

Created in the image of God
Genesis 1:26-28

26 Then God said, ‘Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.’

27 So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; 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 in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground.’

Have you ever wondered what the Scriptures mean when they say in Genesis 1:27...

So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.

I've pondered this passage of Scripture for many years.

It should be noted first that this cannot refer to the human physical composition, for God is not “flesh and blood.” When one considers John 4:24, which says:

God is spirit, and his worshippers must worship in the Spirit and in truth.

This verse makes it pretty obvious that being created in God's image is **not** referring to our physical nature.

What exactly is it about humanity that makes us image bearers of our creator?

Genesis 2:7 informs us that God formed Adam from the dust and gave him life by sharing His own breath. Accordingly, humanity is unique among all God's creations, having both a material body and an immaterial soul/spirit.

Everything in the cosmos has value because it was made by God. But since human beings bear God's image, we possess an innate value beyond anything else in the created order. This is why every human life, regardless of its relative potential or accomplishments, is sacred from the moment of conception to the moment of death. It's also why virtually every culture throughout history has recognized murder as the highest crime one can commit against another. To harm or destroy another person is to assault the image of God in that person.

So if we apply this same understanding to us being made in God's image, **He has created us with the special purpose of drawing attention to Himself and representing who He is to all of creation.**

Humanity alone among the creatures is endowed with spiritual awareness. Animals are unaware of God. They do not seek or worship their Maker. But mankind, Paul says, knows God because God has designed creation to reveal Himself to his image-bearers.

As Solomon observed in Eccl 3:11 – God...

“has also set eternity in the human heart”

We are living creatures made by God to bear His own image. The stamp of God is seen in our moral and spiritual nature, in our shared love within community, in our dominion on God's behalf, and especially in our calling to commune with God. There is nothing that could grant a greater dignity, along with humility before God than to realize that we are creatures designed to know and be known by God and to love and be loved by our Maker.

Being made in the image of God refers to the immaterial part of humanity. It sets human beings apart from the animal world, fits them for the dominion God intended them to have over the earth, and enables them to commune with their Maker.

Being made in the image of God is a likeness mentally, socially, and morally.

Mentally: Being made in the image of our Creator, we have been imbued with creative skills.

Genesis introduces us to a God who creates. Genesis chapter 1 is full of this creative energy. We read of how God created light, gathered the land together, thus forming oceans, lakes and rivers, created vegetation, creatures to inhabit the seas, air and land and, as God's final act, He created mankind.

To me, this is the most definitive aspect of our likeness to our Creator – our capacity for creativity.

Whenever you design a garden bed, cook or bake something you haven't done before, write a new song, or poem, or a computer program, paint a landscape, create music, design an architectural wonder or, as husband and wife, create a new life, you are proclaiming your God given capacity for creativity.

As a linguist and translator, I am amazed at the creative ways humanity encodes meaning into language. Our vocal apparatus is capable of producing about 700 distinct sounds. From this inventory of about 700 sounds, the language with the least number of phonemes is Rotokas, in PNG which uses only 11 distinct sounds. On the other hand, Taa in Botswana has up to 164 consonants, plus five vowels, as well as four tones. And there is a staggeringly wide variety of grammatical encoding utilised by each different language.

The heavens declare the glory of God, as does all of His creation. God is a God of beauty and creativity, who loves to express Himself through the unity and diversity of all that He has made. And He has imparted something of His remarkable creative facility to His human image bearers.

To be sure, we don't create things out of nothing, as God does. But we've been granted an ability to perceive, appreciate and create good and beautiful things by organizing and shaping the resources God has provided.

Socially, humanity was created for fellowship. This reflects God's triune nature and His love. In Eden, humanity's primary relationship was with God and, in Genesis 2:18 we are told that God made the first woman because "it is not good for the man to be alone." As "male and female," mankind bears God's image in a community of love.

The image of God should be seen not merely individualistically but communally. Just as God himself exists within loving community – Father, Son, and Spirit, experiencing eternal and perfect love, mankind bears God's image in relationships of community and love.

Every time someone makes a friend, hugs a child, gets married, or gets together with others in Christian fellowship, he or she is demonstrating the fact that we are made in the likeness of God.

Morally: Humanity was created as a rational, volitional agent. In other words, human beings can reason and choose. In Genesis 1:31 we read that "God saw all He had made (humanity included) and called it very good". Our conscience or "moral compass" is a vestige of that original state.

Like God, we're self-aware. We have thoughts about our thoughts. We perceive our location in time and space. We remember our past and anticipate our future. We have feelings independent of basic physical needs. We're volitional, desiring and making free choices that aren't pre-programmed by instinct or circumstance.

God has given us free will - the ability to make moral choices for which we're accountable to Him. This differentiates us from the animals, which merely follow instinct and are thus not moral agents.

God didn't make us because He was lonely and needed something to do. He is totally self-sufficient, and within the Trinity, the three Persons of the Godhead have enjoyed a perfect, loving relationship from eternity past and will continue to do so forever. Therefore, being made in God's image means we were built for relationship. At our core, our most fundamental need is to love and be loved – in a word, to belong. Ultimately, God made us in His image so that we might glorify Him and enjoy eternal, intimate, loving relationship with Him.

Whenever someone writes a law, recoils from evil, engages in good behaviour, or feels guilty, he or she is confirming the fact that we are made in God's own image.

A direct result of humans bearing God's image is the kingly rule into which mankind is called. In Genesis 1:26 God said:

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.

Humanity's dominion over creation is meant to have the form of a viceregency; meaning that you and I have been given the privilege of exercising the authority of another, namely, God the Creator.

As God's representatives, humans have been given authority over the physical realm. We're not to be environmental despots, raping and ruining the natural world to suit our whim. God intended mankind to care for and develop the physical resources He has entrusted to us in ways that will honour Him and benefit others.

As God's royal servants, we are to rule on the earth **in keeping with God's standards and purposes. God's rule is not the rule of a despot, but the loving nurture of a caring parent."**

Bearing God's image and ruling on God's behalf, mankind is to do good on the earth.

Part of being made in God's image is that Adam had the capacity to make free choices. Sadly, Adam and Eve chose to rebel against their Creator. In so doing, they marred the image of God within themselves, and passed that damaged likeness on to all their descendants. Romans 5:12 tells us:

Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all people, because all sinned.

Today, we still bear the image of God but we also bear the scars of sin. Mentally, morally, socially, and physically, we show the effects of sin.

The good news is that when God redeems an individual, He begins to restore the original image of God, creating a "new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness."

Ephesians 4:22-24 tells us:

You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires;²³ to be made new in the attitude of your minds;²⁴ and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.

Through Christ, we are made new creations in the likeness of God as we are told in 2 Corinthians 5:17 (NIV):

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: the old has gone, the new is here!

Or as it is phrased in the Living Bible:

When someone becomes a Christian, he becomes a brand new person inside. He is not the same anymore. A new life has begun!

And because God is love, if we want to live as the image bearers we were created to be, the best way and only way to do this is to walk in love.

1 John 5:15-16 tells us:

¹⁵If anyone acknowledges that Jesus is the Son of God, God lives in them and they in God. ¹⁶And so we know and rely on the love God has for us.

God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in them.

The Fall has marred the image of God – shattering the righteousness and holiness in which we were first made. So God sent his Son, Jesus Christ, to redeem us and restore the image of God.

The apostle Paul writing in Romans 8:29 tells us:

*For those God foreknew he also predestined to be **conformed to the image of his Son**, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters.*

And in Colossians 3:9-10, Paul makes it clear that, as much as we might wish it to be an instantaneous transformation, it is actually a process:

*Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices 10 and have put on the new self, **which is being renewed** in knowledge in the image of its Creator.*

Why is it a process? Because God wants you and me to engage with Him with our will. You see, we are still free agents, not automatons. We need to learn to yield our will to God's will. And so, step-by-step, day-by-day, our transformation occurs.

1 John 3:2-3 says:

²Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when Christ appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. ³All who have this hope in him purify themselves, just as he is pure.

There is hope for us in our sin because of the grace of God which fulfils his original plan for creation. Christ fulfilled the law of God on our behalf and then offered his own life as a sacrifice to God's justice for the forgiveness of our sins. Romans 3:23-25 explains:

²³for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, ²⁴and all are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. ²⁵God presented Christ as a sacrifice of atonement, through the shedding of his blood – to be received by faith.

Christ came not only to remedy our standing with God but also to restore God's image within us. In 2 Cor 3:18 Paul says that by God's grace...

"we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another"

Humanity was created in the image of God, and the fall of human beings into sin as recorded in Genesis 3 did not destroy it, but defaced it.

Being a sinner does not mean we have ceased to be in the image of God. James 3:9 says:

⁹With the tongue we praise our Lord and Father, and with it we curse human beings, who have been made in God's likeness.

Here, James is using "being in the likeness or the image of God" in our present condition as an argument for why we shouldn't curse each other.

God's image in you and me has been defaced and needs repair or restoration. Nonetheless, we remain creatures designed to know God and respond to him in faith and praise.

You and I are in the image of God, a sadly defaced image. But through Christ's redeeming work, God has begun a process of shaping us, making us again into the image of our Creator.

And so I want to read again what 1 John 3:2 says:

Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when Christ appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.

That image WILL be restored!