

Why Did God Create Man?

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One of the things I've learned from parenthood is that many of those child developmental stages that I thought were clichés are, in fact, not clichés. For instance, Zoë has now reached the age where she asks, "Why?" about practically everything. "Zoë, don't mess with Mama's tablet." "But why?" "Because you'll break it." "But why?" "Because you're small and careless." "But why?" "Because God made you that way. Ask Him!"

In reality, though, we don't ever outgrow the question-asking stage. We move on to different questions, particularly when it comes to spiritual matters. Some of those questions are extremely practical and relevant, for instance, "What must I do to be saved?" Others are quite a bit more abstract. As Solomon says in Ecclesiastes 3, God has set eternity in our hearts, and sometimes that eternal longing reveals itself in questions. This morning, we're going to tackle one of those big-picture questions that actually does have an answer. We're going to ask, "Why did God create man?"

The Father and Creation

Our search this morning will begin by considering God the Father, His role in the creation of man, and why He chose to do it. This inquiry must start, though, by acknowledging that the Bible speaks of the creation of man in two different senses. The first concerns the **PHYSICAL CREATION**. Read with me from Genesis 1:26; 2:7. There are several important Scriptural concepts that we must note here before we move forward. First, the text makes clear that we exist because we are the creation of God. We are not here as the result of the meaningless interaction of physical forces. We are not here because we evolved from the primordial slime. We are here because God took the dust of the ground and from it, fashioned a living soul. He had a reason for doing that, so it follows that we have a purpose.

Second, we must compare God's statement of intent with what He did. The Scripture says of us, unlike anything else that God made during the six days of creation, that God's goal was to fashion something according to His own image and likeness. We are, in essence, God's self-portrait. However, this doesn't mean that God physically looks like any of us. Instead, the means that God used to give us life reveals the likeness we share with Him. He breathed His own Spirit into our nostrils to give us life. We are made in His image not in our outward form, but in our inward reality, for in our spirits, we are just as immortal and eternal as He is in His Spirit. Fido and Fluffy and all the other animals aren't made in the image of God. They will perish when the earth is burned up, if not before. However, we are, and the resemblance that we bear to God that we can't even see is the first thing that He notices whenever He looks at any one of us.

However, those of us who are Christians are not only His physical creation, but also His **SPIRITUAL CREATION**. Read with me from Ephesians 4:22-24. At first glance, this seems like an odd description. Most of us here have witnessed several baptisms. We know from reading the Scripture that it's an extremely important step, but there is nothing about it that's especially visually impressive. Dude goes down into the water, comes up wet and happy.

What the Biblical description of our salvation as a re-creation should do for us, though, is to emphasize the radical nature of the change that we cannot see or even feel. When we are baptized, God isn't doing some minor repair work on our souls. Instead, He is transforming us utterly. The transformation is so great that the Scripture can only compare it to the transformation of a pile of dirt into Adam, the first man. If we refuse the call to be baptized, we cannot experience that re-creation. When we are, though, the old man of sin is replaced with an entirely new creature.

Only when we understand this Biblical imagery of the new creation can we begin to answer the question the sermon poses. It's not like God created us with Plan A in mind, was surprised by sin or Israel's rejection of Jesus or some other event, and made up a stopgap Plan B in reaction. Instead, both the physical creation of mankind and our spiritual re-creation are part of the same Plan A that God devised before the foundation of the world. His motivations have always been the same, and if they apply to one part of the process, then they also apply to the whole thing.

Once we acknowledge this, we can turn to Ephesians 1 for a fairly straightforward explanation of the Father's motivations. First, He created us **TO BE WITH HIM**. Read with me from Ephesians 1:3-4. In many ways, God's aims in creating us are similar to our aims in choosing to have children. Lauren and I made that decision because our lives felt lonely and incomplete without them and because we hoped, and indeed still hope, that they will be a lifelong source of companionship and consolation. So too it is with God. He made us because He wanted to share eternity with us.

However, our sins create a massive obstacle for God's plan. He wanted us to be free-willed people, so that we could freely choose to be with Him, but invariably, we also use our free will to sin. God is holy and perfect; we are anything but. In order for us to be people whom He could stand to have around, He had to re-create us. Once again, only people who choose to be spiritually renewed will be, but in that process, He brings us to a state of holiness and blamelessness. That fits us for fellowship with Him. Because we have been re-created, we can walk with Him throughout our lives, and once that walk is over, we can rest eternally with Him in heaven. This seems complicated to us, but every step of the process is necessary. This is the only way that a perfect God could spend eternity with a perfect people that still was able to freely chose to love Him. God created us, and indeed everything, to make this possible.

Second, God created us **TO GLORIFY HIM**. Paul raises this point in Ephesians 1:5-6. A couple of months ago, my family and I went on vacation to the mid-Atlantic states, and while in Pennsylvania, I spent a day or two touring the battlefield at Gettysburg. For those of you who have never been to a Civil War battlefield, one of the most noteworthy things about such places is all the monuments that are set up everywhere. There are monuments to regiments, sometimes marking out the entire position where the regiment was deployed in battle. There are monuments to generals, big bronze statues of men on horseback. There are even monuments to states and the men they contributed to the battle. Presumably, all of these monuments were erected so that when people like me visit the park, our minds will be recalled to remember the courage and fortitude that those men showed on those three bloody days.

What Ephesians 1 tells us is that God is in the monument business too. His physical creation proclaims His divinity and power, but most of all, He created and re-created us as His memorials. We are the monuments that He set up to proclaim the greatness of His victory over Satan, a victory that nobody but God Himself could have won. Through eternity, no angel nor any other spiritual being will be able even to look at us without being reminded of God's glory.

Jesus and Creation

Second, just as we can look Biblically at why God did what He did, we can consider Jesus' motivations from the perspective of the Scripture too. Before we go any further, though, let's take note of Jesus' role in creating us. First, He is our **PHYSICAL CREATOR**. Lots of passages talk about this, but let's focus on John 1:1-3. In Scripture, there are some hard things to understand, and the nature of and the precise relationship among the persons of the Godhead is one of those things. As we would expect when God is our Creator and we are His creation, God is much more complex than we are, and when we try to understand His identity in human terms, that's about like Marky trying to work calculus problems. Regardless of our ability to comprehend the big picture, though, we can understand the pieces that God reveals, and one of those pieces says that all things were created through Jesus. We see evidence of this in the "Let us" dialogue of Genesis 1, and John gives us more insight into how this happened when he describes Jesus as the Word. God doesn't have a literal mouth; God doesn't have literal lips, yet the text tells us that He spoke creation into existence. Well, when He said, "Let there be light", Jesus was the Word that He said. Jesus was the power and force through whom everything came into being, our selves included.

Second, Jesus is our **SPIRITUAL CREATOR** too. Consider Galatians 6:14-15. Paul's logic here is very interesting. As always, he emphasizes what a humble people we should be. When it comes to our own actions and the effect they have had on our spiritual state, we have nothing to boast about. We cannot renew ourselves in God's image. However, we can boast in Jesus. When He was crucified, it was not merely His body that died on the cross, but our old selves too. Through His selfless sacrifice, we have become an entirely new creation. This awesome act is the most impressive thing that anyone has ever done, and we can proclaim the power of Jesus to accomplish His work. Just as He was the agent of our physical creation, so too our spiritual re-creation can only be carried out through Him.

When we consider all that the Lord has done for us, from giving us life in the first place to making it possible for us to inherit eternal life, we are almost compelled to ask why He would do such a thing. When He has given up so much, what did He hope to gain from it? Here too, there's a passage that provides us with the answers we're looking for, Jesus' high-priestly prayer in John 17. In this text, Jesus lists three goals that He hopes to accomplish by creating us. The first is **TO MAKE US ONE** with Him. Read with me from John 17:22-23. This is extremely intimate language. Normally, when the Bible talks about two becoming one, it's speaking of physical union, such as between man and wife. Jesus here is praying that we may know a spiritual union that is every bit as deep and intimate.

Many of our human relationships were ordained by God to give us some insight into our relationship with Him. For instance, the parent-child relationship is a type of our relationship with God as our heavenly Father. In the same way, the relationship between husband and wife is a type of the relationship Jesus shares with His church. For most of us, our marriages are the most important earthly relationships we will have. Our spouses are important to us in a way that no one else is. They know us better than anyone, and we share more with them than we do with anyone else. All of those things tell us about the relationship that Jesus wants to have with us too. He longs to have that profound connection with us, not merely for our time on this earth, but eternally, and He created us to make that connection possible. He desires this so greatly that He gave up everything He had to accomplish it, and when we turn aside to sin, He responds with jealousy, just like we would be jealous if our husband or wife were unfaithful to us. Only through faithfulness and single-minded devotion to Him can we participate in the union that Christ desires, both in this life and in the life to come.

Second, Jesus created us **TO SEE HIS GLORY**. Along these lines, let's look at John 17:24. Our first take on this is that this seems vain to us. However, we must recognize that Jesus isn't saying this because He matters to Himself. He's saying it because we do. All of us want to be appreciated by those we love. That's why little kids want their parents to take the drawings they did at school and hang them up on the refrigerator, even when those drawings look like they depict tentacled alien squid monsters rather than anything found on planet Earth. Every wife appreciates verbal and physical gestures of affection from her husband. Even men like to know that their loved ones respect the work they do.

All of those opinions matter to us because the people providing the opinions matter to us. In the same way, Jesus, whom none of us have ever even glimpsed in the flesh, wants us to come to know and appreciate Him for who He is. This desire for our appreciation and even worship, freely given, moved Him to create us in the first place.

Finally, Jesus created us **TO DISPLAY HIS LOVE**. He makes this point in John 17:26. Here, we're shifting back a little bit from the husband-wife model of our relationship with Jesus to the parent-child relationship, which is still appropriate, because He's our Creator too. One of the things that we most enjoy seeing in our children is the expression of the traits that we ourselves hold most dear. A few weeks ago, I was eating breakfast with Zoë, and she gave me a look, a half-smile with a knowing twinkle in her eye, that was one of my mother's favorite expressions. It looked like my mother looking out of my daughter's eyes. When I mentioned this to my father, he got extremely interested. I got the feeling that he was just about to ask us to drive down to Missouri so that he too could watch for the living echoes of the woman he was married to for 50 years and still loves.

It makes sense that God has the same desire with respect to us. We are his children, after all, and one of the hallmarks of children is their likeness to their parents. We resemble Him not in what we look like or how we act, but in who we are, and one of the most important aspects of who God is, if not THE most important aspect, is His love. The love that we reveal is the center of our family resemblance to God. More than anything else, God wants to look at us and see that, and when He can see it, He takes such joy in it that He wants to spend eternity with us.

As parents, we have goals for our children. As the children of our parents, I think most of us would say that one of the ways we honor our parents is by fulfilling those goals. It matters to me deeply that I know that before my mother died, she was proud of me. It matters to me deeply that my father is still proud of me, and I don't ever want to do anything that would disappoint him.

How do things stand, though, between us and God? He loves us even more than our earthly parents do, and He is deeply invested in the decisions we make. Are we carrying out the goals that He has for us? Can our heavenly Father be proud of us? Or, instead, are we wrecking His aspirations for us? Let's think about this as we partake.

Fulfilling Our Purpose

Finally, we're going to consider what it is that we ought to do to fulfill God's purpose in creating us. First, we must note that **FAILURE** is possible. Let's consider Romans 1:24-25. One of the most bizarre aspects of the modern religious world is the belief that because God loves us, He doesn't really have any standards for our conduct and allows us to do what we want. I could stand up here from now till midnight citing and explaining passage after passage that demonstrates that God actually does care a lot about what we do. This morning, though, I'm going to take a simpler tack. In ourselves, in our own human experience, is it true that the more we love someone, the less we care about what they do? Or is it instead true that the more we love someone, the more we care about what they do? I don't know about the rest of you, but when somebody else's kid starts screaming in the middle of the assembly, I'm able to shrug that off. It's an inevitable part of having members with small children. When it's my kid, though, that's a whole different matter. That needs to stop immediately. Why? Because it's my kid, and they and I are so emotionally intertwined that I cannot detach myself from them. A God who doesn't care about sin in our lives isn't a loving God. He's an apathetic God.

Because God does care so deeply about the choices that we make, because His aspirations for us are so significant, it is possible for us to disappoint Him, and disappoint Him badly. We inevitably do this when we worship and serve the creature rather than the Creator, when we make our lives about ourselves instead of about Him. When we do that, we hurt God so deeply that we leave Him no choice but to detach Himself emotionally from us, and ultimately to send us away from Himself eternally, to the place where everyone goes who is indifferent about God.

If we don't want to fail God, we must first **REMEMBER** Him. Solomon advises this in Ecclesiastes 12:1. Although this verse is specifically addressed to the young, it applies to everyone. It defines the way that we must consider our lives and ourselves. Do I believe that I'm here on this planet to wander around doing whatever I feel like? Or instead, do I owe a responsibility to God for creating and re-creating me, so that I have to spend my time on earth serving Him? If the latter is true, that's the way we need to think about each of our days. One of my personal quirks is that I like to pay attention to what the first thought that passes through my mind every morning is. Some days, I wake up thinking about God, His people, and the work that is before me, and when I do, I think that says positive things about my mindset. On the other hand, sometimes those first conscious thoughts are about a computer game or Mizzou football or something else unimportant like that, and when I start thinking that way, I get concerned about the direction that I'm headed. You know, the devil doesn't really care what the focus of our lives is, as long as that focus isn't God. To him, one distraction is as good as another. We need to fight against distractions by being aware of where our priorities are, and if they aren't where they should be, by taking a moment to re-center our lives on God through meditation and prayer.

Second, we also fulfill God's purpose for our lives when we **WALK IN GOOD WORKS**. Paul makes the connection here in Ephesians 2:10. The idea of walking in these good works instead of merely doing them is extremely important. We all know what a walk is. It is a continual progression from our starting point that doesn't end until our

destination. We might pause from time to time to catch our breath or tie our shoes, but the overall pattern of that walk is forward movement. If I don't have a goal in mind, or if I'm not moving, I'm not walking. All these things are true of our spiritual lives too. Our walk with God is supposed to be a consistent progression of good works that only reaches its conclusion when we get to heaven. We're not supposed to be on a spiritual treadmill, doing the same thing over and over again until we die. We're supposed to be moving forward. We were created for those good works, and they were created for us. That's the way that God wants His people to live, constantly seeking to imitate Jesus. Every one of us is at a different place in our walk with God, so I can't provide specific prescriptions for what forward progress looks like. However, each one of us need to know our spiritual strengths and weaknesses, and be making progress in both.

Finally, if we want to fulfill God's purpose for us, we must **TRUST** Him. Read with me from 1 Peter 4:19. In the abstract, we think of doing good as something that will benefit us in earthly terms. Sometimes, that's true. Sometimes, though, the benefits of sin look a lot more impressive than the benefits of righteousness. In fact, there are even times when in earthly terms, righteousness is worse for us than sin would be. Take, for instance, the martyrs of the first century. They didn't see some earthly benefit for following Jesus. They died for it, and they were willing to die because they trusted God. They believed that He would bless them for fulfilling His purposes instead of their own, and they believed that so strongly they forfeited their own lives. Do we believe that? Are we willing to reject the passing pleasures of sin for the joy of an eternal inheritance? Are we willing to be so noisy about Jesus that we must endure the shame and reproach of others for the sake of living forever with Him? If we trust Jesus when He makes those promises to us, we will do what is right. If we don't, we won't.