

Theme: The key to human freedom is recognizing and embracing our inherent nature as we were created by God, including both the God-given dignity and limits of that nature.

I. Intro - The Heart of Liberty?

- A. Planned Parenthood vs. Casey (Supreme Court)
- B. "At the heart of liberty is the right to define one's own concept of existence, of meaning, of the universe, and of the mystery of human life." - Justice Kennedy
- C. Each human gets to define reality - there is no higher law to which we can appeal - even if it kills humans in the womb or denies objective physical cosmic reality
- D. Is freedom actually found in the unfettered ability to define reality as I want?
- E. This series will look at why true freedom is not found in unfettered choice but rather in recognizing and embracing the limits inherent to our nature as humans.

II. The Nature of Created Reality

- A. The entire cosmos is created by God
In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth... ^{2:1} Thus the heavens and the earth were completed in all their vast array. Genesis 1:1, 2:1
 - 1. God created everything - the whole cosmos
 - 2. We live in a universe created and structured by God
 - 3. This has huge implications for all reality
 - a. The universe did NOT simply evolve by blind chance
 - b. The universe does not exist in a random, purposeless way, but rather has a definite structure and purpose defined by its Creator.

- B. Creation is defined by a definite structure and limits
In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. ² Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters. ³ And God said, "Let there be light," and there was light. ⁴ God saw that the light was good, and he separated the light from the darkness. Genesis 1:1–4
 - 1. Genesis 1 is about the move from chaos to structure - formless chaos is bad while structured form is good
 - 2. The structure of creation is built around separations
 - a. Light and dark are separated
 - b. The sky and the earth are separated
 - c. The land and the water are separated
 - d. These separations and definite structure are repeatedly affirmed by God as good
 - 3. All life is created to inhabit the structured reality and within its own limits
 - a. Sea creatures are created in a particular way that suits them to the water
 - b. Birds are created in a particular way to suit them to their environment
 - c. Each type of life is created and blessed within its "kind" and is thus distinct from other life forms
 - d. Once again, God affirms that this structure, separation, and limit is inherently good.
- C. The nature of reality is that structure, distinctions, separations, and limits are good, and that any attempt to live apart from them leads to chaos, not blessing.

III. The Glory and Limits of Human Nature

A. Human beings are created in the image of God

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; male and female he created them. ²⁸ God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground." Genesis 1:26–28

1. Humans are presented as the apex of creation

- a. The text moves to poetry to set it apart as special
- b. The only time God announces what He will do
- c. Humans are the only creation made in God's image
- d. Humans are given rulership over the rest of creation

2. This is the inherent dignity & worth of every human

- a. Because we are created, we are one with the rest of creation, from sub-atomic particles to swirling galaxies, from amoeba to the blue whale, from a rock to an archangel.
- b. Because we are the image of God we are set apart from the rest of creation and given unique value and dignity.
- c. Our value is not found in any particular trait, nor our dominance over other creatures, but rather in the image of God.
- d. Pure materialism has no basis for human dignity or freedom - the strong dominate the weak.

- e. As we move towards Good Friday and Easter, we should remember that when angels fell they had no chance of redemption, but Jesus came and died and was raised that we might be saved. This is the dignity and worth of every human, from conception to death.

B. Human beings are given definite limits & must obey God

The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it. ¹⁶ And the Lord God commanded the man, "You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; ¹⁷ but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die." Genesis 2:15–17

1. God assigned our task to work and care for the Garden - and will hold us responsible.
2. God gave limits that we must obey - a command
3. We do not determine good and evil for ourselves - this is beyond our capability. Determining good and evil belongs to God alone.
4. To break God's command and to determine good and evil (reality) for ourselves is death.
5. Freedom, blessing, and life come from embracing our place within creation and obeying God, while bondage, curse, and death come from rejecting our place within creation and disobeying God.

C. The key to human freedom is recognizing and embracing our inherent nature as we were created by God, including both the God-given dignity and limits of that nature.

IV. Applying the word

A. Do I see the false notion of freedom in our culture?

1. Our culture falsely thinks freedom is found in defining and living our own reality and creating our human nature as we desire it to be
"At the heart of liberty is the right to define one's own concept of existence, of meaning, of the universe, and of the mystery of human life." - Justice Kennedy, *Planned Parenthood vs. Casey*
2. This has been the long march of our culture: to ignore the limits of creation and to define reality as we want it to be, especially regarding human nature.
We are not a culture that never understood what a human being was in his nature and in his destiny. Rather we are a culture that, having once known these things, has decided against living them or understanding them. Indeed, we have decided to reject most of them, almost as an act of defiance—as an act of pure humanism—as if what we are is not first given to us. - James V. Schall, foreword to Josef Pieper, *Leisure, the Basis of Culture*, 9
3. This was foreseen in the great dystopian novels of the 20th century
Anything could be true. The so-called laws of Nature were nonsense. The law of gravity was nonsense. 'If I wished,' O'Brien had said, 'I could float off this floor like a soap bubble.' Winston worked it out. 'If he thinks he floats off the floor, and if I simultaneously think I see him do it, then the thing happens... It needed also a sort of athleticism of mind, an ability at one moment to make the most delicate use of logic and at the next to be unconscious of the crudest logical errors. Stupidity was as necessary as intelligence, and as difficult to attain.' (1984)

4. The ultimate goal in this is to deny the reality of a given human nature which should be embraced, and to declare we are free to make ourselves as we want to be. This is the birth of 'plastic man'.
We control life, Winston, at all its levels. You are imagining that there is something called human nature which will be outraged by what we do and will turn against us. But we create human nature. Men are infinitely malleable. (1984)
5. The key to authenticity and freedom in this understanding is doing what you desire. To judge or refuse your desires is inauthentic and is bondage.
He who desires but acts not, breeds pestilence...

Sooner murder an infant in its cradle than nurse unacted desires.
William Blake, *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*
6. This false view of freedom runs through our entire culture, and it is even the default view of many Christians, who only object when it leads to certain decisions they do not like. But the entire notion is false and must be rejected in toto.

B. Do I see freedom requires embracing the nature of creation as given by God?

1. The first fundamental fact is that we are created, not self-existent; only God is self-existent.
2. Creatures are inherently limited by the very fact that they are created and not self-existent and eternal. They exist in a particular cosmos with specific laws, and they have specific natures that must also be recognized and obeyed.
3. This means that objective reality, outside of us and our control, actually exists, and it imposes limits upon us that must be obeyed.

If you draw a giraffe, you must draw him with a long neck. If, in your bold creative way, you hold yourself free to draw a giraffe with a short neck, you will really find that you are not free to draw a giraffe. The moment you step into a world of facts, you step into a world of limits - G.K. Chesterton, *Orthodoxy*

4. True freedom is thus found in knowing and embracing my created nature and living within the limits it imposes

Because a fish absorbs oxygen from water, not air, it is free only if it is restricted to water. If a fish is 'freed' from the river and put out on the grass to explore, its freedom to move and soon live is destroyed. Real freedom is finding the right restrictions. - Tim Keller, *The Reason for God*

5. The rest of creation knows and does this instinctually - fish don't try to behave like lions, birds don't try to behave like leopards. The entire cosmos acts in the manner appropriate to its given nature.

C. Do I see that the key to human freedom is embracing our given nature and the nature of creation?

1. Humans are unique in that we do NOT simply obey instinct - we must choose how we will behave.
2. The key to an authentic life, a life of blessing, is not to define reality for myself but rather to live in line with the nature of the cosmos as created and defined by God.

We are not our own, any more than what we possess is our own. We did not make ourselves; we cannot be supreme over ourselves. We cannot be our own masters. We are God's property by creation, by redemption, by regeneration. He has a triple claim upon us. Is it not our happiness thus to view the matter? - Cardinal Newman, quoted in *Brave New World* (Chapter 17)

3. Because of our specific nature, humans actually flourish when limits are established and recognized
 - a. Landscape architect study of kids on playgrounds
 - b. Kids are FREER when fences surround the playground than when the space is entirely open!
4. Our culture proclaims that freedom is the absence of any limitations or restrictions, but true freedom is actually only possible when there are inherent limitations and restrictions, and we flourish when we recognize and embrace these limitations!
5. This is ESPECIALLY true for humans because we are created in the image of God and will only flourish as we embrace the physical, spiritual, and moral constraints that are part of that image.

D. The Table of Freedom

1. This is our Covenant Table, given by our Covenant Lord
2. Here we are reminded that He is Lord, and confess our transgressions
3. Here we are reminded that He is Lord, and we renew our covenant vows

The Key To Human Freedom

Genesis 1:26-31; 2:15-17

February 21, 2021

Communion

Psalms 115:14-15

Teaching keywords: Freedom; humanity; Lent; creation; image of God; Sovereignty of God

May the Lord make you increase, both you and your children.
¹⁵May you be blessed by the Lord, the Maker of heaven and earth. Psalm 115:14–15

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; male and female he created them. ²⁸ God blessed them and said to them, “Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground.” ²⁹ 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. ³⁰ And to all the beasts of the earth and all the birds of the air and all the creatures that move on the ground — everything that has the breath of life in it — I give every green plant for food.” And it was so. ³¹ God saw all that he had made, and it was very good. And there was evening, and there was morning — the sixth day. Genesis 1:26–31

The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it. ¹⁶ And the Lord God commanded the man, “You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; ¹⁷ but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die.” Genesis 2:15–17