

## Prayers

### **To God**

It is a wonderful and glorious thing Lord Jesus, for us to receive the blessing of Your presence. The world does not understand it, and we cannot fully explain it, but we can know it with certainty through the inner witness of the Spirit. May we rejoice in the help and assurance You give us, and testify to others of this life changing power. Glory be to You, Lord Jesus: AMEN

### **For myself**

*Pray today for your closest family member. Pray for this person with care and with love, pray for his or her needs and his or her aspirations. Pray also that your words and actions will support and encourage this person in the years ahead.*

### **For others**

Weekly theme: Justice

*Pray for all who work for voluntary organisations in various countries of the world, seeking to create a better world for the majority of people who are poor and in need.*

## Meditation

Now, let us truly honour God– with conviction.

Give thanks for the mercy of Christ – without doubts;  
Offer every part of life to Him – without objection;  
Love each person that we meet – without question;  
Study the eternal Word of God – without complaining;  
Spend time in prayer each day– without exception;  
Support the church at all times – without moaning;  
Do everything possible for the poor – without protest;  
Give all our possessions to Him – without excuses;  
Speak openly about the Saviour – without hesitation;  
Be bold to do what He has said – without dissent;

And let all this come from the heart – with passion.

# Bible Passage

## Genesis 1:26-31

<sup>26</sup> Then God said, 'Let us make people in our image, just like ourselves; and let them rule over the fish of the sea, the birds of the air and the cattle; and over all the earth including all the creatures that crawl on the ground.' <sup>27</sup> So God created people in his image, in his divine likeness; and he created them male and female.

<sup>28</sup> God blessed them, and God said to them, 'Be fertile and increase in number, fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea, the birds of the air and every living thing that moves on the earth.'

<sup>29</sup> God said, 'Look, I have given you every plant that yields seed over the whole earth, and every tree that has fruit with seed in it. You shall have them for food. <sup>30</sup> I have given every green plant for food to everything that has the breath of life, to all living things on earth, all birds of the air, and all creatures that crawl on the ground.' And it was so. <sup>31</sup> God saw everything that he had made, and was indeed very good. Evening came and morning came: day six.

## Review

The sixth day of Creation began in yesterday's reading with the creation of animal life. From verse 26, day six continues here with what is surely the highlight of the whole creation story, the creation of humanity. The passage contains three commands of God, and describes not just the creation of men and women, but their special place within God's world (1:27,28). It also describes the creation of some of the contents of the created world; birds, domesticated animals and insects (1:26). Ultimately, people have the greatest responsibility possible within creation, which is to rule and exercise authority over everything, especially all creatures (1:26,28). They are also told they may eat what they like of the vegetation (1:29).

The making of men and women is the centrepiece of creation because God made them '*in his image*' (1:27). It is extraordinary to think that people are made '*like*' God, but this reveals to us that we must be very close to Him indeed. '*Likeness*', however, is hard to define, and we need to think carefully about what this means. Are there similarities between God and us? It is hard to know at this point within scripture. Is this likeness spiritual or physical, or both, and does our likeness mean that God thinks and feels in a way that is similar to the way we think and feel?

All these are intriguing questions, and the rest of the Bible leads us towards a few answers, but there are many mysteries about us as well as God, and we will never understand them fully while we live in the created world. What we can do, however, is to look at what we know about God from within His creation; for if this is what He has made and He thinks it is good, then it shows us something of His amazing nature and character! At the very least, God is creative and loving, for He cares for what He has made. He likes what He does, so He must like us; then, He seems to have a purpose for everything and everyone created, so our lives must have a purpose within His plan! All these are important matters, but there is so much more!

As soon as we read, there are some surprises awaiting us. To begin with, God describes Himself as more than just one person! He says, '*Let **us** make people in **our** image, just like **ourselves***' (1:26). This could be a shock to us, because we tend to think of God as 'one' being, as a 'singular' entity! However, Genesis says that God is more complex than this, and we should not be surprised. Genesis has already revealed to us one of the different ways we

understand God, for at the very beginning of creation, it was God's Spirit who '*brooded*' over the chaos and created order (1:2). Later passages of scripture speak quite openly of other different ways to experience God; for example, Proverbs describes His presence as like '*wisdom*' (Prov 8:22ff). Then, in the New Testament, we learn that God's son Jesus was present at the events described in Genesis 1, '*in the beginning*' (John 1:1,2ff). Indeed, some texts describe something like a council of heavenly beings as being present at creation (Psalm 8:5, 82:1,6, Job 1:6, Isaiah 40:14), and God speaks to them about His creative power.

There are many different theories about why God speaks as he does when creating things '*let us ...*' (e.g. 1:26),<sup>34</sup> but they all accept that God is more multifaceted than a solitary being. Indeed, this is the first indication in Scripture that God could indeed be described, experienced and understood in different ways, as Father, Son and Holy Spirit at least, whatever place we think the heavenly council has in God's creative work. Some feel that we can justify something of the theory of the Trinity; God as 'Three in One', and 'One in three'. Genesis certainly does not define the multifaceted nature of God, but it points us towards the mystery of His existence and the possibility of the Trinity, at least. This means a great deal to Christian people, and has done so for many years.

The next surprise is to do with the creation of people. We discover as expected that they are made '*male and female*' (1:27). However, the manner in which Genesis describes this suggests that it is not one or other by themselves who is equal to God's '*likeness*', both male and female together equate to God's '*divine likeness*'. So men and women reflect God's 'image'; not one or the other, but both of them, together! If we take this thought one stage further, then we are led to think that when men and women are together they reflect the image of God more fully than when they are separate, and this, of course, is the divine mystery of marriage and the union of man and woman, which reflects the very being of God.

All this sounds radical, but it is easily observable that married men and women find their fulfilment in each other and discover that their life as a couple is a unity, and far richer together than if they were alone. Those who also honour God find that their faith is richer and their lives fuller, reflecting the glory of God. This is not to say that single people who are not married are less 'complete' in themselves than others who are married, but the general experience of humanity is that the bond of one man and one woman is uniquely expressive of human life, and is celebrated in the family. Within this bond God blesses people with the creative ability to conceive and bear children (see also Matt 19:5), and thus continue the creative power of God evidenced in the world. The command to '*be fertile*' (1:28) is an essential part of God's design for the world. In most religions this is celebrated in some formal way, and in most ancient religion sex can be violent and domineering. The picture created here is one of equality before God and also of blessing; for sex is at the very heart of God's plan for men and women.

Beyond this, verses 29-31 describes the relationship between people and the created order; God has ordained that every possible fruit of the earth is available for food for humanity. This last part of our passage is often interpreted as a clear indication that God's perfect intention for humanity is that people should eat only fruit and vegetation! Unfortunately, we must not be taken in by this rather simple way of interpreting the text here. The concern of early people was the appropriateness of all foods and whether God was happy with eating of certain foods, whether meat or vegetation. Here, God effectively pronounces all vegetation 'clean', in a way that is not true of animals for example. Cattle and other domestic animals are mentioned in Genesis, and the names used for these animals (e.g. 1:26) mean animals kept and reared for food. Later books of the Bible speak of divisions between animals and what God considers 'clean' or 'unclean' for human consumption (though the New testament abolished these laws).

The main point spoken of here is that people are given authority over all the vegetation of the world in order to care for it and eat from it as required, and clearly, you cannot eat from it if you simply destroy it, for example, for firewood! Behind the whole of Genesis is the amazing message that God has handed over His creation to the people He has made to live in it. They are to '*rule*' over to (1:28), and look after it (1:30). This, then is the world God has created and pronounced to be '*very good*' (1:31). The work of Creation has been done, though one thing remains, and we will read about it tomorrow!

## **Discipleship**

### ***Application***

#### ***The importance of humanity***

God has not only made the world, but has made provision for its continuance and its governance; but more than that, He has made people special, and distinct from Creation. What is it however, that separates people from animals? It is all very well reading from Genesis and discovering that God has made us special, but today, some would disagree!

Scientists today like to do experiments on monkeys or perhaps dolphins to see whether they can demonstrate language and social behaviour which is like humans. When these efforts are reported, it is implied that the thinking, reasoning and emotional processes discovered in such mammals in some way mimics that of people, so these discoveries are trumpeted as 'narrowing the gap' between ourselves and other animals. It is a sad way of doing science and reporting it; for the difference between animals and people is what has been fully and well described in Genesis; the combination of reason, sexuality, consciousness and logic (all found in animals) taken to a higher level by the authority, rule, evaluative self consciousness and love which is a result of us being made in the image and likeness of God.

#### ***Being made in the image of God***

The study today has raised a host of questions that are very challenging for us. It may be difficult for some to agree what they mean by being '*made in the image of God*', or what it means for God to have made '*male and female*' in His likeness. However, this should at least make us realise afresh how much God loves us and the importance He places on both our presence and our role within the world. And we are not even talking here about salvation, but simply 'running' the world! Big issues are raised for us about our responsibilities for the earth and everything in it.

### ***Ideas for what to do***

- Some say that it is more important to do evangelism than work to prevent environmental disaster on our planet. What do you think? Indeed, what can you do yourself about the state of our world and God's charge to look after it, and how does this relate to the church's task of evangelism?
- Pray and fast for the world in which we live. It is so vast, and yet its problems are acute in this age, and people are very divided on its future. Seek the Lord's will on issues to do with the health of our planet today.

## ***Questions (for use in groups)***

1. Discuss what it means to you to know that you are made in the image and likeness of God.
2. Is there any implied difference here in this text between male and female? What is about the unity of man and women that makes their relationship unique?
3. Is it fair to say that vegetables are the earthly source and sustenance of all life (1:29), or that people should only eat vegetables?

## **Final Prayer**

You, Lord God, can raise a single man or woman to do Your will and through that servant change the world. Work with such power in our midst, we pray, to revitalise both the Church and the world in which we live. This we ask in Jesus' name; AMEN.