Lord,

We exalt You! You are the Lord of Lords, the King of Kings, the Prince of Peace, the Creator of the ends of the earth, the Creator of hundreds of billions of galaxies, with their hundreds of billions of stars. You are the Creator of the tiniest particle beyond our sight and our comprehension. And You are, oh God, our Maker, and it is our purpose and delight to exalt Thee!

Receive our hearts in worship; receive our gifts in worship; and may it all be a fragrant offering that is magnificently blessed to be a blessing. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

SøREN KIERKEGAARD, the Danish philosopher, is the one who first told the story, but I, along with other preachers, have embellished it greatly. It is the story of the duck village and the duck church, where all the duck worshippers would waddle to church each week. They would listen to the duck preacher proclaim the Gospel; they would take up the duck offering; and they would sing the ducksology. Then they would quack at each other: That was a fine message. And they would waddle back home.

Every week, fifty-two weeks a year: waddle to church, go through the motions, hear the message, declare it good, sing the ducksology, and waddle back home, until one Sunday morning. Everyone could tell immediately that something had changed. The duck preacher was animated. He was excited. And as he began to preach, everyone realized that something had happened to him.

He said: Brothers and sisters, something happened to me this week. I began to flap my wings, and I discovered that they could lift me up into the air! In fact, I began to fly! I learned that if I spread
out my wings wide, the wind would cause me to float upward and I could soar through the air! I soared through the clouds and I flew across this land. But then I looked down and saw everyone waddling, and I realized we don’t need to waddle. So, brothers and sisters, I have come here today to tell you, You do not have to keep waddling. YOU WERE MADE TO FLY!

The ducks stood up in the pews and they quacked out, Amen! Amen! Preach it Brother Duck! And the more they said, Amen, the more he preached. We are magnificent creatures. We can fly! We can see things that we never saw before! We can go to heights that we never imagined we could reach! We can FLY!

All the ducks quacked out, Amen! Amen! and the message was over. They then sang the ducksology with all their heart, all their soul, and all their strength, and at the end, there was much quacking in that building as they as they exclaimed to each other: Wasn’t that the most awesome message you ever heard? They all agreed it was FANTASTIC!

And they all waddled back home.

Are you ready for some good news?

You aren’t a duck, but you are made for higher heights. You are made in the image and likeness of God, and as such, you are His representatives on the earth.

GOD OF ALL CREATION

Genesis one has been a glorious meditation on the magnificence of God and the vastness of His creation.

We have meditated on light, traveling at 186,000 miles per second, faster than anything known to us.

We have meditated on a universe, bigger and more vast than we could possibly comprehend, with hundreds of billions of stars, in hundreds of billions of galaxies, all in mind-bending numbers beyond our ability to count them, and in greatness of size beyond our ability to imagine.

We have meditated on the Canis Majoris star, the largest we have discovered, which alone could hold seven quadrillion earths.

What a magnificent God, Who designed an equally mind-boggling intricacy for His creation, and Who called it all into perfect order!

It has been a glorious meditation.

Today we come to Genesis one for the pinnacle of God’s creative work.

26 Then God said, ‘Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.’

27 So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him;

The belief that humanity bears the image of God is referred to commonly from the Latin as the Imago Dei, and this doctrine is one of the most misunderstood and confusing matters for Christians.

Part of this confusion is in the way that we proclaim it, and part is a result of scriptures which seem to be inconsistent with each other.

Isaiah 41:13-14

13 For I, the LORD your God, hold your right hand; it is I who say to you, ‘Fear not, I am the one who helps you.’

14 Fear not, you worm Jacob...

Romans 7:18

Paul says:

For I know that nothing good dwells in me.

Then there are other texts which differ.

Psalm 8:3-5, 9

3 When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, 4 what is man that you are mindful of him, and the son of man that you care for him? 5 Yet you have made him a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned him with glory and honor ....

9 O LORD, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth!
Ephesians 1:3-4

3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, 4 even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him.

So the question is: Are we worms, or are we glorious, crowned creatures? It is very important that we have a clear understanding of the answer to this question, and so I want to lay out for you some building blocks of a doctrine about who you are. And woven into the midst of this is something so important that if you will open your heart to what God is saying to you, it will constitute a paradigm shift, an entirely different way of thinking about yourself and others in this world.

THE PINNACLE OF CREATION

The first building block is to say that Genesis one makes it abundantly clear that humanity is the pinnacle of creation. You are the best, the most complicated, the most wonderful of all of the created order.

Grandeur of the Created Order

As a person who knows very little science, it has been a fascinating and worshipful experience for me to spend time thinking about how numerous are the stars, or how numerous are the molecules in a mole – merely eighteen milliliters – of water; that by comparison, if those molecules were marshmallows, (I’m thinking about s’mores with chocolate drizzled over all those marshmallows!), there would be enough marshmallows to cover the surface of the earth six miles deep. THAT is cause for worship!

The Human Creature

It is fascinating to think about the created order, from the vastness of the universe to the intricacy of the molecules, but it is most important that we elevate our thinking to the point of appreciating the exquisite grandeur of the entire created order. And so today I invite you to something far more glorious than all that previously left us in awe, and that is the human being, the pinnacle of all creation.

Beloved, no matter how you feel about yourself today, I can say with absolute certainty, from God’s Word and from science itself, that you as a human creature are mind-bendingly glorious.

Our physical being

Inside each of the ten to one hundred trillion cells in your body, is six feet of tightly interwoven DNA that is directing every single cell to where it was designed to be, and assigning to it the kind of cell it was designed to be. That DNA is formed from a pattern of cohesion of four basic building blocks that boggle the mind, and we have absolutely no way of explaining how the DNA assists the amino acids in forming proteins, or how those proteins could possibly come together to form something so intelligent that your body could be what it is, aside from knowing that inside every cell there is a machine so complicated it is beyond comprehension.

Our invisible being

But that which is more marvelous than all the wonders of your physical being, is your soul, meaning your consciousness and your mind. No Darwinian can explain the origin of life, but even more so, no Darwinian can explain how it is possible that you have a soul. Your soul is invisible and it is far more elaborate and incomprehensible than your body.

Lee Strobel’s book, The Case for a Creator, is marvelous. In an interview with a scientist about the matter of human consciousness, Strobel says, The fact that the soul and consciousness are invisible makes it difficult to conceptualize them. And the scientist responds:

Sure, that’s true. My soul and my consciousness are invisible, though my body is visible. That’s another distinction. In fact, I remember the time
when my daughter was in the fifth grade and we were having family prayers. She said, ‘Dad, if I could see God, it would help me believe in him.’ I said, ‘Well, honey, the problem isn’t that you never see God. The problem is that you’ve never seen your mother.’ And her mother was sitting right next to her!

My daughter said, ‘What do you mean, Dad?’ I said, ‘Suppose without hurting your mom, we were able to take her apart cell by cell and peek inside each one of them. We would never come to a moment where we would say, ‘Look here’s what Mommy’s thinking about doing the rest of the day.’ Or ‘Hey, this cell contains Mommy’s feelings.’ Or ‘So this is what Mom believes about pro football.’ We couldn’t find Mommy’s thoughts, beliefs, desires, or her feelings.

Guess what else we would never find? We’d never find Mommy’s ego or her self. We would never say, ‘Finally, in this particular brain cell, there’s Mommy. There’s her ego, or self.’ That’s because Mommy is a person, and persons are invisible. Mommy’s ego and her conscious life are invisible. Now, she’s small enough to have a body, while God is too big to have a body, so let’s pray! 1

YOU are the absolute pinnacle of all creation! And even if you feel worthless about yourself today, I am telling you, you are a magnificent machine, and beyond being a magnificent machine, you are a living spirit. You are so awesome in your design that God just had to sit back and say: That’s very good.


We are the image and likeness of God.
In some profound way, we are like God, and we are here on earth representing Him.

THE IMAGE AND LIKENESS OF GOD

The second building block is from Genesis chapter one. Not only do we know that we are the pinnacle of creation, but we are the image and likeness of God. This is to say succinctly that we are like God and we represent God. We are very much like God and we re-present God in the world. To bear an image of someone means that there is a likeness that would be recognizable if you saw the two together. For example, you see someone’s child and you say, Your eyes look exactly like your father’s eyes. Your smile is just like your mother’s smile. You are saying their bearing and image cause you to realize that the two are connected.

The image of God, the Imago Dei, has raised amongst philosophers and theologians such questions as: How is it that we actually bear this image? and, What does it mean to have someone who is representing you? But for initial purposes, it simply means that in some profound way, you are like Him, and you are here on earth representing Him.

WHAT MAKES US LIKE GOD?

As we read the early chapters of Genesis, we begin to see certain characteristics about ourselves as human beings which reflect our unique likeness to God.

Morally

Like God, we are capable of moral choices. Despite culture’s attempts to move toward a moral relativism that says there is no real right or wrong, we know that is simply not true. All you have to do is steal something from somebody, or break in line
in front of them, and they will cry, *That’s wrong!* So, unlike the animal world, we have moral consciousness, and God is like this.

**Spiritually**
Like God, we are spiritual in our nature.

**Mentally**
Like God, we think logically, we use abstract language, we are inventive, creative and artistic.

**Relationally**
We are relational in intricate and intimate ways that no other part of creation is.

So, as we begin to understand who we are, we can see ourselves as the image of God in that we have many attributes which reflect the likeness of God.

**DISTORTED BUT NOT LOST**

It is important to our understanding of ourselves as human beings to know that when sin came into the world, it touched every person, and therefore all were born in sin. As a result, the image of God became distorted, but has not been lost.

**God’s Image in Ourselves**

In Genesis 9:6 there is an interesting reference to our having been made in the image of God. God made this statement after man had sinned, and after the flood: 6 *Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed, for God made man in his own image.* This is showing us that this soon after sin had been in the world, God was saying that it is still wrong to murder someone because they are made in the image of God. So Even though there was a great distortion of man’s image of God at the Fall, the image of God remains in man.

This week while I was going through one of the funhouses at the Dixie Classic Fair, I came upon those convoluted mirrors which cause you to look so funny. One of the mirrors made my fingers look long and boney when I held them up. Of course, you know that’s just not true; I have normal fingers. One of the mirrors made my fingers look really fat. Of course, we know that’s not true. One of the mirrors made me look like I had a big chin, and of course, that’s not true. And one of them made me look short. Can you believe that?

I saw in those mirrors a distorted image of myself, but it was still a real me. The correct image of me was not actually gone, just distorted by the mirror. Likewise, the correct image of God in us is not gone, but it is distorted by sin.

This is important, because, if you begin to see yourself as the image of God, it will change the way you think about and see yourself, even when you are lost in sin.

**God’s Image in Others**

If you see that every person, no matter how distorted, is made in the image of God, it will also change the way you think about other people. This goes far to explain why Jesus said, *If you have done it [shown kindness towards those who were hungry, thirsty, naked, sick or in prison] to the least of these, you have done it unto me.* Regardless of whether that one is justified, born again, growing in the likeness of Christ, or an emboldened sinner, there is a truth that every human being, Christian or not, no matter how distorted, bears the image of God.

**I HAD A GREAT OPPORTUNITY** to put this into practice. Yesterday my seventeen-year old son, Bennett, was in an important statewide golf tournament. He was playing well when his group was held up for five minutes by another group on the tee in front of them, something which only a golfer can fully appreciate. So, by the time they played the hole, the group in front of them had moved on, and Bennett’s group appeared to have dropped behind. The rules official then came around and said that he

Matthew 25:35-40
was putting them on the clock, that from that time on, they had forty seconds to hit each shot or else there would be a stroke penalty each time.

The problem with this, of course, was that Bennett’s group had not been playing slowly. They had been held up because a fellow in the other group had gone back to replay his tee shot, and it had given the appearance that Bennett’s group was slow. But the rules official stuck to his decision, and his decision stuck inside of my son’s head. First, he hit his worst shot of the day. Then, rushing his next shot, he hit the ball into an area of thick grass and was unable to find it, so he had to go back to the tee and play the shot again. That is the worst penalty in golf. Then, he made a triple bogey on the hole, and he had been about even par up to that point. All the while, the rules official was just plain picking on Bennett, standing around with his stopwatch, watching him.

Bennett parred the next hole, but at the end of the hole, the rules official came up to him and he said, I’m giving you a two stroke penalty. One because you took forty-one seconds on the tee rather than forty, and the second because you took fifty-two seconds on your approach shot to the green. By then Bennett had lost five strokes on the two holes.

I just want to tell you what a wonderful opportunity this was for me to put into practice the sermon I’d been thinking about all that day. Any parent would tend to get madder than his kid in a situation like this, because we are designed to take up for them, so I was contemplating saying to that rules official, Let’s talk about that stopwatch...I have an idea of what we can do with it... Honestly, what do you do to calm yourself down in a situation like that, when someone is behaving that way? We don’t know that man at all. I only know that for some reason, he was thoroughly enjoying just ruining my boy’s day out there on the course.

Finally I had to say to myself, Alan, okay. You’re preaching tomorrow so you can’t be in jail. Then I also had to repeat to myself, That man is made in the image of God. That man is made in the image of God. That man is made in the image of God. Would it change how you feel about every human being, if instead of seeing them as worthless slime, you saw them as the pinnacle of God’s creation, His very image on the earth?

Grace to Reflect His Image

The fact that we can be the image of God, yet distorted, also explains why there are people who do not know Christ, yet they demonstrate a lot of the image of God. We were reminded of an example of such a person this week upon hearing of the death of Steve Jobs, who was a Buddhist. He founded Apple, demonstrated the creativity and intelligence of the human race, changed our culture, remained committed to his family, gave money away quietly, and from all appearances, did much good.

How do we explain this? It is because there is common grace that is given to all of us, even those who are apart from Christ, and anything we do that is good is a reflection of the image of God, Who created everyone.

WITHOUT THE WORK OF JESUS

Next in the building of our doctrine of humanity, it is essential that we know that though we are the image of God, without the work of Jesus Christ on the cross, and our acceptance of His saving grace by faith, we are a distorted image, and we are doomed to never fully be restored to our original state, to never fully be like God in the way that He has
planned, and to be separated from Him for all eternity.

Thus when Paul said in Romans 7:18 that nothing good dwells in me, he was referring to his sin nature, or his flesh. He was saying that in his flesh and in his sin nature, in that distorted part of himself, there is no good thing. Everything that is good about us, and everything we ever do that is good – every good decision that we ever make and every good thought that we ever have – originates from God, Who is the author and the giver of every good gift. And so any mention of putting off our self, denying our self, or getting rid of anything that is not good within us – whether it be in Paul’s writings or elsewhere in the Scriptures – the reference is to our old nature, our sin nature, because all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God.

GLORIOUS RESTORATION

The next building block of a good doctrine of humanity is that as Christians, we have been given a glorious restoration of our relationship with God wherein we are entitled to look more and more each day like the image of God that we were originally intended to be.

The joy of the Christian life and the appeal of it is that, though in this world there is still a distortion of the image of God in us, we have the privilege of becoming increasingly, unreservedly like Him. And that is because when we accepted Christ and His saving work, an amazing exchange took place wherein Jesus became our sin, and we became His righteousness!

It was necessary because our sin must be paid for, so Jesus paid that penalty with His own blood, and we were purified from all our sin. Our sin was cast as far as the east is from the west, and our consciences were made clean by the sprinkling of His blood so that we would be without the smallest nagging thought, or recollection of any sin, that could disqualify us from coming into His presence.

And now, we can live a life of ever-increasing sanctification wherein day by day we are moving from glory to glory and being transformed more and more into the very likeness of Jesus Himself. And we are assured that one day we will be glorified and we shall be as He is.

The motivation of your Christian life is not a matter of what you ought to do in order to impress God or anyone else – I ought to pray today. I ought to read my Bible today. Instead, the motivation of the Christian life is a recognition that you are made in the image of God, forgiven fully by the blood of the Lord Jesus, and therefore, entitled to become more and more like Him every day.

Who wouldn’t want that?

KNOWING WHO WE ARE

Our final building block of a good doctrine of humanity is that sanctification, success, and spiritual virtue are joined to the glad, bold affirmation of who we are as the image of God, and as the redeemed of the Lord, destined to be fully as He is.

Worm Theology

Worthlessness

Some say worm theology was coined from the words of the hymn, Alas! and Did My Saviour Bleed, which says: Would He devote that sacred

As Christians, we have been given a glorious restoration of our relationship with God wherein we are entitled to look more and more each day like the image of God that we were originally intended to be. Who wouldn’t want that?

3 James 1:17
4 Romans 3:23
5 2 Corinthians 3:18; Colossians 3:9
6 2 Corinthians 5:21
7 Romans 5:12
8 Matthew 20:28; Romans 6:23
9 1 Corinthians 6:11; 1 John 1:9
10 Psalm 103:12
11 Hebrews 10:22
12 Hebrews 10:19-22
13 Hebrews 10:14
14 Rom 8:29, 9:23; 2 Cor 3:18; Phil 3:21; Col 3:10

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The denial of our magnificence as the pinnacle of creation is not an expression of humility; it is an expression of deception.

head for such a worm as I? 15 I don’t know about that, but I do know that worm theology worms its way into our thinking in subtle ways and sabotages not only the joy of the Christian life, but its power.

While surfing around to see what people are saying and preaching about worm theology, I stumbled upon a blog from a young woman, and it provides an insight into probably what a lot of people think and feel. She wrote:

Before I became a born again Christian at sixteen years old, my problem at that time was that I didn’t have enough self-esteem and self-confidence. I didn’t believe in myself enough, and I didn’t try hard enough to believe in myself which to be honest, I didn’t because ... I wanted to be that, grungy teenager who thought it was cool to revel in my depression and suicidal bent.

Enter in born-again fundamentalist Christianity, she writes. Fundamentalist Christianity says that one must not believe in himself and only in Jesus Christ. Fundamentalist Christianity has no room for self-esteem, requiring a believer to place his or her trust solely in Jesus Christ. Then I entered [what she calls] Protestantism and encountered a softer version of the same thing: Solo Cristo. This really refers to a theological belief of salvation, but this is the prescription of many Orthodox Christians when it comes to problems with self-esteem.

She continued:

For a long time then, I believed self-esteem and self-confidence were wrong ... because my soul worth should be found in God and not in myself. I engaged in worm theology: ‘oh I’m such an awful, terrible sinner. There is no righteousness in me. All righteousness is found in God, and I’m a poor, pathetic, pitiful soul ... and I’m so lucky God saved me because I’m totally worthless otherwise.’

Beginning last week, [This is where it starts shifting for her, just a subtle shift, because our worth is found in Christ], I started reading Jillian Michael’s book, Unlimited: How to Live an Exceptional Life, and started seriously thinking, maybe it’s time for me to walk away from Christianity because I like what Jillian is saying about reclaiming and recapturing my life. I want to have self-esteem. I want to have self-confidence. I want to stop obsessing and feeling like a poor, pathetic little blank all the time.

Deception

There are droves of people who are misunderstanding the Christian gospel, for when the Christian gospel speaks of denying self, being humble and counting others higher than yourself, if you interpret that to mean that God is honored when you consider yourself worthless, in fact of matter, you have dishonored God and you have dishonored yourself. God is most exalted when we most glorify Him. The denial of our magnificence as the pinnacle of creation is not an expression of humility; it is an expression of deception.

The enemy has worked this, and even some of the best voices for the Gospel don’t see this. Following is a statement from a sermon I read this week of one of the nation’s best-known preachers, with whom I most often agree, but look at the turn in what he says as he is speaking about the dangers of pride and narcissism:

That leads today to thinking such as, ‘You can’t love God until you first love yourself,’ that it begins with me.

That point is absolutely true and important: love begins with God, not with myself.

Jesus said, ‘Love your neighbor as yourself... You already do love yourself,’ he says.

Then here is where he comes to the statement that I totally disagree with. He says: We all love ourselves. We need to learn to love others.

We all love ourselves?

It changed my life when one day I was reading the story of the prodigal son and I was thinking: The prodigal son embarrasses his dad, brings shame upon his family, takes his inheritance when he is not supposed to, goes to a faraway land, lives amongst the pagans, parties with prostitutes and ends up eating with the pigs. And we would say, ‘All that boy cared about was himself.’ Really?

15 Isaac Watts, (lyrics), Hymns and Spiritual Songs, 1707; Ralph E. Hudson, (refrain), published as At the Cross, 1885.
This is not a matter of semantics, beloved. To say the prodigal son cared about himself can’t be an accurate statement. If you care about somebody, if you love somebody, would you send them down that road? Think of somebody you love. Would you send them to the prostitutes to go live it up? No you wouldn’t. You’d do everything you could to protect them from such wanton destruction, would you not? Care and love want to protect and bless and move towards a holy life. That boy didn’t care about himself. It was the fact that he didn’t care about himself that made him move down the path of destruction.

Self-condemnation

The problem in our culture is not self love; it is self absorption. There is a fundamental difference between being self-consumed and being self-accepting. If you do not come to the place where you in Jesus Christ can accept yourself and love yourself, the only alternative is to hate yourself. And whoever you hate you want to hurt. You wonder why you are defeating yourself, why you are sabotaging yourself, why you are hurting yourself, why you are removing yourself from joy, why you are removing yourself from the things that are holy and pure and good and righteous, and why you keep on sinning so much. And the more you keep beating yourself up and dwelling upon your sin nature, the more you just keep on sinning.

If you come to a profound understanding, beloved, that you are the image of God, the likeness of God, that in Jesus Christ you are so fully redeemed and forgiven that you are becoming more and more like Him, and that you are positioned with Him, how could you not accept that person that God has already accepted? Your way to improvement, beloved, is not by rejecting yourself, but by accepting the self that God came to save.

I cannot tell you how important this is, because we spend so much time in ministry just trying to move someone through the grace to quit condemning herself. All of hell conspires for our condemnation, but Jesus came not to condemn, but to save and deliver. Why are we condemning ourselves when the God of the universe came and died for us so that we would not be condemned?

Imago Dei Theology

C. S. Lewis said: *We may be content to remain what we call 'ordinary people': but He [God] is determined to carry out a quite different plan. To shrink back from that plan is not humility: it is laziness and cowardice. To submit to it is not conceit or megalomania; it is obedience.*

If you would recognize the greatness of God’s love and purpose for your life, you would not be exalting yourself in a prideful way. You would be obedient to God, and it would be your worship of Him to know who you really are.

CONCLUSIONS

God is not honored, and we are not motivated, when we view ourselves, speak to ourselves and confess to others that we are worthless.

Instead, God is honored and we are motivated when we view ourselves as He made us, in the likeness and image of God. And for the Christian, hope abounds when we meditate upon the good news that we will, one day, be glorified and fully human.

God is honored, and I am less likely to sin, if in the morning when my feet hit the floor, instead of saying: *I feel worthless*, I will honor God more and I will have a more victorious day, if whether I feel it or not, I say: *I am made in the image and likeness of God, and I represent Him today.*

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16 John 3:17

Confession of sin is not the announcement of my worthlessness. It is the announcement that I am worth so much that I have remorse for ever living as though I am worthless.

The law is good in that it shows us our need for God’s grace, and if we are going to live out our destiny as God’s image bearers on the earth, we need His grace.

Confession of sin is not the self-absorbed, morbid self examination that cries: There is nothing good about me. Confession of sin is the acknowledgement that, though I am the image of God, when I sin, I run contrary to my true identity.

Therefore, the meditation on God’s goodness and the acknowledgement of your true identity will lead you into true repentance.

Never forget, beloved, it is the kindness of God that leads us into repentance.  

You will do well to meditate on the goodness of God and understand the destiny and glory for which He has made you, and therein your sin will stand out as that which is contrary to your true destiny.

Christ’s invitation to humility is not an invitation to self-abasement, or self-flagellation. It is an invitation to awe, worship and surrender to God’s greatness, and to the acknowledgement that the only reason that there is anything good in us is that God, Who is good, made us. Pride is not the admission or celebration of one’s giftedness or glory. Pride is the assumption that I contrived my own goodness and therefore do not need God and have no reason to thank Him.

If it is prideful to celebrate the glory of who you are as a human being, then Psalm eight must be blasphemy. God is glorified when you comprehend more and more the glory that He has woven into you. Pride is the assumption that somehow I don’t need God, whereas humility is the joyful surrender, acknowledgement and contemplation of His greatness, that He is the author of everything that is good.

Our problem is that we tend to practice self-absorption rather than self-acceptance. The interpretation of the Gospel to say that we are to love God and others but not ourselves, misses the meaning of love and misses the motivating force for righteous living. When we love ourselves, we are not absorbed with ourselves.

Until you accept yourself, you will be consumed with yourself. Let me express this in the simplest way: If you are consumed with how you look, you will stand in front of the mirror all day and look at yourself. But the person who accepts how they look, can go on and do something more important.

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18 Romans 2:4; 2 Peter 3:9
19 Leviticus 19:2, 20:26; Deuteronomy 14:2
The means by which we know how to be fully human, that is, truly what God made us to be, is not by looking within ourselves, but by looking to Jesus, Who is the true human. He is God and He was human, the perfect human. So if you want to know what you were made to look like, look to Jesus.

It’s wonderful. You can look to Jesus and see who God is, and you can look to Jesus and see who you are meant to be.

YEARS AGO when my little girl, Abigail, was five years old, she was in the readiness class here at Reynolda and she came home with a tadpole to learn how a tadpole grows into a frog. We had gone through this experience with our son, Bennett, whose tadpole grew into a frog within a matter of weeks, and we let the frog go free in a lake. *(I’m sure he was fine).*

But Abby’s tadpole remained a tadpole. This tadpole – I am telling the absolute truth – remained a tadpole for a year and a half! We read science books that said that this was defying all biological principles. So, as any parent knows, once you have a tadpole that has not turned into a frog, there is a rule: you must keep the thing until it becomes a frog.

Now, caring for a tadpole is harder than caring for a frog, because there is for some unknown reason only one suitable food, and that is fresh spinach, which you must boil, then freeze, and feed in very small portions to the tadpole each day. This was not fun for the parents of the tadpole. It was a never-ending tadpole, and we were the first people in America to have a pet tadpole.

Well, one day Abby came home from a camp and, glory be, how kind of them, they sent her home with an aquatic frog. So then we had a tadpole and a frog, and we considered putting them in the same bowl, but my wife said, *No. One of them will eat the other.* And so we put the aquatic frog in its own bowl and positioned it right next to the tadpole on a shelf in Abby’s room.

I am not telling you anything but the absolute truth, and it is verifiable amongst witnesses: within twenty-four hours – the next day – my little girl called me. I was sitting in my office and I will never forget it. She was screaming on the phone: *Daddy, Daddy, Daddy, you can’t believe it! Daddy, you can’t believe it!*

*WHAT can I not believe,* I said. *Calm down, Honey. What are you saying?*

And she said, *My tadpole has grown legs!*

I said, *I do not believe it. I’m coming home!*

I went home and confirmed it. In one night the tadpole had grown legs, and I’m telling you, within about forty-eight hours, which again defied the biological process of metamorphosis, that tadpole shed its tail and *IT BECAME A FROG!* All it had needed all along was to see what it was supposed to look like! We put a frog down next to him and he said, *Oh! I’m supposed to be a frog!* So he dropped the tail, grew legs and became a frog!

Which is to say, look to Jesus, the Author and the Finisher of your faith. Keep looking to Him. You don’t need to try to be fully human. Just keep looking to Jesus, and you will become more like Him.

And *THAT* is the Gospel!

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20 Hebrews 12:2
Father, we are just so thankful to You for the glory of the Gospel, and today I pray, Lord, that You would minister in very deep ways with a great hope, because there are people here today for whom life would change dramatically if You would assure them of these truths. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

An Invitation

If you do not know Jesus Christ, my invitation to you today is, come to Christ. You are made in the image of God, in the likeness of God, but sin is a distortion. Come to Christ and let Him wash you. Let Him rearrange you, so that the image is more and more like Jesus.

Come to Christ and be assured that one day, because of His sacrifice, you will be made perfectly as He is. Come to Christ.

My invitation for you who are heavy laden and carrying deep burdens: come to Christ.21 He cares for you.22 Come to Christ. See Him for Who He is, so He can show you who you are. Come to Christ.

For those who have been wounded and abused, come to Christ and let Him heal you. Let His face shine upon you.23 And for those who are sick: come to Christ. Your healing is not by your own effort; it is not by your sacrifice; it is not based on whether you have been good or bad. It is by His stripes, His sacrifice and effort on your behalf.24 Come to Christ.

Concluding Remarks

God loves you so very much. He made you in His own image and He took great delight when He made you. You are complicated, and the wonderful intricate design of your physical body is astounding. Nobody can figure it out because it is so glorious. But what is even more glorious is that you are a living soul, created for eternity.25 Wow! Crowned with splendor.26

When I think about things like that, I do not begin to feel prideful. I want to worship God, and to go out and live my life to His glory!

May the Lord God bless you and keep you, and be kind and gracious to you. May the Lord make His face to shine upon you and give you His peace today and every day, forevermore. Amen!

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21 Matthew 11:28
22 1 Peter 5:7
23 Numbers 6:22-26; Psalm 80:19
24 Isaiah 53:4-5; 1 Peter 2:24
25 Ecclesiastes 3:11; Rom 8:29, 9:23; Eph 1:3-14
26 Psalm 8:4-9

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