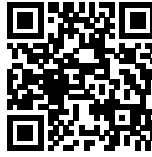




THE LAST APPLE

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Immediately after Adam and Eve disobeyed God in the garden, God said to Adam: "Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat of it, all the days of your life. It will produce thorns and thistles for you." God wasn't joking when he said that; as many can testify.

Fighting the weeds is a perennial problem. I was reading recently where a charity worker and his wife moved out of their one bed flat in London in search of more space. They dreamt of having a garden to explore, digging up worms and generally getting their hands dirty. No harm in that. This couple had found a terraced house in a nearby leafy suburb with a small garden. But there was a major problem.

It had a major bindweed (*Convolvulus*) infestation. For the non-gardeners bindweed is the Terminator of the weed world. It mercilessly smothers other plants twisting itself around their stems with a vice like grip. It has a pretty little trumpet shaped white flower but that is just to deceive you. Its roots can penetrate up to 5 meters into the ground and if even a few centimetres of the root system is left in the soil it will thrive and grow. With the roots being so long it is practically impossible to dig all the root system out and practically impossible to destroy. Anyway, this couple decided to dig the whole garden up with the intention of removing the dreaded bindweed.

After a month of toil, the couple were eventually able to sow a lawn, plant fragrant flowers, roses, and apple trees. The garden was now like what it should have been. After this major dig the husband said that it was the first time in his life he had ever got his hands dirty. His experience is not a one off, for we live in the most sanitised civilization in history, making sure we don't get our hands dirty. However, we tend to forget that God was the first person to get his hands dirty by forming the first human being out of dirt. "The Lord God formed the man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being."

We are all familiar, I'm sure, with how God created the heavens and the earth. In Genesis we are told that on the first day God spoke, he said, "Let there be light, and there was light." On the second day God spoke, he said, "Let there be sky above the earth and it was so." On the third day God spoke, he said, "Let dry land appear and it happened, and so on; until the sixth day. On the sixth day God spoke, and said, Let the land produce living creatures and wild animals."

Also, on the sixth day God spoke, and said, "Let us make man in our image, so God created man in his own image." God simply spoke and everything appeared. But with human kind, you and me, it was

different. God created man. He didn't just speak and it happened as with the other days of creation. When he created man, God got his hands dirty.

Nothing else in all of creation required God to get his hands dirty, except man. Nothing else in all of creation called for that degree of fine-tuning and attention to detail, that depth of involvement and artistry by God. Man was the only created being on earth that was formed by God. Man was the only created being made in the image of God. Animals, or plants or fish or birds or insects were not made in the image of God.

Evolutionists teach in our schools and colleges that there is no divine in man, just dirt. They tell us that man gradually evolved from some primeval form millions of years ago. That we are a random collection of cells and flesh. What utter nonsense. There is no scientific evidence to support such a claim. Only giant leaps and bounds of scientific imaginations. How on earth can a blue whale come from a fish? Where is the biological evidence

Because you and I are made in the image of God, each person has intrinsic value, worth, and purpose. Each person is not a random evolved collection of cells and flesh. Each person has intrinsic value and a living soul. The secular liberal universities in the English speaking West deny this. Their teaching revolves around group identification based on colour, race, gender, and socio-economics. It is divisive, demeaning and godless. It is the group that wields power and pits one grouping against the other. For them the individual is irrelevant and hapless. Incapable of coherent logic.

Have you ever wondered why we are made in the image of God and why did God bother in the first place, putting us on this planet? Sometimes we may feel like the man who said; "I've got a clock that tells me when to get up; but sometimes I need one to tell me, why I need to get up."

If people think that all there is in this life is the material world, they will give themselves over to it and in the end all you have is yourself. It was the author G.K. Chesterton who said; "When you abandon belief in the creator God, people do not begin to believe in nothing, they begin to believe in anything."

The Bible says there is more to life than just you or us. In fact, we are the product of a very creative and loving God. In short, we are to reflect God's image. That is the why bit. Why am I here? I am created by God to reflect His image. Humanity alone is made in the image of God. We are made for intimacy with

Him. We are to be His mind, His attitude, His hands, His heart, His feet.

Amazingly we can communicate with the God of this universe, and God can communicate with us. This is why God cares more about who you are, and what you are becoming, than you do. To be made in the image of God means that we possess some of the features and qualities of the God who made us. Like kindness, love, forgiveness, peace, joy and goodness. Yet because we are all like pools of muddy water because of our sin, instead of naturally reflecting these qualities and relating to God and loving him for who he is, and loving others, we relate much better to possessions, power and the material world around us. We tend to love things and use people, instead of loving people and using things. We have a tendency to find meaning in every created thing instead of the Creator. We become what we love. We reflect what we love and serve. Throughout the Old Testament we read consistently where Israel abandoned their faith for various idols.

God in His wisdom has made us constantly restless, in order that we can find Him and reflect Him to the world; which is why we are here in the first place. We can know what it means to be made in the Image of God; the responsibility and privilege that it carries. There is no greater accolade than to be known by God and to serve Him. Yet, of the many downsides in the world we see today concerns that of Self Image. Self-Image is huge; whether its connected with advertising, or celebrities, reality TV programmes or social media; its ultimately all about self; the persona of "Me."

Sin in its many forms has deformed the image of God in each person. Instead of being clean, pure, unpolluted water, we are more like a muddy pool where the sediment settles and then it's kicked up once more. Sin has deformed the image of God in each person so that we either sinfully think too highly of ourselves, or, we think too lowly of ourselves, which is also a sin. The power is always in the balance. We are both depraved and possess dignity at the same time.

On the one hand, if you think highly of yourself and value yourself above others in pride, you do not love your neighbour as you should, since you don't think they are worth loving. On the other hand, if you have a low self-image, you also will not love your neighbour, since you feel like you have nothing to give. We can elevate our dignity in sinful pride, or elevate our depravity also in sinful pride. Both are in the end; forms of pride and sin which deforms the image of God in us. And all of this is connected to self-image; who we think we are.

Some of you may have seen a bird attack its own reflection against a window pane. Time and time

again the bird throws itself against the glass as if it doesn't like the image it sees. And then discovers too late, that all it was seeing was itself.

These are some of the comments taken from a female website where women can anonymously share how they feel about their bodies: "I hate everything about my body." "I constantly compare myself to other women." "I eat when I'm depressed and then I get more depressed." "Sometimes when I see a woman fatter than me, I'm glad. She's making me feel better." "I don't know how to feel comfortable in my own skin." (Incidentally, men say the same thing). Tragically these sentiments are widespread within our Western societies, driven by mainstream media and the result of a self-loathing secular ideology.

What do you see when you look in the mirror? The image of God in each person is marred. Thankfully it is marred but not destroyed. However, the Gospel made known to us through Jesus Christ allows us to be humble and confident at the same time. On the one hand, the Gospel tells us we are sinful, and the sins we know about ourselves are just the tip of the iceberg. This humbles us, which is good. At the same time, the Gospel message informs us, we are loved and the love we know of Christ is just the tip of the iceberg. Which is very good.

Not only did God hand make us from the dirt of the ground, but he paid the price to redeem us on the cross at Calvary when we decided to live for ourselves instead of Him. To know we are accepted, loved, and his love is what makes us beautiful again, gives us hope and confidence in Christ and within ourselves. When that collision between the recognition of my sin and the understanding of how Jesus has dealt with my sin on the cross occurs, a new beginning happens. We can begin to properly reflect and grow in practising the image of God which we were always designed to do.

Thanksgiving is a time of giving thanks to God for his material blessings, for the harvest, the crops, the fruit, the vegetables and so much more and for the farmers and others who make the harvest possible. Despite modern agricultural advances and inventions, we are still wholly dependant on God to provide the weather and the conditions for the seed to germinate and grow and be fruitful.

We are also thankful to God for his spiritual blessings which at times we can easily forget about. There is no greater supernatural blessing than the way in which He can transform a lost life. To know God's peace, His wisdom, and the hope of eternal life are blessings this world, including the atheist academics, can never deliver. God in His mercy reached down from heaven and got His hands dirty with us. He knew exactly what He was doing, but He wanted more than anything else to talk to us, to

invest in us, and have a relationship with us.

The bindweed in the garden is a picture of the damage sin does in our lives, both on the surface, and with the roots that go deep inside. But God got His hands dirty by pulling that bindweed out of our lives and by replanting the goodness of His love and mercy in us. God is saying that your self-image matters to me. You are of great worth, and you are highly valued.

An old lady was very poor. She had absolutely nothing. No shelter, no food, no nothing. She prayed to God and God gave her 10 apples. This was wonderful. Now I can get the things I need she said. She was so hungry of course that she ate the first 3 apples. The next 3 apples she traded to rent a small shelter so she could keep dry when it rained. She exchanged the next 3 apples for some new clothes, so she was no longer cold at night. But then she discovered she had only one apple left over. "Why did you give me one apple more than I needed," she asked God? God replied; "So you can have something with which to thank me for." All of us have a lot more than one apple left. We thank God for His provision.

Alan Wilson is a retired Presbyterian minister, who lives in Northern Ireland.

The [*image*](#) shows, "Midday Prayer During Harvest," by Theodor Christoph Schütz, painted in 1861.

