

Sermon Outline

EQUAL IN THE IMAGE OF GOD

GENESIS 1:26-27

I. A Singaporean Conversation with Scripture

II. Based on Justice and Equality

- A. This National Day, we consider the cherished principle of *equality*.
- B. Equality is one of the cardinal values of our nation.
 - 1. It is one of the five stars on our national flag.
 - 2. It is one of the key tenets that each Singaporean has sworn to uphold: “to build a democratic society based on justice and *equality*...”
- C. How does our heavenly Father want us to be thinking about this equality that we love so much? How does God want us to go about fulfilling this pledge to equality that we have made?
 - 1. If we do not ask those questions, we risk defining equality in ways that do not advance the glory of God or the good of others.
 - 2. But once we have asked those questions, we have begun to bring Singapore into conversation with Scripture.

***Questions for reflection:** (1) Why are Singaporeans obliged to uphold equality? (2) Why must we bring equality into discussion with Scripture?

III. An Equal Opportunity Minefield

- A. But equality means different things to different people.
- B. A growing number of people today believe that equality means everyone’s opinions and views are equally right.
 - 1. There is ultimately no right and wrong, so long as you are not inflicting harm on others.
 - 2. A manifestation of this vision of equality is in the homosexual movement: “It doesn’t matter what your sexual orientation is—live and let live!”
- C. It is not a simple thing to talk about equality.
—Even if you think your view of equality is right, there would be many others who would not.
- D. Why does it even matter what the Bible says about equality when our views may never see the light of day, politically speaking?
 - 1. The Word of God must be heeded, regardless of what those of other religious faiths may say.
 - 2. Christians do not take the lead from the popular opinions of our society.
—We do not decide what needs to be discussed based on what people think is important.

3. We take the lead from our Lord Jesus Christ, who speaks through the Scriptures and teaches us how to be wisdom for the world.
 4. We believe whatever our Lord tells us to believe; and obey whatever he tells us to do.
 5. If our Lord has views on what equality should look like in a society, then we have to listen to what he says.
- E. But the wonderful thing about living in a democracy is that you *can* have your views heard and felt.
- F. It is with those considerations in mind, let us proceed to our passage—Genesis 1.
- G. Genesis 1:26-27 shows us the common denominator that is shared by all human beings—the image of God.
- H. Any attempt to discuss equality in a truly *Christian* way must begin with these truths:
1. We uphold equality because God made each one of us in his image.
 2. Because we are made in God’s image, equality must serve the purposes of God—not distract us from it.

***Questions for reflection:** (1) Why should we talk about equality even if our views may never be accepted (in part or in whole) by our society? (2) What makes discussions of equality so difficult? (3) Why is Genesis 1 a good place to start talking about equality?

IV. A Universe Defined by God

- A. Genesis 1:26-27 teaches us that God created and defined the human race.
- B. God created the whole universe using speech.
—Through his divine Word, God creates matter and meaning out of nothing.
- C. We live in a pre-defined universe—a universe that has already been interpreted by God.
1. We are not free to redefine the universe according to our desires or values.
 - a. A rock is a rock, not a flower
 - b. Good is not evil, and evil is not good.
 2. We are therefore to operate within the boundaries of God’s rules.
 3. Sure, God gives us freedom to choose different courses of action within those boundaries.
 4. But we are not at liberty to redefine what God has already set in stone (or in human DNA).
- D. The same goes for equality.
1. Equality must be defined according to God’s laws, not our own.
 2. To define equality in a way that counters what God has already made—that destroys the diversity God himself has placed in creation—is not a good thing!
- E. In all things, we must think according to God’s Word, because it was God who made the universe and not us.

***Questions for reflection:** (1) How did God make the universe? (2) “We live in a pre-defined universe.” What does this imply about how we should conduct ourselves? (3) If God created the universe, what does this mean for our understanding of equality?

V. God Announces the Making of Mankind (Genesis 1:26)

- A. After creating the world and its flora and fauna, God turns his attention to his highest creation—the human race, our first parents, Adam and Eve.
- B. Just before God speaks mankind into being, he makes this declaration: “Then God said, ‘Let us make man in our image, after our likeness.’”
- C. This declaration is important because it shows us...
 - *who* made mankind
 - *what* significance mankind has to God and to the world.
- D. God made the human race.
 1. God, the same Creator who, just a few moments ago, set the stars in their orbits and called the animals into being, made mankind.
 2. There is no hint here of any notion of a “chance” creation.
 3. God was behind the creation of the human race out of dust.
 4. The plural pronoun, “us” may refer to the Community of the Trinity.
- E. God made mankind in his image.
 1. To be made in God’s image is to be made in God’s likeness.
 2. The image of God refers to a combination of three things.
 - a. The image of God is mankind’s *responsibility* to represent God in the world through righteous words and deeds.
 - b. The image of God is mankind’s *physical and psychological ability* to fulfill that calling.
 - c. The image of God is mankind’s *moral compass—the heart*—which aligns them to the will of the Creator God.
 - i. This component may be likened to the “software” of the image of God.
 - ii. Unless this aspect of the image of God is present...
 - (A) all the other aspects of the image of God will not be able to function as such.
 - (B) the other aspects may even function *against* what God desires.
 - e.g. Instead of healing, our hands may be used to hurt others.
- F. The image of God cannot be reduced to one or two components of human existence.
 1. It is not simply the human soul or a human sense of morality.
 2. The entire human being is the image of God (Bavinck, *In the Beginning*, 186).
- G. The image of God implies submission to God—we are *God’s* image/representative, not our own or anyone else’s.

***Questions for reflection:** (1) “Then God said, ‘Let us make man in our image, after our likeness.’ What does this statement tell us? (2) Where in the human being is the image of God found? (3) What are three key components of the image of God?

VI. The Gift of Dominion (Genesis 1:26)

- A. Having declared that they would make man in their image, the triune God grants mankind the gift of dominion: “And let them have dominion...”
- B. Here we see very clearly the functional aspect of the image of God.
 - 1. Since God is the Lord of all creation, to be made as God’s image is to also be a lord.
 - 2. God gives his new creation, mankind, authority over the creatures of the world.
- C. The secular narrative teaches us that religion hampers the development of man.
 - 1. But if we take Genesis 1:26 seriously, we see that this is not so.
 - 2. In fact, secularism itself offers us no ultimate, unshaking basis for either human dignity or rights.
 - a. If everything was made by chance, we can decide whatever meaning we want for ourselves—and for others (which can be scary!).
 - b. In the end, human dignity is rooted in wish-fulfilment.
 - 3. But Genesis 1:26 teaches us that our human dignity and authority is rooted in God himself, for it was God who gave us the right to rule the world.
- D. Because we are the image of God, we are to rule the world in a way that reflects the kind, loving, and life-giving character of our Creator.

***Questions for reflection:** (1) What gift does God intend to give to mankind? (2) “Since God is the Lord of all creation, to be made as God’s image is to also be a lord.” Discuss.

VII. The Creation of Man (Genesis 1:27)

- A. God carries out what he said he would do: “So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.”
- B. There are three discernible parts to this sentence.
- C. First, “God created man in his own image.”
 - 1. The word for “man” here is *adam*.
 - 2. Adam is therefore the name of the first man and the name of mankind in general.
 - 3. All human beings, whether they are male or female, are *adam*.
- D. Second, “in the image of God he created him.”
 - 1. This restates God’s intentions in the previous verse.
 - 2. Adam and all his descendants are made in the image of God.
 - 3. They are made to resemble God.
 - a. Like God, they are rulers.
 - b. Like God, they are able to think, make sense of reality, and execute their plans.

- c. Like God, they are able to be holy and act in righteousness and compassion.
- E. Third, “male and female he created them.”
1. This statement refers to the creation of Eve, Adam’s spouse and companion.
 2. It teaches that the race of *adam* is not a single uniform group.
 3. The race *adam* exists as male and female, men and women.
 4. What does this mean?
 - a. Women are equally the image of God as their male counterparts.
 - b. Since God made mankind male and female, the human race as a whole cannot fully function as the image of God without women.
 - c. While each human being is already the image of God, it takes the entire human race, male and female working together, to show the full glory of God to the world.

***Questions for reflection:** (1) What do the three parts of God’s statement state? (2) What is the name of the human race? (3) How does the human race resemble God? (4) How do women fit into the race of *adam*?

VIII. Equality Is Rooted in the Image of God

- A. Why do we all naturally find *equality* such a captivating idea? Why do we instinctively resent anything that smacks of elitism? Could it be that Genesis 1:26, 27 has been hardwired into us?
- B. Although we may deny this verse of the Bible, although we may be ignorant of what it says, we cannot ever outrun its reality in our lives.
1. Genesis 1:26, 27 is like a program that has been written into each human being.
 2. Like it or not, we were made in the image of God.
 3. Like it or not, both male and female are needed to offer a full vision of the glory of God from the human race—androgyny was not in God’s plans.
 4. If we take Scripture seriously, the only kind of equality that is valid is equality that arises from our common possession of the image of God.

***Questions for reflection:** (1) Why do we secretly resent elitism and arrogance? (2) We cannot outrun the force of Genesis 1:26, 27. It is hardwired into us. How do we rebel against the truths—and get into trouble?

IX. The Image of God Remains But Is Distorted

- A. After the fall, the image of God in man remains.
- Genesis 9:6: “Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed, for God made man in his own image.”
 - Acts 17:28: “For we are indeed his offspring.”
 - James 3:9: “With it we bless our Lord and Father, and with it we curse people who are made in the likeness of God.”

- B. Our Hindu neighbors, Buddhist parents, atheist bosses are still, whether they care to realize it or not, the image of God on earth.
- C. Yet, the fall did change one very crucial thing.
 - 1. While Adam's disobedience did not destroy the image of God in his descendants entirely, it did corrupt the moral heart of his descendants—the most crucial aspect of the image of God.
 - 2. While *adam* still had the physical and psychological capabilities of doing good deeds, they no longer had the moral ability—the heart—to do so.
 - 3. Additionally, God's condemnation placed a curse on all that mankind does.—Although the responsibility to serve God remains, mankind is not even qualified to do that unless they are reconciled to God and given new hearts to obey.
 - 4. The sin of our first parents damaged the image of God so badly that unless God himself renews our hearts (i.e. reprograms us to serve him), we will use the very gifts he has given to serve our own goals.
 - a. Instead of thinking the thoughts of God, we will devote our minds to perversion.
 - b. Instead of speaking the words of God, we will spew the lies of Satan.
 - c. Instead of using our bodies to show the righteousness of God, we will give our bodies over to all kinds of sinful addictions.
- D. Yet, the image of God remains.
 - 1. Thus, even our unbelieving friends can dream of such wonderful virtues as justice and equality.
 - 2. They can pursue peace, progress, and happiness.
 - 3. They can build schools, and shopping malls, and sophisticated computer systems.

***Questions for reflection:** (1) How do we know that the image of God remains even in sinful, unregenerate human beings? (2) What part of the image of God was lost when Adam and Eve sinned?

X. Equality As Second Great Commandment

- A. To practice equality in the way God himself has envisioned is to treat each fellow human being as an image of God, which is simply another way of saying, “love your neighbor as yourself.”
- B. God calls us to respect his image in one another because that is how God's designs for human society are achieved.
- C. Unless we treat one another as images of God, none of the other virtues our nation loves so much can be realized.
 - 1. How do we practice justice if we have no concept of what each person deserves equally?
 - 2. How can we be truly democratic if we don't assume that everyone has the right to an honest and moral opinion about the good of the nation?

3. How can we make progress and peace without mutual respect and compassion?
- D. But we cannot treat one another equally unless we recognize that the image of God is the common denominator shared by each human being.
- E. Government is only one part of society and cannot create equality by itself. —For a society to flourish, citizens themselves need to regularly practice the habits of equality.

***Questions for reflection:** (1) How does equality relate to the second great commandment? (2) Why is the recognition of equality necessary for justice, democracy, and other virtues? (3) What is the necessary precursor to equality?

XI. Habits of God-Defined Equality

- A. The habits of equality are developed and sharpened in the home and in the Church.
- B. Without using the terminology of equality, the apostle Paul in Ephesians 5:22-6:9 teaches us what God-honoring equality would look like in our homes and our places of work.
- C. Ephesians 5:22-6:9 is prefaced by Ephesians 5:21: “submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ.”
—The whole list of duties in Ephesians 5:22 all the way to 6:9—even the authority that superiors exert over their subordinates—are to be done in a spirit of mutual submission, consideration, and care.
- D. The practices of equality are as follows:
 1. Wives are to submit to their own husbands “as to the Lord” (5:22).
 2. Husbands are to love their wives “as Christ loved the church...” (5:25).
 3. Children are to obey their parents “in the Lord” (6:1).
 4. Fathers are not to provoke their children to anger but train them in the Lord (6:4).
 5. Slaves (and present-day employees) are to obey their earthly bosses “as you would Christ” (6:5).
 6. Slave masters (or present-day managers and CEOs) are to stop threatening their workers knowing that they both have one common Lord (6:9).
- E. That is how we practice God-centered, God-defined equality in the details of our lives—by recognizing that we are all servants of God assigned to bless one another.

***Questions for reflection:** (1) How do we know the theme of equality runs through Ephesians 5:22-6:9? (2) How does godly equality show itself in the conduct of a wife, husband, children, boss, etc.?

XII. Equality in Jesus Christ

To practice the kind of equality that pleases God and forms a just society, we need to feel secure enough to show respect to others. We are not saying that we

should show respect only when we feel secure. We are saying that unless we feel secure, we will not be able to demonstrate the kind of mutual, God-centered respectfulness that God desires from us in the long-term. After all, how can we practice God-centered equality if we are still thinking that our survival is dependent on putting ourselves above and ahead of others? Once again, we come to the unavoidable basis of all good virtues: We can only do good if we have been joined to ultimate Good himself. We can only practice the equality of the image of God if we have been reconciled to God through the Lord Jesus Christ and are secure in him.

- A. The only way to realize a truly just and equal society is if the image of God in us is healed and restored through the Lord Jesus Christ.
- B. And he has done that.
 - 1. By his death, our Lord Jesus absorbed the condemnation that kept God and us apart.
 - 2. Through his resurrection, our Lord Jesus gives us new hearts that allow us to function as God's image again.
—Colossians 3:9, 10: “Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator.”
 - 3. Our Lord Jesus functions as the new center of each and every Christian.
—Colossians 3:4: “When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.”
 - 4. By his power, Christ reorients the life of each Christian once more around the will of God. Christ Jesus himself becomes the new program of the Christian. He is the life-giving core of the renewed image of God.
- C. In Christ, equality as God envisioned it is finally and truly restored.
 - Galatians 3:28: “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.”
 - Colossians 3:11: “Here there is not Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free; but Christ is all, and in all.”
- D. Our nation's hope is in Christ. Let us not be ashamed of the power of the Gospel.

***Questions for reflection:** (1) How does Christ heal the image of God in us and restore an equal and just society? (2) What does this teach us about the Gospel's power to form and reform our society?