

Created in God's Image and Likeness

Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, in our likeness..."
Genesis 1:26-27 (NIV)

What exactly does it mean to be made in God's image and likeness? "Image" and "likeness" are actually similar yet distinct terms. I believe they are complementary and better define the passage's meaning.

An image of something is duplicative in nature. For example, statues are made in the image of a person. A likeness does not convey such preciseness. To be like someone means you possess many, but not all of the characteristics of that person. Obviously, man does not possess God's omnipotence. However, there are some ways that we do emulate God.

Like God, human beings have a unique soul, which enables us to form a personal relationship with Him. Just as we are inclined to form intimate relationships with our own family, God seeks to bond with us.

Human beings also possess free will. We are capable of comparing the options in our lives and are free to choose among them. We are capable of making decisions, whether they are good or bad. Since we are the only creatures on Earth with a soul, we can use free will to sin or live a righteous life.

God granted us dominion over the Earth. God is responsible for creating the universe, and likewise, we are responsible for our world. This delegated sovereignty is sacred. Just as God formed the Earth to His liking, we are capable of changing it and managing it to our liking. I side with environmentalists here because we must not take this responsibility for granted. Ultimately, we are answerable to God for the conditions of planet Earth, and the state of our fellow human beings.

While few of us approach the legendary Wisdom of Solomon, wisdom is another characteristic that both God and man possess. Only human beings, alone among all of God's Earthly creatures, have the ability to reason, and the maturity to make intelligent choices without allowing selfish motives to consume us. Adam and Eve ate fruit from the "tree of the knowledge of good and evil." Many Biblical scholars believe the phrase, "knowledge of good and evil," is another way of saying "wisdom." It appears that even the earliest recorded human beings desired to expand their wisdom.

Man is God's sole Earthly creature that understands the concept of morality. We possess the ability to comprehend right from wrong, and have written morality and rules of conduct into the social-binding contracts that are contained in our laws. Perhaps this ability best exemplifies the way that we are most like God.

Unlike the animals, human beings are capable of acquiring knowledge. The explosion of knowledge in our modern technological society is a key development in the progression of our culture. It has transformed our planet into a global community. With the advancements and the knowledge that we have acquired, humanity can no longer hide behind the pretense of ignorance. We are fully aware of the consequences of our actions – whether it is recognizing our impact on the environment or the destructive capability of our weapons. It remains to be seen whether our wisdom has kept pace with technology.

Mankind also possesses another type of knowledge. We know that life is temporary, and that death is inevitable. This knowledge of death and an afterlife may give us a sense of purpose, and the inclination to reflect upon our lives. While animals act mainly on instinct and the need to fulfill their immediate desires, we are capable of looking beyond our current situation. We are also aware that our actions today may have consequences later in life, and beyond our Earthly departure.

When we speak of love and compassion, we tend to think of these characteristics in human terms. However, we can also detect these very same traits among many mammals. Dogs, cats, and horses, for example, appear capable of love and compassion. However, only man has the capacity to recognize, love, and worship God. We are also capable of forgiveness.

God made us in His image and likeness. Because of this, each of us is capable of determining our own destiny. God endowed us with a soul, the ability to form a relationship with Him, and the ability to increase our knowledge and wisdom. We are obligated to care for the people and the world that He gave us. Far too often, we have failed in that responsibility.

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