

The Creator's Children-Food Covenant

Genesis 1:26–30

Turn to Genesis 1 please. This is Thanksgiving weekend. It comes at a time of year when most of the harvest is in, and we thank God for providing food. This fall, as every fall since creation, people have harvested a lot of food. It is true that some places have drought and famine for a time, and it can be severe. But it is never worldwide, and every year this earth brings forth a lot of food. That is built right into creation, and we'll look at that today. Genesis 1 tells us why we have Thanksgiving.

1 In God's Image and Likeness, to Rule All Animals – Genesis 1:26

Then God said, "Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground."

By this point in Genesis 1, God has separated light from darkness, and separated land from water, and separated earth from sky. He's made the sun and the moon and the stars, and he's made fish and birds and all the animals.

Then we get to the crown of creation, which is mankind. God made people last. There's a second creation story in Genesis 2, and it is a little different, but there also, men and women are the high point of God's creation.

*"Let us make mankind in **our** image, in **our** likeness."* Who is "our"? Who is God talking to? There are a lot of guesses about this, but we don't really know, so I will drop it. It is plain in the next verse that we are made in God's image, not anyone else's, and we'll leave it at that.

What exactly is it about humans that makes us in the image and likeness of God? That's an important question, and a lot could be said, but I'm not going to say very much. There is some profound likeness between God and us. He modeled us after himself in some very significant ways. In humans he deliberately replicated himself. That much is clear.

In Genesis 1, we are made in the image and likeness of God so that God could put us in charge of fish and birds and all animals. God made us in his image and likeness so he could make us responsible for the rest of life on earth.

The Scripture says to "rule over" fish and birds and animals. "Rule over" them is what it says, but "rule" can have a dark flavour, which is not what God intends. God likes all he made, he thinks it is very good, so we are certainly not to plunder it. Parents take care of their children. Family members take care of each other when someone is in need.

Farmers take care of their land and their livestock. In the ancient world, a good king would manage his kingdom so that everyone in his kingdom was cared for. In Genesis 2, God put the man in the garden to work it and take care of it. That's the kind of "ruling" God has in mind.

Humans are made in the image and likeness of God so that God could put us in charge and we would manage it responsibly. In Genesis 1, that's the main feature of humans made in the image and likeness of God.

2 The Image in Male and Female – Genesis 1:27

*So God created mankind in his own image,
in the image of God he created them;
male and female he created them.*

There are three clauses in this sentence. The first two emphasize "image." In the previous sentence, God is talking to himself. "Let's make mankind in our image and likeness, and let's put them in charge of fish and birds and animals." That's God talking to himself. Now God goes ahead and does what he had previously decided within himself to do. He now created mankind in his image.

Can you see how ludicrous it was for Aaron to shape a calf from gold and then tell Israel, "this golden calf was the god that brought us up out of Egypt"? God already has his image and likeness on this earth. It's us! Many, many humans. And now humans, themselves in the image of God, will make a shape out of wood or stone or metal, and say "this is an image of my god"? The world is full of the image of God, and all these images are *alive*! They live and breathe and move and speak, all eight billion of us.

The third line of this sentence emphasizes female. From the start, humans were male and female. "*Male and female he created them.*" That is somehow bound up in being made in the image and likeness of God. Male and female equally in the image of God.

By the time we get this far into Genesis, we know the two most important things to know about humans. The first one unites us all, which is that we are made in the image and likeness of God. However we define that image, female and male share it equally. That's what unites us.

The second thing to know separates us into two groups. We are either male or female. Those are the two most important things to know about humans, what unites us all and what separates us.

The next three verses describe the Creator's children-food covenant. A covenant is a solemn agreement. This is what you will do, and that is what I will do. We agree like this in small ways with each other all the time, but we don't call those a covenant. But when this agreement has long term effects on both persons' lives, then we call it a covenant. Now to verse 28.

God blessed them and said to them, “Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground.” Genesis 1:28

3 God Blessed Male and Female – Genesis 1:28a

The blessing means that this covenant, what we do and what God does, is shaped and carried by God's goodness to us, by his favour on us. People on earth don't live in a neutral relationship to God. All people live under an umbrella of God's favour. The whole earth is full of his glory, and he continues to give us life and breath and everything else. We are all blessed. The human race is constantly helped and guided and cared for and provided for by God. God blessed male and female from the start, and it continues on at this moment.

When the first couple sinned, God cursed the ground and he cursed the snake, but he did not curse the woman and he did not curse the man. There were consequences for the woman and the man, but no curse. He had blessed them, and he did not take that back. When God spoke to Noah and his sons, after the flood, he repeated this blessing. Humans continue to live under God's blessing.

4 God Commanded Male and Female – the Human Responsibility – Genesis 1:28b

Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground.

This is our part of the covenant. This is what God wants people to do. First, have children, lots of them, grow in numbers. Fill the earth. Then, subdue earth. Outside of the garden, earth is a rough and wild place. Subdue it. Manage it. Make homes and roads and bridges. Make the earth a good place for people. Rule over the animals as a good king would rule and care for his kingdom. That's the human responsibility.

In Genesis 1, God made male and female so they could reproduce. Male and female were designed to have children. Genesis 1 is our first creation story, and Genesis 2 is our second creation story.

In the second creation story, Genesis 2, male and female are made so that they can come together and be one flesh again, because they started out as just one flesh. The second story does not speak of children, it is more intimate, it emphasizes the oneness that a man and a woman can share. But today we're talking about Genesis 1, which emphasizes being fruitful and managing the earth.

5 Food for People and Animals – the Divine Responsibility – Genesis 1:29–30

Then God said, “I give you every seed-bearing plant on the face of the whole earth and every tree that has fruit with seed in it. They will be yours for food. And to all the beasts of the earth

and all the birds in the sky and all the creatures that move along the ground—everything that has the breath of life in it—I give every green plant for food.” And it was so.

Now we get to Thanksgiving Sunday. We have Thanksgiving in fall, when most of our harvest is in, and we thank God for the harvest of food. God's part of the creation covenant was to provide food for people and animals. That was always God's job.

There are many people on earth, and there are many animals, many birds, and many fish. Every one of us and of them is alive today because God kept this Creation covenant. God provides food for people and animals. Nothing ever gets food any other way, ever. God makes food available.

Psalm 145 says, *“the eyes of all look to you, LORD, and you give them their food at the proper time. You open your hand, and satisfy the desires of every living thing.”*

Let's go back to the command to male and female. Be fruitful, multiply, fill the earth, subdue it, rule over the animals. For male and female to keep their part of the Creator's covenant, they first have to covenant with each other. Humans make a baby when one man and one woman come together. That's the only way it happens

But human babies need a lot of care for them to survive. And the Creator's covenant needs them not only to survive, but for them to become responsible well-functioning adults. For humans to keep the Creator's covenant to subdue the earth and care for it, we need to take time to nurture children and guide them so they will be take charge of the earth in a constructive way.

To fulfill the Creator's covenant, male and female need to covenant with each other about having children and raising them. The good news is that males and females all over the world have been doing this right from creation. Many societies never heard of our God, and never read Genesis 1. Nevertheless, males and females come together and stay together and raise responsible children. People without God have done this for a long time. Why? Because God blessed male and female.

There are many, many people on earth, and much of the earth has been subdued, and people have ruled over the animals with varying degrees of nurture. Males and females have done what God commanded, because his command began with his blessing, and that has carried us.

When God commands people, he carries us toward obeying. There have always been men and women that lived single and celibate, and there have always been couples that married but did not have children. The Creator's children-food covenant was with the whole human race, not for any individual person or couple. In broad strokes, males and females have done what God commanded.

And God has done his part. He has provided food for people and animals. By now some of you are nervous that I will leave you eating vegetables for the rest of your life. The food God supplies as part of the Creator's children and food covenant is only plants and fruit from trees.

But after the flood, God said to Noah and his family, *“every bird and every creature on the ground and all the fish are given into your hands. Everything that lives and moves about will be food for you. Just as I gave you the green plants, I now give you everything.”* (Genesis 9:3). God gave us animals for food, along with plants. Covenant: people have children, God provides food.

As I said, it is true that God sometimes sends famine. In Genesis, in the time that Joseph was in Egypt, God sent a severe famine over a large area for seven years. God gave Pharaoh two dreams ahead of time, one about cows, and the other about stalks of grain. Joseph interpreted the dreams and told Pharaoh, *“the reason the dream was given to Pharaoh in two forms is that the matter has been firmly decided by God, and God will do it soon.”* Why did God do this? Genesis gives no hint at all. We don't know. But he does sometimes send famine, then and now.

But when we eat, it comes from God, always. Psalm 104:27–30: *All creatures look to you to give them their food at the proper time. When you give it to them, they gather it up; when you open your hand, they are satisfied with good things. When you hide your face, they are terrified; when you take away their breath, they die and return to the dust. When you send your Spirit, they are created, and you renew the face of the ground.*

Earlier, Psalm 104 said, *“The lions roar for their prey, and seek their food from God.”* When lions roar, they are asking God for food. God gave humans animals to eat, and God also gave animals to each other for food. It is a hard reality. Animals preying on animals is not a pretty sight. God does not like it either, and has planned something better.

Isaiah 11 - *The wolf will live with the lamb, the leopard will lie down with the goat, the calf and the lion and the yearling together; and a little child will lead them. The cow will feed with the bear; their young will lie down together; and the lion will eat straw like the ox. The infant will play near the cobra's den, and the young child will put its hand into the viper's nest. They will neither harm nor destroy on all my holy mountain, for the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea.*

It is not like that yet. For now: *“the eyes of all look to you, LORD, and you give them their food at the proper time. You open your hand, and satisfy the desires of every living thing.”* Meister Eckhart was a German theologian and mystic around the year 1300. He said, “If the only prayer you ever say in your entire life is ‘thank you,’ it will be enough.” Amen.

PRAYER: Almighty God, all creatures, including us here, look to you to give them their food at the proper time. When you give it to us, we gather it up; when you open your hand, we are satisfied with good things from you. Thank you for feeding us and all your creatures for such a long time. Amen.

BENEDICTION: The LORD bless you and keep you; the LORD make his face shine upon you and be gracious to you; the LORD turn his face toward you and give you peace. Amen. Go in God's peace to love and serve the Lord.