

THEOLOGY I: Doctrine of Man: Image of God (Part 1)

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KEY QUESTIONS

- What is the biblical teaching about the image of God?
- What are the three different views on the image of God?
- Why does this doctrine matter?

Gen 1... ***in the image of God he created them***... Gen 3 comes... distortion.

- The fact that I am made in the image of God means...
- How has sin affected the fact that we are image bearers of God?

INTRODUCTION

- We want to give a separate and detailed treatment of the issue of the image of God in humanity for three reasons.
 - **Historically**, it has been an important and much discussed issue, with major directions in the history of theology being affected by one's interpretation of it. One might easily argue that it was central in the Reformation and remains crucial today as the indispensable background for the doctrine of salvation.
 - **Theologically**, it is not only important in itself, but also provides a good test case for analyzing theological **methodology**.
 - And **practically**, the image of God is the basis for human **dignity**. A correct understanding of it is the basis for truly Christian human relationships. It's not just Christians that are made in the IOG, but all humanity.

BIBLICAL FOUNDATIONS

- One of the reasons for the variety of interpretations of the image of God throughout church history is the **scarcity** of biblical data. Gen 1:26-27, 5:1-2, 9:6-7, 1 Cor 11:7, James 3:9-10 are the only really clear verses affirming the creation of humanity in the image of God.

*Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth. "So God created man in his own image, **in the image of God he created them**; male and female he created them. Gen 1:26-27*

*This is the book of the generations of Adam. When God created man, **he made him in the likeness (image) of God**. Male and female he created them, and he blessed them and named them Man when they were created. Gen 5:1-2*

*But you shall not eat flesh with its life, that is, its blood. And for your lifeblood I will require a reckoning; from every beast I will require it and from man. From his fellow man I will require a reckoning for the life of man. "Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed, for **God made man in his own image**. And you, be fruitful and multiply, increase greatly on earth and multiply in it." Gen 9:4-7*

*With it we bless our Lord and Father, and with it we curse people who are **made in the likeness of God**. From the same mouth come blessing and cursing. My brothers, these things ought not to be so. James 3:9-10*

- Other verses speak about **conformity** to the image of Christ, or of a process of **restoration** of the divine image going on in the Christian life (Col. 3:9-10), but those verses apply only to **Christians**. And none of the verses give an explicit definition of the image of God. We can, however, draw some parameters for our understanding of the image.

*And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. For those whom he foreknew (Christians) he also predestined to be **conformed to the image of his Son**, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. Rom 8:28-29*

*Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the **image of its creator**. Col 3:9-10*

- Creation in the image of God is affirmed for all **persons** and, **male** and **female** alike (Gen 1:26- 27, 5:1-2, 9:6, James 3:9).
 - The universality of the image in all of humanity can be seen in the fact that it is specifically affirmed of both male and female equally in Gen. 1:26-27 and Gen. 5:1-2, in the fact that the words used for "man" in both OT and NT are universal words, and in the fact that the contexts of Gen. 9:6 and James 3:9 require a generic understanding of humans.

- Creation in the image of God involves being like God in some unspecified way.
 - The words used for “image and likeness” are not terribly specific, and Scripture does little to define them explicitly. The most often used word is *tselem*, which is itself most often used negatively, for idolatrous images of God which were prohibited. Only humans are authorized images of God, and that by God's creation of them in that way. No human creation can validly (reasonably) image God. At the very least we know that images represent things, so we know we do that in some way.
- Creation in the image of God is the basis for human uniqueness and dignity (Gen 9:6, James 3:9-10).
 - Thus to kill a human or even curse one is an affront to and an attack upon God. Gen. 9:6 sees murder as so heinous a crime that by it one forfeits his own life.

“You have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not murder; and whoever murders will be liable to judgment.’ But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment; whoever insults his brother will be liable to the council; and whoever says, “You fool!” will be liable to the hell of fire. Matt 5:21-22

- Even after the fall, humans are spoken of as being in the image of God (Gen 9:6, James 3:9), so the image isn't completely lost in the fall.
 - However, it does seem that the image was damaged in the fall, for there are verses that speak of the restoration of the divine image or conformity to the image of Christ as an ongoing process in the Christian life (Rom. 8:29, 2 Cor. 3:18, Eph. 4:23-24, Col. 3:10). The exact extent of the damage and how it is being restored is a matter we will discuss in more depth later. For now, the important point is that humans today still bear God's image, even if in a distorted and fallen way.

*And we all, with unveiled faces, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same **image** from one degree of glory to another.*
(sanctification, transformation, renewed in His image) 2 Cor 3:18a

*But that is not the way you learned Christ? - assuming that you have heard about him and were taught in him, as the truth is in Jesus, to put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and to put on the **new self**, (righteousness, holiness, love, self- control, dignity, integrity) **created after the likeness of God** in true righteousness and holiness. Eph 4:20-24*

Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. Col 3:5

Jesus is the perfect image of God.

He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature Heb 1:3a

- Since Christ is the **perfect image** of God and the end result of this process of restoration is being fully **like Christ** (Rom. 8:29, 1 John 3:1-2), we may speak of the image of God as being not only **created design**, but our **eschatological** (end-time) destiny. Thus, to understand who we are, we need not look at how we are different from other animals, but how we are or can become like Christ.
- At the same time, I think at least some of the verses that speak of Christ as the image of God (Heb. 1:3, Col. 1:15) contain a strong idea of his **deity**, that he is the image of God in a way that no other human being can ever be. He **is** the image of God, we are created **in** the image of God. There is a great deal of similarity, but I think there is also room for a distinction.

See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are. The reason why the world does not know us is that it did not know him. Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is. And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure. 1 John 3:1-3