

# Fallen Masterpiece: Man as the Image of God

Genesis 1:26–28 and Selected Scriptures

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## Introduction

In the middle of last month, I embarked on a sermon series related to the need for the church of Christ to boldly confront the lies of the present culture with the truth of Scripture. I began by observing that our culture has launched a full-scale assault against the very concept of truth—a concept that is fundamental to all rational thought, and especially to our understanding both of reality and morality. As a result, our society has descended into absurdity and chaos—a claim that is virtually self-evident to anyone bothering to pay attention, but which is no better illustrated than by our culture’s embrace of transgender ideology.

And because of that, and because of the irreparable damage this ideology is wreaking in the lives of so many in our culture, I thought it profitable to bring the Word of God to bear on the question of human sexuality. If we’re going to have any hope of being salt and light in *this* culture in the way Jesus commands us to be, we will need to be equipped to tear down the strongholds of our society’s perverse sexual credo and to take every thought captive unto Christ—to proclaim the Lordship of Jesus Christ and the biblical doctrine of sexuality.

And I mentioned that, as I began studying to do that, I quickly realized how central the notion of **identity** has become in this discussion. Our culture has actually conflated sexuality with identity. According to them, our sexual appetites define us. We are what we desire. And if we ever act out of accord with our basest desires and impulses, we are somehow not “being true to our authentic self.” That’s not how Scripture defines mankind. And that made me realize that before I dove in to biblical sexuality, I needed to back up and consider mankind’s **identity** at its most fundamental level.

And we said last time that that identity begins with the fact that we are creatures. This is the very first, most fundamental thing to say about man. In fact, it’s the first thing said about man in Genesis 1:26: “Then God said, ‘Let Us *make* man.’” And so the first thing we must say about man is that he is *made*—that he is not God, that he is the creature of the one true and living God. And that means that we do not create our own identity, but that we receive our identity from our Creator.

We are not evolved animals, however highly functioning. We are not slaves to our basest passions and impulses. We are not of no more dignity than to be discarded when society determines that we are no longer useful, or convenient, or wanted. And yet neither are we semi-divine demi-gods, unaccountable to anyone but ourselves, fabricating our own “truth,” or speaking our own identity into existence. We are, most fundamentally, creatures, and so we are accountable to God our Creator, subject to the identity He has given us, subject to the law of His mouth as the rule of our lives.

And so last time, we defended that fundamental tenet of man’s identity—his creatureliness—by vindicating the biblical doctrine of **creation**. If the culture’s goal is ultimately to free man from his accountability to his Creator and the totalizing claims of the law of God so he can be left alone to sin in peace, then you start at the very root. You seek to undermine the notion that man is a creature at all, and you say he is the product of evolutionary processes and so on. And so we defended six-day creation.

We turn today to discuss what is perhaps the next most fundamental concept concerning man’s identity—namely, that man is created as the **image** of God. Because the second thing that shows up in Genesis 1:26, right after the term “man” is used for the first time in Scripture, is that man is the image of God: “Let Us make man *in Our image, according to Our likeness*.” And verse 27: “God created man *in His own image, in the image of God* He created him; male and female He created them.”

Back in 1971, in the latter stages of his ministry, the great expositor, Martyn Lloyd-Jones, gave a fascinating interview on the BBC. In that interview, he captured the sort-of-schizophrenic, internally inconsistent view of man’s identity that still plagues our society. He said, “The contemporary conception of man, on the one hand, doesn’t make enough of man, and, on the other, makes too much of him.” We don’t make enough of man because we consider him to be a mere animal, not really distinct from the other creatures. Abortion. Euthanasia. When a person is deemed to be not useful or too much of an inconvenience, he can be discarded. We don’t make enough of man, because we don’t see him as an image-bearer of Almighty God. We don’t see the inherent dignity and value that man has, and so we treat him like an animal. And yet the Scriptures say that man is the *pinnacle* of God’s creation, uniquely created in His image to represent His glory to the world, whose life is valuable because it is the image of the Creator of that life. And so on the one hand, we don’t make enough of man.

On the other hand, as Lloyd-Jones said, we make too much of man. We flatter ourselves into suggesting that man is basically good—a morally upright being, who just needs to live out his authentic inner self. There are these axiomatic catch phrases, almost catechetical phrases from our culture: “You’re amazing, just the way you are.” “You do you.” “No one can judge you.” “You need to love yourself.” “Find *your* truth and live *your* truth.” Which is to say: fabricate

your own version of reality, and insist on it! “*You* can create male and female—in *your* image! *You* determine when a baby becomes a person—when it has value and dignity and so should be protected from harm! *You* can define marriage however you see fit!” Two men; two women; even three people. These days, you can marry your pet!

And what that shows you, is that even when man makes too much of himself, he winds up not making enough of himself. The embrace of transgenderism leads men and women to treat themselves like Frankenstein-like experiments, and often ends in irreversible self-mutilation and sterilization. The embrace of abortion leads to parents murdering their own defenseless children. The embrace of homosexuality leads to the denigration and trivialization of the most solemn of human relationships. In seeking to exalt himself, man ruins himself. But there *is* this self-contradictory approach to man’s identity, isn’t there? On the one hand, we don’t make enough of man, and on the other hand, we make too much of him.

But instead of that schizophrenic, inconsistent view of man, Scripture identifies man as the image of God. Joel Beeke makes the comment that man is “a fallen masterpiece of God.” And I think that really captures it well. Man is a *masterpiece*. We are a masterpiece because we are made in the image of God and therefore we have inherent dignity. Our lives are worthy to be protected because we are the closest reflection of the life and character of our Creator. But man is a *fallen* masterpiece. We have not remained in that very-good state in which God created us. We haven’t lost the image of God, but we *have* marred it. Something has gone terribly wrong with us, so that the altogether optimistic views of man and his moral goodness are a wild caricature of reality. Man and women are lost, bound for hell, and totally beholden to the sovereign grace of God for any remedy to our hopeless predicament.

Beeke goes on to strike that balance well when he says, “The value of all things lies in their manifestation of the glory of God, and God has chosen to concentrate his revealed glory in the human race” (*RST*, 2:161). In other words, there is glory and dignity in the human race, but it is a derived glory and dignity. It’s derived from the glory and dignity of God, whose image man is. God multiplies and magnifies His own glory by creating images of Himself—pictures of His beauty and glory and righteousness—in the crown and apex of His creation.

And so it is difficult to overestimate the **importance** of the doctrine of the image of God. That human beings are created in God’s image stands as a defining notion for understanding who we are, fundamentally, where we’ve come from, what our purpose is, to whom were accountable, and how we are to function in our various relationships. As Christians, you need to understand who man is in relation to his Creator and to his fellow-man. If you don’t, you will not be equipped to witness to the truth of Christ and Scripture in this present age. This is where the battle is raging, and we need to be equipped to wage the warfare of taking every thought captive

to the obedience of Christ—first in our own minds and thinking, but then also as we engage the world around us.

### **Key Biblical Passages**

Well, let's get to it, then. We saw Genesis 1:26–27: “God created man *in His own image, in the image of God* He created him; male and female He created them.” We also see it in Genesis 5:1: “In the day when God created man, He made him in the *likeness* of God.” In Genesis 9:6, God says, “Whoever sheds man's blood, by man his blood shall be shed, for in the *image* of God He made man.” And it's not just in the Old Testament. In 1 Corinthians 11:7, Paul says, “For a man ought not to have his head covered, since he is the *image* and glory of God.” And we have it again in James 3:9, which says, “With [the tongue] we bless our Lord and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in the *likeness* of God.”

And when you do a detailed word study of the Greek and Hebrew terms for “image” and “likeness,” you're left with a couple of conclusions. First, the two terms are virtually interchangeable. It's not as if “image” speaks of one discrete concept and “likeness” speaks of another. And second, the terms express the notion of *representation* and *similarity*. “In the ancient world, a king or a ruler would place an image or idol of himself in his realm to symbolize his sovereignty there. When others saw the image, they knew who had control. [In the same way], God's image bearers represent God in the world” (*Biblical Doctrine*, 410). And a “likeness” was simply a pattern after an original—something *like* the original but not identical to it. Genesis 5:3 tells us that Seth was made in Adam's likeness—which meant that Seth was like Adam in that he was a human being from his loins, even while he was not identical to Adam.

And so, man is not identical to God, as pantheism teaches. Neither is man a part of God, as in panentheism. We do not partake in God's incommunicable attributes; God alone is eternal and infinite, while man is temporal and finite. God alone is self-existent, while man depends on God for life, breath, and all things. God alone is omnipotent, omniscient, and omnipresent, while man is limited in power and wisdom and is localized in space. So man's creation in the image of God does not mean that we creatures are so much like our Creator as to be gods in any sense. Instead, being created in the image of God means that we are like God in very important ways, and that we represent God in the world in a way that is unique among the other creatures.

In fact, it's best to say not that man *has* the image of God somewhere dwelling within him, but that man *is* the image of God on earth, representing God to the world. Why are we here? What is the purpose of our lives? What am I supposed to do in this world? Men and women are designed by God to make His character visible, living in a way that tells the truth about God to the rest of creation. That's why we're here. That's who we are.

Now, Scripture never explicitly defines in what specific ways and to what exact extent man is like God. But we can make several observations from the relevant texts. In fact, we're going to work quickly through **nine features** of the image of God that will give us a full-orbed, biblical picture of our identity as image-bearers. And after we consider those **nine features**, we'll summarize by considering several **implications**.

## I. Representation

Number one, and we've mentioned this several times already: **representation**. If man's being the image of God means that we represent Him in some way, the manner in which we represent Him must at least include the notion that we share some of His attributes in a finite way. Part of what it means to be God's image is that we show forth His communicable attributes.

If God created in power, we expect that those He created in His image would reflect a degree of that power and authority, which of course man does in being tasked with exercising dominion, in ruling and subduing the earth. If He created in wisdom, we expect that His image-bearers would reflect that in some way. And we see it in man's intellectual capabilities above that of the other creatures. Further still, the events of Genesis 1 are caused not by an impersonal force but a personal Creator. And so, it's right to expect His image-bearers to be persons, in a way that could not be predicated of the rest of the animate creatures. Since God created by His Word, we would expect that His image-bearers would resemble His communicative nature, even in a way that surpasses the powers of communication in the rest of creation. Animals communicate, but man's linguistic powers are unique in his reflection of the God whose image man bears. He communicates with God and about God to one another, in ways that far surpass the animals.

And so, man represents God, in part, by reflecting certain of His communicable attributes to the world.

## II. Reverence

Number two, **reverence**. And by **reverence** I mean that man's being the image of God reflects the worship of God. Just as sinful men make idols—images—of their gods, that they might worship a visual expression of idols, so also the true God makes images of Himself to multiply the worship of Himself.

When God's image-bearers rebel and worship idols, rather than reflecting the God in whose image they were made, they begin to reflect their idols. G. K. Beale has that great study, *You Become What You Worship*. John Piper talks about how what we behold is what we become. "You resemble what you revere," Beale says, "whether for your ruin or restoration." And in a sense, we can say we are to revere what we were made to resemble. God's character is reflected

in a finite and imperfect way in man, but in such a way that we may see that faint reflection of His character, and, without worshiping the pictures, we may worship Him for how He's revealed Himself in His image-bearers.

How opposite that is to our society's self-perception! The dignity we have is reflective of God's glory, God's worth. We are to see the glory of God faintly reflected in man and trace the streams of that glory back up to the fountain from which they flow—to God Himself. Man is to be a conduit of the worship of God! And yet man has perverted that to make God a means of exalting man. It's famously been said that God made man in His own image, and then man returned the favor by creating *God* in *his* image. Men and women today use God as a boon of their own self-esteem, rather than seeing themselves as an instrument of bringing esteem to *God's* name.

### III. Relationship

Number three, **relationship**. In the text in which God declares that He has made man in His image, He reveals Himself in personal plurality. “Let *Us* make man in *Our* image.” And I do think that that is a veiled reference to the plurality of persons in the Godhead, what we later learn to be Triunity. There is both unity *and* diversity in the very life of God Himself—one essence, subsisting in three co-equal, co-eternal, consubstantial persons. And that unity and diversity—that relational interaction—is reflected in the nature of man as God's image.

And you see that in a number of ways. Immediately after stating that God made man in His own image, He clarifies: “Male and female He created them.” Gender—and, in particular, the gender binary—is fundamental to the biblical doctrine of man. What it means to be an image-bearer is to be *either* male *or* female. And that thought will figure prominently in later messages. But I can't resist a comment at present. If that is so, any attempt to change one into the other—and certainly to try to find a space in between those two—is a fundamental attack on one's own humanity! It is an attack on oneself—a suicidal attempt at self-exaltation! “I'm going to define who I am! And in the process, I will undermine my *humanity* by making myself neither male nor female!”

But right there we see unity and diversity in God's image that reflects unity and diversity in God Himself. Just as the persons of the Trinity are united in their essence but distinct in their personal properties of Father, Son, and Spirit, so also males and females are united in their humanity but distinct in their different genders. And the fact that the first male and the first female were soon brought together in marriage, who were then immediately tasked with being fruitful and multiplying and filling the earth, means that family is the fundamental institution for human relationships.

And certainly, the notion of sonship bespeaks what it means to be the image of God in **relationship**. Luke 3:38 calls Adam “the Son of God.” And Adam is made in the image and

likeness of God. Well, in the same way, in Genesis 5:1–3, Adam’s son, Seth, is said to be fathered in the likeness of Adam, according to his image. There is this great interconnection between sonship and image-bearing. And so the fact that we were created in God’s image speaks to the **relationship** that human beings carry on with our children. A son is like his father; that speaks of representing God’s attributes. A son should honor his father; that speaks of the reverence or worship that we just spoke about. A son often shares his father’s authority as his representative; that speaks of the dominion overtones that we’ll speak about in a moment. And a son **relates** to his father in fellowship and communion.

We might summarize “image as relationship” by noting that the image bears on (1) man’s relationship to God—we are to love God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength. Image bears on (2) man’s relationship to his fellow man—we are to love our neighbor as ourselves, treating one another with the dignity that accords to image-bearers of God. And image bears on (3) man’s relationship to the inanimate creation—man is to rule over the creation; he is to cultivate and steward the resources of the environment in such a way that glorifies God.

#### IV. Rule

That leads nicely to number four: **rule**, or we might say **reign**. Immediately following the decree that God would make man in His image, He says, Genesis 1:26, “and let them **rule** over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky,” and so on. Verse 28: “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and **subdue** it, and **rule** over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over everything that moves on the earth.” You see, man is God’s representative in this particular way: he will image God’s authority by reigning over creation as a vice-regent, as if in the place of God Himself. Man’s job is to make the invisible King visible by our rule over creation according to the dictates of the King.

We read of the kingdom implications of man’s rule as vice-regent in Psalm 8:4–8: “What is man that You take thought of him, And the son of man that You care for him? Yet You have made him a little lower than God, And You crown him with glory and majesty! You make him to rule over the works of Your hands; You have put all things under his feet, All sheep and oxen, And also the beasts of the field, The birds of the heavens and the fish of the sea, Whatever passes through the paths of the seas.”

So, a key part of the image is this **ruling** and **reigning** over creation as God’s vice-regent, as representative of the King who is seemingly absent in personal presence. We are to be the image of that King.

#### V. Rectitude

Number five is **rectitude**, which is to say that there is a moral aspect to the image of God. Scripture says that God made man “very good,” Genesis 1:31. Ecclesiastes 7:29 says that “God made man upright.” This means that Adam and Eve were not morally neutral creatures. They were created in what the Reformed tradition has called “original righteousness” (Berkhof, 204). But we didn’t stay that way, did we! Man fell into sin, and acted inconsistently with our identity as image-bearers of the holy God.

And the New Testament teaches that the believer in Christ is being progressively renewed into the image of God. Colossians 3:10 says the believer has “put on the new self, who is being renewed to a true knowledge according to the image of the One who created him.” In progressive sanctification, we’re being renewed into the image of God—returning to a condition which we are no longer in. Similarly, Ephesians 4:23–24 says that we are to “be renewed in the in the spirit of our mind, and put on the new self, which in the likeness of God”—literally, “according to God”—“has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth.” Here again, we are being renewed into the likeness of God, and whereas Colossians 3:10 speaks of a true knowledge, Ephesians 4:24 speaks of righteousness and holiness.

And so we can put them together: this moral aspect of the image of God consists in true knowledge, righteousness, and holiness. Charles Hodge says, “That image did not consist merely in man’s rational nature, nor in his immortality, nor in his dominion, but specially in that righteousness and holiness, that rectitude in all his principles, which are inseparable from the possession of the truth, or true knowledge of God” (*Ephesians*, 193; cf. *ST*, 2:99–102).

But we know that this **rectitude** is not all that there is to the image of God, because this moral aspect was lost in the fall and regained in Christ. “True knowledge, righteousness, and holiness” does not describe man in his fallen state. Far from “true knowledge,” Scripture speaks of man as one who walks “in the futility of their mind,” Ephesians 4:17; “*darkened* in their understanding, excluded from the life of God because of the *ignorance* that is in them.” Rather than “righteousness,” Romans 3 testifies that “there is none righteous, not even one.” Rather than “holiness,” Isaiah 64:6 says, “All of us have become like one who is unclean, And all our righteous deeds are like a filthy garment.” And so this moral aspect of the image was lost at the fall.

## **VI. Remaining**

But Scripture is very clear that the image of God in man is not entirely vanquished by the fall. And that means that there is more to the image than the moral aspect. That leads us to number six: the image is **remaining**. The image of God in fallen man is marred, but it is not lost. It is distorted, but is not entirely destroyed. How do we know that?



Well, after the fall, and after even the flood, in Genesis chapter 9, God repeats the cultural mandate that He gave Adam and Eve in Genesis 1:28—to be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth—He repeats that to Noah in chapter 9 verse 1. And in addition to that, now in a world that labors under the curse of sin, God institutes the law of capital punishment. Genesis 9:6 says, “Whoever sheds man’s blood, by man his blood shall be shed, for in the image of God He made man.” Now, in 9:3, God gives every living beast to man for food, which means man may shed the blood of animals for food and not be subject to any punishment. But to shed man’s blood—that is not allowed, for—because—in the image of God He made man. After the fall, man’s being created in the image of God is the ground upon which his life has dignity and worth, and thus is protected by the threat of death. You can kill the animals for clothes; you can harvest them for resources; you can domesticate them to serve God’s interests and to benefit mankind. But if you kill a man, you’ve got to die, because you’ve attacked the very image of God (cf. *RST*, 2:202). So the image of God **remains**.

James 3:9 is another text. James expresses the incongruity of using our tongues to praise God on the one hand, and then to curse men on the other hand, “who,” James says, “have been made in the likeness of God.” Don’t treat people this way! Don’t bless God and then curse His image! The men James is speaking about obviously exist after the fall, and so we must conclude that even after the fall man **retains** the image of God in some sense. And just a footnote: whereas Genesis 9:6 uses “image,” James 3:9 uses “likeness.” So we have both terms being used to speak of man as the “image” and “likeness” of God even after the fall.

So, though sin has distorted the image of God—such that the Christian life is spoken of as the progressive restoration of that image, Romans 8:29–30; 2 Corinthians 3:18; Colossians 3:10—nevertheless, it has not been totally obliterated or destroyed. We are not what we ought to be, but we do remain human, and thus we remain image-bearers.

“In what sense?” you ask. Well, Romans 1:20 does speak of a theoretical knowledge of God: “Although they *knew God*, they did not honor Him as God.” But they do have genuine knowledge of God as an image-bearer. That’s more than can be said of an animal, or a plant, or a mountain. Man also has a conscience, Romans 2:15. Even unbelievers have consciences. Though they might silence their conscience and even sear their conscience, unbelievers do retain this system in their heart that reproaches them for behavior that violates that law written on the heart, and which approves of them when they walk consistently with that law. There’s a general kindness that even unbelievers show toward others. Matthew 7:11 says, “If you, then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children...” So, Jesus acknowledges, that even evil men can give good gifts. This shows that the image is not entirely destroyed. And then there are what some would call shadows of virtue. Second Timothy 3:5 speaks of those “holding to a form of godliness but denying its power.” Well to whatever form of godliness they hold to, that’s a good thing. Even though fallen man is inwardly corrupt and worthy of no reward from God, if

someone outwardly conforms to those external requirements of the law of God, there's evidence of restraint of sin, which speaks to not having totally lost the image. We are not brute beasts. We are not as bad as we could be. There's some reflection of godlikeness, because the image remains. And of course, 1 Corinthians 5:1 talks about sins not even named among the Gentiles. There are certain groups of Gentiles that won't sin so grossly as was going on in the Corinthian Church.

So, the point is: there's some dignity that remains, there. There's some vestigial reflection of God in the man who was patterned after God in his creation. And so all people, even in their fallen state, are to be treated with dignity and kindness; they have inherent value, as image-bearers of God.

## VII. Realized

Number seven: there is the **realized** image—which is to say, the *perfected* image—who is **Christ**. Scripture identifies the God-man, Jesus Christ, as the perfect image of God. Because of our sin, humanity has marred the image of God in us. In order to restore us to a relationship with Him, the Father has sent His own Son to be a perfect representative both of God Himself and of humanity. Second Corinthians 4:4 speaks of “the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the *image* of God.” Colossians 1:15: “He is the *image* of the invisible God...” Christ makes the invisible God visible, which is precisely what Adam was tasked with doing and failed to do. Hebrews 1:3: “And He is the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature.” He is the image of God in its perfection, such that if you have seen Him you have seen the Father, John 14:9.

In the ways in which men and women fail to function as the image of God, falling short in all three of those primary relationships—God, others, creation—Jesus has succeeded (cf. Hoekema, *Created in God's Image*, 75). He perfectly loved God with all His heart, soul, mind, and strength, and thus He related to God rightly. He perfectly loved His neighbor as Himself, and thus related to fellow-humans rightly. And He demonstrated His righteous dominion over nature by quieting the storm, walking on water, and healing disease, and thus related to creation rightly—even as its Lord.

He is therefore “the last Adam” (1 Cor 15:45) who succeeds where Adam fails and imputes to this new race under His headship the righteousness that God demands (Rom 5:18–19; cf. 1 Cor 15:22).

## VIII. Renewed

Eighth, there is the **renewed** image. This speaks of those of us who have been saved and who are in the process of being progressively conformed to the image of Christ. Second Corinthians 3:18 says that believers behold the glory of Christ, and are thereby “being transformed into the same *image*, from glory to glory.” Colossians 3:10, again: We have “put on the new self who is being **renewed** to a true knowledge according to the *image* of the One who created” us. In whatever ways we make progress in holiness, we are conformed to the image of Christ, who is the image of God. And thus that moral aspect that was lost is progressively renewed.

## **IX. Restored**

All the way until, number nine, the image is **restored**. The restored image comes to fruition ultimately in our complete conformity to Christ’s likeness in glorification. First Corinthians 15:49 speaks of our resurrection and says, “Just as we have borne the **image** of the earthy [man, Adam], we will also bear the **image** of the heavenly [man, Christ].” First John 3:2: “We know that when He appears, we will be **like** Him, because we will see Him just as He is.” And I love this comment from Beeke and Smalley: “Just as Christ is greater than Adam, so our image bearing in Christ will be more glorious than Adam’s. ... This life not only will lift Christians above their present condition in this fallen world, but will exalt them higher than Adam ever stood in paradise, for the first man was earthly, but the second man is heavenly” (*RST*, 2:173).

And again, I’m struck with that contrast: with the way that the people of our society destroy themselves. In seeking to exalt himself above being the image of God—to exercise the prerogatives of God Himself by creating male and female in our own image—man ruins himself! He renders himself *beneath* what Adam was! But in Christ, walking in faith after the perfect image of God, man is restored to a position *above* what he had in Adam! Man’s devices ruin him, so that he is beneath Adam; Christ comes and restores humanity above what they had in Adam.

You see, *this* is true and abundant life. Life is not found in the self-actualization of all of our base, fleshly desires. Life is found in humble submission to the Lord of glory, walking in the way of His commandments, and trusting Him to show us what it means to be truly *human* in this life. If man would avoid ruining himself, he needs only to turn his eyes away from himself, and set them upon Christ, and follow after Him in faith.

## **Implications for the Image of God**

And we’ve mentioned some along the way, but I do want to take some time to summarize a handful of **implications** of the doctrine of the image of God.

### **I. Man’s Uniqueness and Dignity**

First, that man is created in the image of God is the **basis for his uniqueness and dignity**. No other creature is said to be created in the image and likeness of God. This gives to humans a special place of dignity—and responsibility—that is not shared by other created beings. Animals are valuable to God, but people are *more* valuable. And some of you are tempted to be offended by that statement. Jesus tells His hearers in Matthew 6:26 that they are “worth much more” than the birds of the air. He says in Matthew 10:29–31 that the disciples “are more valuable than many sparrows.” And in Matthew 12:12, speaking of healing a man on the Sabbath, and how even the Pharisees would rescue a sheep who had fallen into a pit on the Sabbath, Jesus says, “How much more valuable then is a man than a sheep!”

And so there is a **dignity** that is afforded to man precisely because he is an image-bearer. First Peter 2:17 says, “Honor all people.” Each human being is owed an appropriate honor for no other reason than that he is the image of God. This has implications for the way we treat the *poor*, Proverbs 14:31: “He who oppresses the poor taunts his Maker, But he who is gracious to the needy honors Him.” So if you oppress the poor, you taunt the God who made him. If you’re gracious to him, you honor the God who made him.

Surely this has implications for the poorest of the poor—the precious little babies inside the wombs of their mothers—who have no voice of their own to raise in their defense, no capability to protest that they are not merely clumps of cells, but are living human beings who bear the image of their Maker. Proverbs 31:8–9 says, “Open your mouth for the mute, For the rights of all the unfortunate. Open your mouth, judge righteously, And defend the rights of the afflicted and needy.” And again, there are no more unfortunate, afflicted, or needy persons on the planet than those tiny image-bearers whom it’s legal to rip apart limb from limb in many states.

The Bible calls the babies in the womb “children.” It uses the same terminology of babes *in* the womb as it does of babies *out* of the womb. The law of God, in Exodus 22, requires that someone be put to death for killing an unborn child. That means that the law of God recognizes that the unborn baby is an image-bearer of God right alongside its mother. Which means, friends, that “abortion” has nothing to do with women’s rights! It has nothing to do with choice! It has nothing to do with men trying to control women’s bodies! It has everything to do with the image of God! Christians are against the murder of defenseless children—let me start just by saying that: Christians are against abortion. If you’re not against that, you violate a fundamental principle of the Christian worldview, and you show yourself at best confused, and at worst still in bondage to your sins and your corrupt reasoning.

But Christians are against the murder of defenseless children because they are image-bearers—because God’s image is to be honored among men and women. Who do you love most? You love *God* most, who is most worthy of love. Then, who do you love *second*-most? The image of

God, precisely because he is the image of God. That sounds sort of like a first and second great commandment, doesn't it? That is what abortion is about. And so, anyone who sheds the blood of those tiny image-bearers—including their mothers—deserves to have his or her blood shed as a result, Genesis 9:6.

And of course, we could say all the same things about euthanasia. Just because a human being is so old or infirm that he is no longer considered useful to society, or because it might seem more merciful to relieve his suffering by “putting him out of his misery,” the doctrine of the image of God simply does not allow us to put him to death. Christians oppose euthanasia because these dear people are image-bearers of the Almighty God, and so their lives have inherent worth and value. To shed innocent blood is murder. It is one of the six things the Lord says He hates, in Proverbs 6. And it is worthy of the very capital punishment that God prescribes in Genesis 9:6.

## II. Man's Equality

Aside from uniqueness and dignity, a second implication is that *all* human beings are image-bearers, and that therefore means that **all human beings are created equal before God**.

“God created man in His image, in the image of God He created him, *male and female* He created *them*.” Men and women are equal image-bearers of God, and therefore they have equal inherent worth and dignity. Now, we understand from Scripture that men and women are given different roles to fulfill, both in the home and in the church. And we'll talk more about that in the coming weeks. But that doesn't mean that there is any essential superiority or inferiority among them. This means that any sort of sexism—whether chauvinism *or* feminism—is an attack on the image of God. Any notion of the domination or abuse or subjugation of women by men *or* of men by women, is a failure to live consistently with and therefore a violation of this doctrine of Scripture.

So also, Acts 17:26: “God made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth,” which means that every ethnicity equally bears God's image. Any sort of ethnic prejudice or racial partiality is an attack upon the image of God. Remember how James reasons: we can't praise God with our tongue, and then with that same tongue curse people made in the image of God. Do you see how he's reasoning? The *imago Dei* creates ethical obligations for how we treat one another. And so any ethnic partiality is strictly forbidden by Scripture. As I said last time, we all have the same daddy. Our unity as image-bearers of God overcomes any enmity that has been created by focusing too exclusively on our diversity. And so you are to view yourself and others, not first as Black, White, Asian, or Hispanic—not first as European or Latino or African. You are to view yourself and others first as human—as an image-bearer of the one true and living God!

### III. Man's Stewardship

Third, there is both **the rule, and the stewardship, of the creation**. Beeke and Smalley write, “The right to engage in agriculture and industry arises directly from the dominion of God’s image bearers over the world. When human beings breed animals, care for them in controlled environments, put them to work in service to humanity, and kill them to harvest their bodies for food, medicine, and other products, they are not transgressing against the oneness of all life. They are exercising God-given authority over God’s earth” (*RST*, 2:202).

We are to rule the earth. And so we are to idolize neither the creation nor the creatures of the creation. We do not treat animals like people. I know you love your pets, but your dogs and your cats are not your children. They are not your “fur babies.” They are wonderful and precious companions! But do not dishonor the image of God by blurring the distinction between humans and animals. Love your pets! But don’t put them in the place of the human beings in your family, or (if you have no blood family) in the place of the human beings in the family of God. We don’t idolize the creatures of creation.

And similarly, we don’t idolize the creation itself. This planet has been given by God to His image-bearers with the intent that we use it. God never intended this present creation in its present order to be eternal. And so we ought not be overly concerned with trying to “save the planet” or “take care of mother earth”—the latter of which is an entirely pagan notion. There is no such thing as “mother earth.” I like what one man said, referencing Isaiah 66:1: “Your mother earth is my Father’s footstool.”

And yet, at the same time, we don’t abuse the creation. We don’t treat it disdainfully or wastefully. We are not reckless or exploitative. We are stewards. And so we need to be faithful and sensible stewards (1 Cor 4:1–2; cf. Luke 12:42), rather than faithless and careless ones.

### IV. Man's Accountability

Finally, we must reiterate that the image is the **basis for accountability to God**. One theologian put it this way. To be created in God’s image is to belong to God, to be responsible to obey His law, and to devote ourselves to Him in love, faith, and service (Vlach).

The point is: the God in whose image you are made will be the God you one day stand before to give an **account** for your life. And that means: you are not free to order your life however you see fit. You are not free to forge your own identity! You are what God says you are, and you must conduct yourself in the way God says you must. You may not rebel against the created order of God by identifying as a different gender, when God has made you male or female in His image. God has designed to receive glory from your life as His creature as the male or female

that He has created you to be. You, as a woman, cannot glorify God as a man is designed to. And you, as a man, cannot glorify God as a woman is designed to. God means to get particular praise from your life given your manhood or womanhood.

Similarly, you may not rebel against the created order of God by pursuing romantic and sexual relationships with members of the same sex. He created men and women to complement one another—to image forth the unity and diversity of the Godhead. Just as there is unity of essence and diversity of person in the Trinity, so also is there to be a unity of humanity and diversity of gender in the marriage relationship. Homosexual “marriage” distorts the picture of God that mankind is designed to be.

So you see, your bearing the image of Another—“Whose image is on this coin?” “Caesar’s.” “Well, render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s. But whose image is upon this *man* or upon this *woman*?” “God’s.” “Well then: render to God the things that are God’s!” Your bearing the image of Another speaks to your **accountability** to that Other. And if you appear before the God in whose image you’re made in the nakedness of your own righteousness—apart from being restored to the image of God by being conformed to the image of Christ by faith—you will suffer His eternal judgment. Being created in the image of God but having fallen and marred the image of God is reason to seek restoration to the image of God through faith alone in Christ alone, and then to walk in conformity to Christlikeness.

But Christ, the God-Man, the Second Adam, the perfect image of God, the One who is the exact imprint of God’s nature, He has come, and lived the life that all image-bearers were commanded to live but failed to live. And He has died on the cross, the death that each one of us deserved because of our sins. And He rose from the grave in victory over sin and death, so that we might “put on the new self who is being renewed to a true knowledge according to the image of the One who created” us. It falls to us to repent of our sins—of the ways we have marred the image of God in us and have lived inconsistently with our identity as His image-bearers—and to trust in Christ, the perfect image of God, to restore us to Him.

And it falls to us to preach that very Gospel to all the image-bearers with whom *we* come in contact who stand yet in rebellion to Him. May we be found faithful witnesses to the truth of God in this crooked and perverse generation—confronting the lies of militant secularism with the truth of Scripture, destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God, and taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ.