

Systematic Theology: The Image of God

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Good evening and I invite you to turn to the book of Genesis as we open God's word tonight as we begin. In Genesis 1:26, we'll refer to this text a couple of times this evening, it describes God's creation of man in verse 26 and it says,

26 Then God said, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; and let them rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over the cattle and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth." 27 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 God said to them, "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 every living thing that moves on the earth."

For the past couple of weeks here on Tuesday evening, we've been studying an area of systematic theology know as anthropology. It's the study of man from the Greek word "anthropos," meaning "man," and we've seen the origin and the purpose of man in the plan of God and we've seen that you cannot understand humanity, you cannot understand mankind, you cannot understand the human race apart from God. When people deny God, when people are agnostic about the existence of God, they sever themselves from the very purpose and the very thing that gives their existence truth and meaning. Man exists as a direct creation from God, he originated from a direct creation from God, his purpose is to give glory to his Creator and when men turn away from that, they have turned themselves to a profound realm of darkness that can only get worse as time goes on. Once you have turned your back on the purpose of your existence, you have fallen into a very deep pit.

Now, this idea of man originating from God and his purpose to give glory to God, we've said that alone refutes the prevailing spirit of our age that describes man's existence in evolutionary terms, in materialistic terms, all that there is is this life and then you die and you cease to exist. Nothing could be further from the truth. In fact, as we study what we see tonight, what we're going to find is this idea of the image of God which is our subject for tonight, "Man in the Image of God," it actually gives us the sense of the destination that we have as redeemed people throughout all of eternity. So while at first blush studying the image of God and studying anthropology might seem to be a bit of an

abstract topic divorced from daily life, the truth of the matter is as you'll see this evening, that nothing could be more central to our sense of purpose and our understanding of our ultimate destiny. This is what we are destined for. This is what we are, men created in the image of God, but we are coming as Christians to a far greater manifestation of the purpose of that image as we will see by the end of the evening.

Now with that in mind then as we study the image of God this evening, we are opening up thought, we are opening up understanding that is foundational to human existence and is foundational to your ultimate purpose as a Christian. But first we would ask and answer this question: what is man's role in the present created order? What is the purpose of man in the created order as God has made it? And the answer to that question is that God created man uniquely to bear his image in creation, to bear his image on the earth. In the passage that we just read, and we'll read it again here in just a moment, we see that God designed man to reflect, to mirror, to show forth God's own relational and sovereign attributes; to be a manifestation of the rule of God on earth.

Look at that passage in Genesis with me again in chapter 1, verse 26, "God said, 'Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness,'" so man is created on a pattern that is like after to God, "and let them rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over the cattle and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.' God created man in His own image." Now as you know very well, this text is the capstone of the six days of creation. Man is the climax, the highlight of all of God's created work. So we see that God created man in his image. What does that mean? Somehow man bears the likeness of God. Somehow man represents God. Somehow man is patterned after God and that means, when you remember who God is, the uncreated Creator, God being the one who ordained all that would ever happen, the God who created the heavens and the earth by the mere power of his spoken word, the God who established a plan and is working his plan out to perfection, somehow we are created after a pattern that reflects him and that means this is that there is a unique and exalted role for man in the order of creation. This is why, this is part of the reason why evolution and this idea of man evolving in a materialistic way without a divine origin, it utterly shatters the purpose of man in creation; it utterly shatters that which gives glory to the existence of man; it utterly reduces man to rubble to say that he is like unto animals. It reduces man to rubble when such profoundly misguided organizations like People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals elevate animals to the level of humanity.

I don't know if I've mentioned this in the past, I probably have, I tend to repeat myself. It's one of the things that goes with old age, I guess, is that you start to repeat yourself. Have I said that before? But you can do a search for different things of what I'm about to describe and there are such goofy ideas going on that these animal rights organizations want to establish memorials for chickens that have died in semi-truck accidents, for fish that died in some kind of natural calamity, as if their existence was parallel to man who we mark with gravestones and other memorials to recognize the passing of men on the scene, and elevating brute creation to the level of man. This is an utter travesty, an utter denial, an utter attack on man having a unique role in creation as the image of God. So these are not harmless matters of eccentricity. It is eccentric but understand that those

efforts to elevate animals and to treat animals in that kind of way that parallels the life of man, is to reduce man far below what God created him to be. So we take those things seriously and recognize them for the attack on the preeminent place that humanity has in the created order for what they are.

Now, over the centuries theologians have tried to define the image of God in man in different ways. It's a bit of a challenge because the Bible does not systematically explain this category of theology. There is not a systematic treatment of this like there is of the doctrine of salvation that you would find in the book of Romans, for example, but I believe that if we keep closely to the context of this passage in Genesis 1, we will find our answer and we will find that which satisfies our sense of what does it mean when God said that he would create man in his own image.

A couple of things that it doesn't mean to start with so that we just think rightly from the beginning. In a negative sense, it should be obvious to us that Adam did not share God's self-existent essence. God did not share his uncreated essence with Adam. Adam is a creature. He will never, humanity will never share in that uncreated essence of God. There is a transcendence to God. There is a holiness to God, a separateness from his creation that we will never bridge even in heaven. He will always be high and exalted and lofty above us. So that uncreated aspect of God's being is not communicable. It is an incommunicable attribute of God that cannot be shared with creatures. Also in the negative sense, the image of God does not mean that man has a bodily likeness to God because God is a spirit who does not have flesh and bones. So when it comes to the very essence of God, the very nature of God, the image of God doesn't reflect something like that when we speak about it in biblical terms.

So that's just by way of preface. What can we say positively about this image of God? Well, I'm going to give you four different aspects about it that we can build from seeing Scripture texts that talk about the image of God and, first of all, we'll start here: there is a relational aspect to the image of God. A relational aspect to the image of God. God created man with the capacity to have relationships, to communicate with other human beings and to communicate with him, and context points this out to us when we think through what's being said.

Look at Genesis 1:26 again, "God said, 'Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness.'" Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness. Now there is something very profound going on in this passage in that text. What this is telling us is that before there was the creation of man, the members of the Godhead deliberated with one another about what they would do in the creation of man. God said, "Let Us." There is a plurality to the Godhead right in Genesis 1. We've talked about that in the past in our teaching on the Trinity. There is a plurality in the Godhead and they are somehow communicating with one another, exchanging thought with one another in an understanding way within themselves, within the oneness of the Godhead as to what they shall do.

Now, we're all already out of our depth trying to understand what that was like. What is it like when the Father, Son and Holy Spirit deliberate within the council of the Godhead? Whatever that's like, whatever the infinite depths of divine mind and divine wisdom are, humanity is a product of that kind of consultation. S. Lewis Johnson said, "Man is the product of the consultation of the Triune God." In the infinite majesty of the Triune God, in the depths of divine being that the mind of man in its finite form cannot plunge and exhaust, somehow from within that infinite wellspring of being and knowledge came the creation of man and there was a relational aspect to the work of God that resulted in the product of man. The Godhead had an interaction that involved loving, intelligent communication with one another with mutual regard, and coming out of that they say, "Let Us create man in Our image." Somehow, then, man has a capacity that mirrors that relational aspect of God and we are enjoying the fruit of that now this evening as we talk with one another. We have the capacity for human relationships, we can communicate thought to one another in language that makes sense to us. Somehow the image of God has a relational aspect that has been impressed, that has been imprinted on humanity in a way that is not true of anything else in creation. God created man as male and female. He told them to multiply. Adam when Eve was created recognized her immediately as a suitable life partner in a way that was not true of the other animals that had been paraded before him, and there was this relational aspect to that recognition. So whatever else we say about the image of God being impressed and given to man, somehow it includes a relational aspect to interact with people in an intelligent and communicating way.

Now, there is something remarkable about that. As you continue to study Scripture, even though Adam fell into sin, Adam and Eve fell into sin and the image of God was therefore marred in man, it was not eradicated. The image of God continues on in man even after his fall into sin and it is this image of God, the fact that man somehow reflects the image of God that Scripture calls upon and points to as that which would restrain physical and verbal assault from one man to another. The Bible forbids murder, the Bible forbids gossip and slander, and grounds that in different portions of Scripture in the fact that man bears the image of God and that becomes that which restrains those kinds of assaults.

Look at Genesis 9, well after the fall of man. Genesis 9 beginning in verse 5 says,

5 "Surely I will require your lifeblood; from every beast I will require it. And from every man, from every man's brother I will require the life of man. 6 Whoever sheds man's blood, By man his blood shall be shed, For [this is the ground of that command, that ground for capital punishment] For in the image of God He made man."

And the rationale for this imposition, this authorization of capital punishment, is that murder is such a severe crime not simply because a human life has been taken away, but because a human life which bears the image of God has been assaulted, has been taken away, and that becomes the understanding upon which we realize that murder is such a serious crime, it is an assault on the image of God. It is not simply a horizontal man upon man crime, it is an assault upon the image of God.

Now turn in the New Testament to James 3 in a passage with this understanding of the exalted place that man holds in the created order, the exalted position that God has given man vis-à-vis everything else in creation. It becomes the ground upon which God forbids cursing of men. James 3 beginning in verse 8. He says,

8 ... no one can tame the tongue; it is a restless evil and full of deadly poison. 9 With it we bless our Lord and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in the likeness of God;

And James is saying that's a bad thing. We should not do that. We should not curse men who bear the image of God because it is a reflection of cursing God himself. And in verse 10 he goes on and says,

10 from the same mouth come both blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not to be this way.

So that the image of God, then, becomes a restraint on the evil that man would exercise against another man. Physical assault restrained by the fact, "That man bears the image of God. I cannot strike against that." Restraining verbal assault, "That man, that woman, bears the image of God. I must restrain my tongue out of deference to the image of God that that person bears."

So we see that God is relational and this starts to put boundaries on our relationships and you could say one more aspect about this. If you would turn from James to the right just a couple of books to 1 John 4 as we remember this relational aspect of the nature of God, while this passage doesn't speak to the image of God directly, I just want to bring this in to you, into your thinking, I should say, that God is relational, God is love, and that becomes the ground of love within the church, within the body of Christ. Verse 7 of 1 John 4,

7 Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. 8 The one who does not love does not know God, for God is love.

So you find within the church the apostles pointing to the character of God saying, "Look at what God is like and realize that the nature of God, the image of God, has implications for all of your relationships. It shapes how you think about other human beings, every one of them." There is not a relationship in your life, when we think about these things rightly, there is not a relationship in our life that is not informed by the reality of the image of God in man.

Now, so there is this relational aspect and that has implications for relationships. Secondly, go back to Genesis 1 again. Secondly, a second aspect that we can find of the image of God in man we could call an authoritative aspect. An authoritative aspect. In creating man, God also emphasized the priority of dominion that he had given to man, the

capacity to rule, to be over creation in authority. In verse 26 again we see God said, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness," there is the relational aspect, now look at the authoritative aspect in what follows, "and," connecting it with the image motif, "and let them rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over the cattle and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth." Five times, I believe it is, this word of "over," indicating the rule of God over different aspects of creation. And again, when you sever man from his creative role and his position as bearing the image of God and being set over creation, you knock him from his glory. In the desire to kill God and to kill his authority over men so that they are free to sin as they want, they actually evacuate man of what actually gives him meaning, of what actually gives him honor in his role and his purpose in creation.

So we see here in verse 26, and actually go on to verse 28 before I get ahead of myself here,

28 God blessed them; and God said to them, "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 every living thing that moves on the earth."

He creates man and he says, "Man is created in order to rule."

Now, there is something interesting about this in that we therefore bear a connection, mankind bears what you could call a mediating position, in a sense, in creation, in this sense: in that man is a creature just as the other animal brute creation are. God created the animals, God also created man, in that sense we share something in common with the brute creation in that we are both creatures from the hand of God, yet we bear an image of God that separates us from the animals and that we have a position, humanity has a position where God has assigned us over the animals, he assigned man over the animate creation, and that's why man had the prerogative of assigning names to animals.

Look at chapter 2, verse 20 of Genesis. Genesis 2:20,

20 The man gave names to all the cattle, and to the birds of the sky, and to every beast of the field,

I don't know if you've ever thought about this but this aspect of assigning names to another creature is an exercise of authority over that creature. "I will tell you what you will be called. I will assign your name to you." So there is this unique role of authority that was given to man.

Turn over to Psalm 8 for a passage that also instructs us in this. Psalm 8 which, of course, we've studied on a few occasions in the past. Psalm 8, affirming this unique role of dominion in the created order. Psalm 8:4, let's begin in verse 3, Psalm 8:3.

3 When I consider Your heavens, the work of Your fingers, The moon and the stars, which You have ordained;

As he looks up and he contemplates the created order and sees the vast infinite glory of it and then brings his eyes back down to earth and sees the smallness of man by comparison, his mind is brought to a thought, "Why would you pay attention to a creature like man?" Verse 4,

4 What is man that You take thought of him, And the son of man that You care for him? 5 Yet You have made him a little lower than God, And You crown him with glory and majesty! 6 You make him to rule over the works of Your hands; You have put all things under his feet, 7 All sheep and oxen, And also the beasts of the field, 8 The birds of the heavens and the fish of the sea, Whatever passes through the paths of the seas.

There is this role of dominion given to man over creation. Paul said, the Apostle Paul said in 1 Corinthians 11:7, man is the image and the glory of God, and therefore there is this authoritative relational aspect to the image of God that defines what the purpose and what the role and what the essence of man is, all of it reflecting a greater reality found in the Godhead, found in the person of God. The relational aspect of man reflecting a greater reality of the relational interactions between the members of the Godhead. The dominion given to man reflecting the greater sovereignty that God has over all, that has over all of the universe, over all of creation, has over all of man, has over time, man bearing a reflection of that.

So beloved, this is all building up to an even more magnificent conclusion before we're done this evening, you start to see something of the purpose of man that God has assigned to him and it is lofty and it is majestic, and when we understand something about the image of God borne by man, we understand why, for example, the implications of this go in a lot of different directions, we understand why abortion is such a deadly sin because it is an assault on the image of God in the womb, and this image of God trumps any sense of a woman's so-called choice. It is not for a woman to give the fruit of her womb over to destruction because her womb is bearing a reflection of the image of God and that is why abortion is such a terrible sin. Not an appendage. It's not a finger. That little one is a bearer of the image of God meant to grow to fullness of life.

Now as we consider what else the Scriptures say about the image of God, there is a sense in which what I hope you're seeing is, there is a sense in which as you study man and you study the purpose of man, man becomes a window through which you see other things about God. He becomes a window into what God is like, in other words. He bears the image. He's a pattern after a greater origin. Thirdly, we can say that there is a moral aspect. A moral aspect to the image of God and we'll turn to the New Testament to see this stated for us. As the image of God, man is made to exist in God's moral realm; that there is an invisible, there is an unseen realm of right and wrong, of righteousness in which man is created to live in, and what Scripture tells us is that man who has sinned against that aspect of the image, salvation in Christ restores that aspect of the image of God to man.

Look at Ephesians 4. Ephesians 4, if you would turn there with me as well. Ephesians 4 in verse 22. We can actually start in verse 20. Ephesians 4:20. Paul having just described the Gentiles who walk in darkness because of the hardness of their heart, having given themselves over to sensuality for the practice of every kind of impurity with greediness says this in verse 20,

20 But you did not learn Christ in this way, 21 if indeed you have heard Him and have been taught in Him, just as truth is in Jesus, 22 that, in reference to your former manner of life, you lay aside the old self, which is being corrupted in accordance with the lusts of deceit, 23 and that you be renewed in the spirit of your mind, 24 and put on the new self, [this new aspect, this new nature in Christ, in other words, and notice how Paul describes it] which in the likeness of God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth.

He says there is an aspect of the image of God that reflects his righteousness and holiness and it is part of our privilege and part of our responsibility as believers to cultivate righteousness and holiness in our lives, not simply for the sake of good morality, there is an aspect to that but it's a lesser aspect to the overall purpose of it, that in pursuing holiness and growing in righteousness, we as believers would better reflect the image of God in this moral realm. So your pursuit of sanctification, your struggle against sin is not simply a matter of trying to avoid bad things or to deal with evil desires in your heart. We do this for a greater goal. We do this for a vertical reason. We do this because this is part as born-again believers in Christ, this is part of our aspect, our privilege of reflecting the image of God. A Christian, then, manifests the likeness of God in his righteousness, in his moral character, in reflecting what God is like morally.

So you start to see the loftiness of this concept of the image, and we haven't even gotten to the best part yet. I'd better deliver, hadn't I, because I keep building up what's yet to come? Relationally, in authority, in morality, in righteousness, reflecting who God is, reflecting something of his likeness, and do you see then, beloved, as we step back as we think about Christians and the sins that we fall into as Christians, do you see how utterly foreign to our existence as Christians created in the image of God and renewed in his image and this aspect of his image in our conversion, to sin against God in fleshly immorality, to sin against God in drunkenness, for example, just to give a couple of illustrations here, do you see that it is more than simply the human dynamic of those sins that's at stake? For the Christian, those sins become an assault on the image of God which is utterly contrary to the purpose for which we have been saved. Our purpose is to reflect the image of God, including in his righteousness, and that becomes a lofty reason for us as Scripture says elsewhere in 1 Corinthians 6, to flee immorality, to flee the sins of the flesh, because you have been saved for a greater purpose. You bear the imprint of the image of God in a way that is designed for you to manifest greater aspects, noble aspects of the character of God that are not reflected in the unsaved man, and that becomes a high and lofty and supreme motivation for us to pursue holiness in our lives. To do anything else, to give ourselves over to immorality or drunkenness or any of the other sins that the New Testament speaks against, is not merely to defile ourselves, to defile our own

conscience, to sin against Christ, beloved, what we see is that it is a perversion of the image of God as well and that should become increasingly unthinkable to you.

There becomes as you study this, as you reflect on what God has done in making us in his image, this has the impact of highlighting and emphasizing your separation from the world. You young people, as you're looking at what your life is going to be, recognizing that if God has saved you at an early age, he has saved you for a glorious purpose that transcends whatever you might decide to do with your life when it comes to career or marriage choices or things like that. Those aspects, those important wonderful aspects of life with what we do, are secondary to the greater purpose, the transcendent purpose that belongs to us as Christians as being image bearers of God and reflecting his likeness in our life and in our sanctification, and what we find is that that even extends into what we could call the mental aspect of the image of God or the intellectual aspect of the image of God. There is a relational aspect, an authoritative aspect, a moral aspect to the image of God, and now to see a mental aspect of the image of God. What I would remind you of is what Jesus said the greatest commandment was, is to love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all of your soul, with all of your strength, and with all of your mind; that even your mind is to be given over to the glory of God, and that even your mind as we're going to see here in another text, even your mind is given in this renewal that comes to us in Christ, is to be bearing the image of God and reflecting the image and glory of God.

Turn over to Colossians 3, which is just two books to the right in your hardcopy Bible. Ephesians, Philippians and Colossians. In Colossians 3, let's actually pick it up in verse 5 just to kind of reemphasize the moral aspect as we lead into this final mental aspect of the image of God. Verse 4,

4 When Christ, who is our life, is revealed, then you also will be revealed with Him in glory. 5 Therefore consider the members of your earthly body as dead to immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed, which amounts to idolatry. 6 For it is because of these things that the wrath of God will come upon the sons of disobedience, 7 and in them you also once walked, when you were living in them. 8 But now you also, put them all aside: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and abusive speech from your mouth.

And look at what he says in verses 9 and 10. He leads from this moral aspect into the image of God. Verse 9

9 Do not lie to one another, since you laid aside the old self with its evil practices, 10 and have put on the new self who is being renewed to a true knowledge [there it is, a true knowledge, the mental dimension, the intellectual dimension of the Christian life] according to the image of the One who created him--

Knowledge according to the image of the one who created him.

So, beloved, I mean, this goes everywhere. This permeates every aspect and every reason for our existence. Relationally, every aspect, every relationship we have is informed and influenced and affected by this. Morally, this is all affected by it. And then even into the inner man, here's what I want you to see, even into our inner man, that our mind would be given over to a true knowledge of God and Paul says that this new self is being renewed to a true knowledge according to, after the pattern, according to the image of God who created him. God made you a new creation in Christ. God saved you out of your former manner of life, in part that your mind would be renewed, that your mind would become truthful, your mind would become godly, and that your mind would become the fertile ground upon which a true knowledge of God grows, truth based on knowledge that reflects the image of God so that you could say that one aspect of sanctification, Christian growth in Christ-likeness, is that sanctification restores this mental aspect of the image of God in ever increasing ways to the regenerate man.

2 Peter 3:18, a verse that for some reason has been imprinted on my mind over the course of life, but grow in the grace and knowledge of Christ. Grow in the grace and knowledge of Christ. There should be a sense in us that appreciates and understands why God has given us understanding. He's given us a capacity for understanding. He has given us a mind that is able to assimilate thought in abstract ways; to assimilate and receive truth about his character and to think about that with understanding and to formulate it in a way that yields into conviction. Your mind is an aspect of the gift of God to you and God has given you this mind that you would use it to appropriate and grow in the knowledge of the Christ who saved you. Your mind becomes one part of the aspect of worship and devotion that you return back to the God who saved you. And if you think about it, the very nature, the very reality of revelation, of God making himself known, presupposes that you have a rational nature that is able to receive that and understand it. God has revealed himself in the skies, Psalm 19:1 through 6, and God has revealed himself in the Scriptures, Psalm 19:7 through 14, and all of this presupposes the lofty position that God has given to us as those who bear his image; that we have a mind that is able to process and understand what he has revealed about himself.

Now, our mind is limited, our mind is finite. It cannot comprehensively know the fullness of the infinite knowledge of God but while it cannot know God comprehensively and exhaustively, our minds can know him truly as they are renewed in Christ and as they are illuminated by the Holy Spirit as we go to his word and read and understand it. If we could just take this and apply it within the context of this wonderful body that we know as Truth Community Church, and as we gather together week by week and on Sundays and Tuesdays, to see that what we are doing together as we contemplate God's truth and as we study it and as we grow in our understanding together of it, is that we are exercising and developing that mental aspect of the knowledge of God that he calls us to, and as we grow in the knowledge of Christ and as grace is manifested and as God uses that truth to sanctify us, John 17:17, we'll also grow in a greater deeper expression of expressing the moral aspect of the image of God as well. You see, beloved, it's hard sometimes to keep the great big picture in mind but what we're doing week after week as we gather together like this, has a great transcendent purpose. God created us in his image, God saved us to restore the moral and mental aspect of his image to those of us

who know Christ, and as we feed that through studying his word, as we feed that in comprehension of what he has revealed, we are fulfilling the very reason that he appointed for our existence. This isn't just a matter of getting together to get more facts into our head, this has a lofty transcendent purpose that the world knows nothing about. So we see the image of God in these four different dimensions.

As lofty as that is, I never want to pit Scripture against Scripture and say, "Well, this is better than that," it's all wonderful but, beloved, what I want you to see is that the ultimate, the highest fulfillment of the image of God is not in you and me, it's not in humanity as known by those who share the human essence with us in the human race, except in this sense, the ultimate fulfillment of the image of God is our Lord Jesus Christ. Colossians 1:15 says that he is the image of the invisible God. It is in Christ where we see the fullness of the image of God on display in humanity. It was Christ – think about this with me – Christ bearing the image, Christ being the very image of the invisible God and Christ taking on human flesh.

There is the pinnacle of the image of God in humanity in the Lord Jesus Christ and let's think about it, let's think about Christ through these four different ways that we have talked about. The relational aspect of the image of God, Christ. Christ showing the greatest and the highest relational love when he laid down his life in loving obedience to his Father, in loving concern for his church, and gave his life on the cross at Calvary. The ultimate expression of relational love found in the ultimate man, the Lord Jesus Christ in his ultimate self-sacrifice at Calvary. That's what the love of God, that's what the image of God looks like. We see it manifested in Christ.

Dominion. Well, did not Christ exercise dominion over creation repeatedly during his time on earth? To the raging seas he says, "Hush," and the storm ceases. One day he will return, he will exercise his rule on earth when he establishes his kingdom on earth and he will rule over the earth as King, manifesting the ultimate authority as a man bearing the image of God while he himself is God himself.

Do you want to talk about morality? This was our Lord. He lived a perfect life, a sinless life. Hebrews says he was high and holy, exalted above the heavens, without sin. Jesus could speak to his adversaries and say, "Which one of you convicts me of sin?" and they fell silent because there was nothing to say. A perfect manifestation, as a man obeying God perfectly and manifesting the image of God in that way.

His knowledge, his intellect. Peter confessed in John 21, "Lord, you know all things."

So when you look at Christ from these aspects of the relational aspect, the authoritative aspect, the mental aspect, the moral aspect of the image of God, you see it in perfection in the Lord Jesus Christ and one day when Christ returns, he will fulfill the role that Adam failed in. Christ will reign on earth as a man and he will not fail. He will not sin. He will not disobey the one who gave him that role and Christ will restore the image in that way. He will fulfill the image in which Adam failed. And there is one more and it's also lofty. Let's put it that way. It's also lofty. Beloved, do you realize that when we talk about our

salvation in Christ, that we're talking about so much more than simply being delivered from the penalty of sin, that we're talking about so much more than being saved from judgment? That is a crucial aspect of it. It is certainly something for which we will give thanks throughout all of eternity to God for, but it's not simply that negative aspect of relieving us from the just punishment that our sins deserve. Salvation doesn't only rescue us from sin, ultimately it will make us like Christ. It will be a fulfillment of the restoration of the image of God in us.

1 John 3:2. Turn there with me. I've said in times past if I had to choose one verse as my favorite verse in the Bible, I don't like to talk that way, again I don't like to pit Scripture against Scripture, but I'll tell you what, 1 John 3:2 is one of the most dear verses in all of Scripture that speaks about our ultimate destiny and says it in language that is so plain and simple that the youngest child could understand it, and yet the greatest theologian could never exhaust the fullness of what it means and what its implications are. In 1 John 3:2,

2 Beloved, now we are children of God,

As we walk on this earth and sod, we are children of God. We are privileged to be called children of God. Verse 1, "the world does not know us, because it did not know Him," but that's all right. I'd rather be known by God than known by the world. I'd rather be owned by God than to be praised by the world, wouldn't you? But look at what he goes on and says in verse 2,

it has not appeared as yet what we will be. We know that when He appears, we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is.

When we are glorified, we will be like Christ in a way that we cannot even comprehend now. There will be a dimension of glory, there will be an aspect of perfection sharing in the glory of Christ that is his now resurrected and ascended on high, that we will share in that, that he will share with us.

Philippians 3 in like manner says that,

20 ... our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ; 21 who will transform the body of our humble state into conformity with the body of His glory, by the exertion of the power that He has even to subject all things to Himself.

Christ has done a great work in you already, my brother or sister in Christ. He has saved you and caused you to be born-again but there is a further work, a further exertion of his power that will one day be exerted upon you. When you see him face-to-face, you will be transformed into his glorious likeness. You will share somehow in the glory of the resurrection. You will find at that time that salvation has fully restored the image of God in you. When we are like Christ, that purpose will be fulfilled. You see, this image of God of which we speak ultimately points us to our ultimate destination. It points us

vertically to Christ and we see the fulfillment of the image of God in him as Incarnate God, and we realize that there will be a full restoration of the image of God when we are made like Christ in our glorification from, beloved, a ruined sinner such as we were before Christ, to ultimately still yet to come a glorified reflection of the eternal God. How lofty is our privilege? How lofty is our position in Christ?

Bow with me in prayer.

O God, we could not have made this up, we could not have thought these things up on our own. We praise you. We honor you. We bless your holy name. And we pray that during this life, during the remainder of the days that you have appointed for our existence here on earth, that we would increasingly reflect your glory in the manifestation of your character through our lives. We know that we're progressing toward a goal. We thank you that we're not like we used to be but, Father, we realize we're not all that we one day will be and so we ask you to help us grow in our sanctification. But Father, by faith we thank you tonight in a particular and special way for the ultimate fulfillment of our salvation, the ultimate glorification that will one day be ours. Father, when this misery, meager life is left behind and we enter into the full realm of glory, when we see Christ for who he is, when one day we are glorified with a resurrected body, O God, how magnificent that day will be! The first day on that will simply be an introduction to the fullness of an eternity where that will just be more greatly and wonderfully appreciated throughout the unfolding eons of the ages. Father, by faith tonight we thank you for that which is yet to come. We thank you for the inestimable, immeasurable wisdom of God, and we thank you for the grace of God that saved sinners like us unto such a noble purpose and a glorious future. Father, may those who are not in Christ hear of this majesty and be drawn to call out to Christ that they also would share in it, knowing that Christ made a blood atonement for sinners just like them; that all who receive him by faith enter freely into these riches of which we have spoken here so briefly and so inadequately here this evening. So Father, receive our praise and fulfill your purpose in us not only in this life but in the life to come. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

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