

## **Introduction**

How many of you know the name Peter Singer? Singer is a humanist and internationally acclaimed bioethicist. Listen carefully to something he said that will startle many of you: **"We can no longer base our ethics on the idea that human beings are a special form of creation singled out from all other animals. Why should we believe that the mere fact that a being is a member of the species Homo Sapien endows its life with some unique, almost infinite value?"** Let me personalize what Singer is asking? Why should I believe that I'm more valuable than my dog Isaac or the pig in any farmer's barn?

That's a valid question and Genesis 1:24-31 answers it. This text reveals that human beings are uniquely valuable and why and that's what I'm going to preach about today.

## **God's Stamp**

Verses 24-31 record what God made on the sixth day of creation. It was animals and man (human beings). He made them the same in one way in verses 29-31. Both would need to eat (fruits and plants) to live. But He also made them different in two ways. First, in verse 28, He made man more capable than animals and challenged him to take dominion over the whole earth. Second, in verses 26-27, He made man **"in His own image."**

Now, that image in man is the decisive difference between animals and him. It's what makes human beings special, unique, of all the living creatures on earth. My dog Isaac is not in God's image. The farmer's pig is not in His image. But I am – and so are you. Human beings have what no other part of creation does. It's what I call the "stamp of God." That stamp is His image in us.

Verse 26 defines that stamp more particularly for us. God said, **"Let us make man in our image, according to our likeness."** Notice that there is no **"and"** between the words **"image"** and **"likeness."** That

implies that those words aren't meant to have different meanings. They're meant to reinforce each other instead. To be made in the image of God, therefore, is to be made in the likeness of God.

An analogy helps explain what that means. A celebrity news website called TMZ held a Father-Son Look Alike Contest. A father named Corey and his eight month-old son Corey Jr. were one of the top five picks. I'll show you their picture on the power point. It's striking isn't it how much Corey Jr. looks like Corey. He's "**the spitting image**" of his father as we say it. We say that even though his father is probably 10 times heavier and bigger than he is and even though his father's levels of consciousness and activity far exceed his. Despite those differences, Corey's likeness is expressed visibly through his son.

It's like that with God and us. Just as Corey Jr. is in Corey's image, so human beings are in God's image. Just as Corey's likeness is expressed through his son, despite the differences, so God's likeness is expressed through human beings, despite the differences.

That doesn't mean we look like Him because, as we know, He's spirit and has no physical form. What does it mean then? Philosophers and theologians have been speculating about that for centuries. Not surprisingly, they've defined His likeness in us in terms of their own principal concerns. Enlightenment thinkers believed His likeness is our ability to think and reason. Pietists said it's our spiritual faculties. Victorians claimed it's our ability to make moral judgments. And Renaissance thinkers declared it to be our creativity. Today, in our psychology driven culture, it's defined as our capacity for personal relationships. Well, the truth is that they're all right. All of those are ways that we convey something of the Creator. God is rational, spiritual, moral, creative, and personal and we are "**like**" Him in those ways.

The National Health Institute recently announced it's going to start using lawyers instead of rats to experiment on – for three reasons. First, there are more lawyers than rats. Second, the researchers sometimes get attached to the rats. And third, there are some things rats won't do.

Or how many of you know how to use chopsticks. I don't. That's why I appreciate the one who invented these. They're called "Beginner's Chopsticks," attached at one end. Anyone can use them, including me.

Human beings have a sense of humor because God, in His own way, does. Human beings are creative (inventive) because God, in His own way, is. Our sense of humor and creativity illustrate how we are unique in all of creation. We bear God's stamp, which is His image in us.

That is without doubt the most significant fact about us and its implications are profound. The Bible develops two of those implications in particular, both of which I want to explain.

### **Stamp of Value**

First, God's image in us is His stamp of value. The Bible teaches us that in Genesis 9:3-6. In those verses, God permits people to kill animals for food. But He prohibits people from killing people and explains why in verse 6, "**For in the image of God He made man.**"

Those verses make it clear. Peter Singer is wrong. The mere fact that a being is a Homo Sapien (a human being) endows its life with unique significance. Every human being, without any exception, has infinite value, immeasurable worth. Why? It's because human beings have God's stamp of value upon them. They have His image in them.

Notice what I didn't say is God's stamp of value. It isn't appearance. It isn't power. It isn't wealth. It isn't achievement. It isn't intelligence. It isn't talent. I mention those things because they're what our secular world bases value on and people buy into it. That's why, for example, people generally treat surgeons more respectfully than they do orderlies or cooks.

Or consider "**Physical Attractiveness Phenomenon,**" also called "**Lookism.**" Gordon Patzer, who is considered an expert on the subject, defines it this way. It's "**treating people in ways biased by their level of physical attractiveness; with benefits to individuals higher in physical attractiveness and detriments to individuals lower in**

**physical attractiveness.”** The result, Patzer claims, is that small differences in looks translate into big consequences in life. He’s right about that. James Dobson, for instance, observes that most adults give attractive children more attention than they do unattractive children.

But we as followers of Jesus will have none of that. We don’t judge people’s value on the basis of appearance, power, wealth, achievement, intelligence, or talent. We’re in touch with reality. We judge their value on the basis of God’s image in them instead.

James 3:9 illustrates how this works out in practice – in our everyday lives. In the previous verses, James teaches us the most important truths about the tongue that we’ll ever learn. He then states about it in verse 9, **“and with it we curse men, who have been made in the likeness of God.”** He observes there that we attack people with our tongues and then attaches an addendum, **“who have been made in the likeness of God.”** When was the last time we gossiped about someone – or spoke harshly to someone? The addendum teaches that we ignored and dishonored God’s stamp of value on them when we did.

The broader calling of that addendum is clear. Recognize and honor God’s stamp of value on the people we live and deal with everyday. Treasure them and treat them well. On the one hand, don’t say or do things that harm them. On the other hand, do say or do things that help them. Always desire and pursue their good.

A Christian I knew decided to sell his 2004 Ford Taurus, which was worth \$5,500. But thinking he would have to dicker, he advertised it for \$6,000. To his surprise, a woman looked at it several days later and offered him what he asked. He wouldn’t take it though. He sold it to her for the \$5,500 price he knew it was worth instead.

Let’s analyze his action in terms of James 3:9. He recognized something about the woman who offered to buy his car. She had God’s stamp of value on her. He could have ignored and dishonored that stamp by harming her; by selling her the car for more than it was worth. But he didn’t. He honored that stamp by helping her instead.

May you and I, in all our dealings with all people in all contexts, do the same. Remember, God's image in people is His stamp of value.

### **Stamp of Ownership**

But it's more than that. It's His stamp of ownership as well.

Jesus Himself illustrated that in Matthew 22:20-21. He asked the Pharisees a question about a coin, "**Whose likeness and inscription is this?**" Notice the word "**likeness**" there. Anyway, the Pharisees answered, "**Caesar's.**" To which Jesus replied, "**Then render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's; and to God the things that are God's.**" There was an inherent assumption in what Jesus said. The image of Caesar was on the coin. And it belonged to him because it was. In the same way, the image of God is in us. And we belong to Him because it is. Just as Caesar's image was his stamp of ownership on the coin, so God's image is His stamp of ownership on us. Just as Caesar owned the coin, so God owns us. We are His!

Jesus explained what we should do because we are. He declared to the Pharisees in verse 21, "**Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's; and to God the things that are God's.**" He was saying that because the coin was Caesar's, the Pharisees should give it to him. He is saying that because we are God's, we should give ourselves to Him.

In his journal, Quaker John Woolman described an experience he had that defines how we do that. While centering down one day, he heard a voice that said, "**John Woolman is dead. John Woolman is dead. John Woolman is dead.**" Puzzled by what it meant, he decided to go spiritually deep in order to find out. As he went deep, he felt divine power prepare his mouth, leading him to declare out loud, "**I am crucified with Christ.**" Then, according to his journal, "**the mystery was opened and I perceived . . . that the language 'John Woolman is dead' meant no more than the death of my own will.**"

That's how we give ourselves to God. We die to our own will. In his classic book *The Cost of Discipleship*, Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote, "**When**

**Christ calls a man, He bids him come and die.”** He was right. Jesus calls us to die to our will and to live for His. Richard Foster calls what I’m talking about living life in the passive voice. We let our life be willed through us – by God. We make His will our will.

In the context of engaging Jesus and His kingdom at hand, we do three things. First, we learn what He wills by studying the Bible and being sensitive to the Holy Spirit’s still small voice. Second, we purposely reject what we want; when and as we want it. And third, we purposely pursue what God wants instead. Notice I said **“purposely.”** At first, dying to our will and living for God’s takes intention and effort. But as we persist, the Holy Spirit gradually transforms us so that it eventually becomes natural more than purposeful.

The opportunities to make God’s will our will are countless. Four years ago, for instance, I studied the Book of Jude and discovered in verse 16 what God wills. It’s that I not **“grumble”** or **“curse my luck,”** as the Greek word means. I stopped and made a list of the things I tended to grumble about, including Ohio’s weather. I then restrained my tongue and didn’t grumble about those things and others when I wanted to. At first, not grumbling was intentional. It took effort. But now it’s more natural than intentional. I’m not as inclined as I was to grumble. That might seem like a small thing to you but it’s in all things, big and small, that we should honor God’s stamp of ownership on us.

## **Conclusion**

I close this morning with the words of St. Augustine: **“Men go abroad to wonder at the height of mountains, at the huge waves of the sea, at the long courses of the rivers, at the vast compass of the ocean, at the circular motion of the stars; and they pass by themselves without wondering.”** The greatest wonder in the universe is you, me, and everyone around us. We’re in God’s image. We have His stamp of value and ownership on us. Let’s leave here and live like it.