a jealous rage immediately after the Fall. But that doesn't make humanity the problem. We, as Christians, need to exercise the Christian mind and think biblically. We need to be clear and we need to be careful that because there are problems in the family, and in individual families, that does not make family the problem.

We have this problem across a number of issues in our world today. Well, people abuse freedom. Therefore, freedom must be the problem. No, actually, freedom is a good thing in God's eyes. In fact, when we are saved and redeemed through faith in Jesus Christ and his shed blood on our behalf, we experience freedom from what? Sin and death and the grave. It is for freedom that you have been set free. But if we come to the conclusion that people abuse freedom and freedom wrecks things and other people suffer because we have this free society, therefore, freedom must be the problem.

We're not thinking clearly. People do the same thing with money. I've heard people say, The problem in this world is money. So let's get rid of it. Good luck. The Bible is clear money isn't the problem. What is? The love of money. We should be clear in understanding that the love of money is a manifestation of our sinfulness. Race is not the problem. Family is not the problem. Money is not the problem. Freedom is not the problem. Authority is not the problem. Sin is the problem. There is only one remedy for it. We should be clear in our thinking and not get drawn down a line of reasoning by the secular thinking around us that because there's a problem in this one thing, therefore that's the problem. What's the Latin phrase? *Post hoc ergo propter hoc*. Because of it, after it, therefore because of it.

Just because we see a problem in the family doesn't mean the family is the problem. In fact, we should be clear in our understanding that family is not the problem. Sin is what plagues us. If we give into that line of thinking, we will begin to undermine not just the family, but humanity. We will neglect what the Bible teaches us, which is that humanity is set apart from the rest of creation. It should be looked at in a high way that it is the manifestation of God's creative energy, energy and design and desire to form humankind in his image and after his likeness, that we would look on one another that way, not looking at you saying you have inherent value because you're a human being who is breathing, but you have inherent value because you are a human being made specially by God in his image and his likeness. To honor one another and defer to one another and respect one another and

to treat one another fairly is, in a manner of speaking, doing that to God, honoring God. Once we make humanity the problem, we make humanity the focal point rather than the one who created humanity. Seeing humanity as set apart is absolutely essential. It's also important to see that God creates humanity in a special way. It isn't just that there's an intimate expression of God forming humankind after his image and likeness and sets it apart from everything else on the Earth. But he's very clear in this passage that humanity, and by nature of that, marriage and family, is created for a purpose.

He says, 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, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth. God blessed them, verse 28, God said, 'Be fruitful and multiply, fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion. Humanity is created in God's image and likeness for a purpose in this world, to exercise dominion. That's the image and likeness of God in humankind. We have the inclination and ability to mold, shape, and form our world, to create, to exercise authority. In fact, one of Adam's job is to name the creatures. There's no higher form of authority than to name something. God charges Adam to have dominion over the Earth, to be a steward, to care for it, to manage it, to love it and appreciate it, to exercise his responsibilities and his authority with great care, according to God's expectations and standards for his glory, and in light of the fact that he, as a human being, is made in the image and likeness of God. That divine image in humankind, to have the inclination and ability to create and to shape and to form our world is what we were purposes to do.

In some traditions, that's referred to as the cultural mandate. We were put here to build and to create, to multiply, to have families, to procreate and fill the Earth, to populate it. Now, in the next installment, we'll talk about what goes wrong with all of that. But what goes wrong is not procreation. What goes wrong is sin that has distorted and corrupted the practice of procreation. I have people who say the world would be better off if people didn't have children. You understand what a ridiculous statement that is, because if people don't have children, well, it's not long until there will be no people. We were created for a purpose, and the family and marriage is embedded in that purpose. It isn't just a cultural mandate to to paint works of art, to build buildings and write books. It's to fill the earth with other human beings, to steward it, and to steward it well. We're not just created here in God's image and likeness in a way that is set apart. We're actually created for a purpose. But there's something else, I think, in this text that's worth drawing out and thinking about, particularly in the day in which we find ourselves.

That is, we are created with purpose on purpose. "God said, 'Let us make mankind in our image and 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 thin creeps on the earth.'" So, verse 27, so "God created man in his own image. In the image of God, he created him. Male and female, he created them."

In this world in which we live, where we have turned sex and gender into a cultural or social issue, it is imperative for us as biblical Christians to see that the male and female, characteristics, the distinction between male and female, The creation of male and female is not a social or cultural construct. It is according to God's design. Whatever pressures are on us in this day to alter our thinking, to conform and to comply with the social pressures to adjust our understanding of sex and gender, it is important for us as biblical Christians to go back to the beginning and see that this distinction and differentiation and design of male and female is a beautiful, gracious, merciful, loving, perfect thing that God did in the very beginning.

The Bible teaches us that we were created in his image and likeness. Male and female, he created us in his image and likeness. There is no inferiority in worth or value. Anyone who attempts to do that is attempting to undermine the created order and the design of male and female by somehow inferring that this means that one sex is inferior to the other. He created them male and female. Male and female, he created them according to his purposes for his design and after his own image and likeness. And he created them for one another. We should have that exciting, lovely, beautiful view of human sex. We are created this way by God's design. This is not just a gender thing. It's not a socio-cultural dimension of our gender expressions. This expresses God's desire for the world and for

humanity, his design from the very beginning and the order in which he wants the world to function. When he does this, he sets in motion marriage in the family. Reverse engineer this. If you are attacking marriage in the family, you are undermining God's created order, which is an attempt to undermine the creator himself.

That does not go well for anyone in the grand scheme of things and at the end of things. It is an act of rebellion, and we should not be associated with it. We should not give in to the pressures to devalue or undervalue or undermine. God's ultimate and perfect design of sex and marriage and family. To do so is an affront or an offense to God himself, and it is an act of rebellion. Sometimes that act of rebellion is a willful shaking of the fist. I refuse to give in to this hierarchical, patriarchal, traditional Western civilization notion. I refuse, and I reject this idea of God and his standards and his design. I reject it. There's that rebellion. But there's also the rebellion that comes from being tormented, from being troubled ourselves, and not willing to yield to God's perfect design, to his will. Both of those are acts of rebellion, one out of torment, the other out of volition. But the answer to both is to yield to God's design, to his authority, to his love and his grace and his mercy. But there's something else insidious in this attack on the distinction and the differentiation and the design of male and female that we don't talk about enough as Christians because we find ourselves pushed into a polemical stance. We're defending something that the culture seems to push back against.

The problem is it isn't just an affront to God. People who reject the idea of God don't care if they offend him. People who reject the idea of divine authority don't care if they rebel against it. There's something else that happens in this war against marriage and family and sexuality as God designed it. I'm convinced in reading the scripture and thinking on this issue that that approach isn't just an affront to the God we believe in, as though he only exists for us because we believe in him. It is dehumanizing. To actually attempt to undermine marriage and the family and human sexuality as designed by God is in essence dehumanizing us, turning us into amorphous, ambiguous automatons that are subservient to earthly authority or the state or the culture. But the family is human. By God's design, it is human. In his image and likeness, it is created for his glory, for the good of the world and for our good. To allow the secular thinking around us to push us in a corner to say, well, if we really want to love people and we really want to care for people and we really want to elevate humanity, we have to give in on this.

I'm telling you that the Christian argument is to do so is actually to dehumanize humankind made in his image and likeness because it rejects his design. We trust that God knows better than us. So why would we want to take control of this? God knows better. His wisdom is unsearchable. It's immeasurable. He did this in the beginning according to his purposes, according to his will for his glory. So I think that it stands to reason that you and I as his people, as followers of Christ, should think on this issue of marriage and family as a human thing. Humans made in his image and likeness, male and female, created according to his design. We should celebrate it. We should enjoy it. It's a blessing. We should uphold it in our language and in our actions. And we should defend it. We should defend it. Because in doing so, We are defending the creator of all things.

Let's pray. Father in heaven, we do indeed thank you for the days that you give us. We thank you for your goodness and for your grace, for your loving, kindness, for your mercies, which are new every morning.

We thank you for the blessings and privileges that we enjoy by your good hand, the blessing of being part of this community, of the freedoms that we enjoy to open your word, to pray, to worship. We thank you for the blessing and privilege of Christian community and fellowship. We thank you for the work that you've given us to do in this world, to declare and to proclaim and to live out the good news of Jesus. We thank you for all the blessings that are ours in and through him, for salvation, for forgiveness for the promise of eternal life that is ours through his shed blood. And Father, we thank you for this world, for the beauty of creation, for the way in which it declares your Majesty and power. And we thank you for humankind made after your own image and likeness. Father, keep us from the sin of dehumanizing this most important element of creation, the one that is set apart, created for a purpose and with purpose. Forgive us when we falter in our willingness to stand our ground that you are infinitely the wise creator who created things according to your good and perfect will that set in

place a created order that gave humanity responsibilities in this world, that charged us with the task of being fruitful and multiplying.

We pray, Father, for the wisdom wisdom and courage to live out the truths of your word in a world that often pushes against it. Father, we pray that we would be mindful of the significant place that family has in this world, and that we might find ourselves by your grace, caring for it, loving it, enjoying it, participating in it, defending and upholding it for your glory for the good of this world. We pray in Christ's name. Amen.