

Created in the Image and Likeness of God

by Jim Schicatano

IMAGE AND LIKENESS

Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground." So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. – (Gen. 1:26-27 NIV)

The creation of mankind acquires special significance in the Biblical Creation Story. It is here where God creates a creature that is higher than the animals – a being which possesses a special likeness to Him, and is created in His very own image. It is this creation – God's final – that is the pinnacle of the Story. The prior six days, and every creation event occurring within, has led up to this profound moment. For in humanity, God has developed a being that is capable of developing a personal, spiritual relationship with Him. In addition, for the first time in the Bible, God directly communicates with mankind. He does this in Genesis 1:28 when, after blessing the first man and woman, He instructed them to "*Be fruitful and increase in number . . .*"

The personal relationship that spiritually bonds us with God is unique on our world. Plants, though certainly living entities, are incapable of thought. The animal world primarily consists of creatures that act on instinct. Some of the "higher" animals – mammals, such as dogs, apes, or monkeys – appear capable of intelligent thought, but do not form a spiritual relationship with God. In all of creation, we alone have been blessed with this wonderful ability and opportunity.

But what exactly does it mean to be made in God's image (the Hebrew word *tselem*¹) and likeness (the Hebrew word *demut*²)? "Image" and "likeness" are actually similar yet distinct terms. I believe they complement each other and better define what is meant by the passage.

IMAGE

An image of something is duplicative in nature. Statues are made in the image of a person. On the term "image," *The Broadman Bible Commentary* states:

It describes an exact resemblance, like a son who is the very image of his father. Ancient kings would place such effigies of themselves in cities they ruled.³

LIKENESS

“Likeness” does not convey such preciseness as “image.”⁴ 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, wisdom, righteousness, perfection, ability to create, and divineness.

EXAMPLES OF MAN’S IMAGE AND LIKENESS TO GOD

Now that we have a better understanding of the terms, let us examine the ways that we emulate God.

1. A SOUL

Human beings are similar to God – and the angels – in that we are spirit beings. Unlike the plants and animals, each of us possesses a unique soul. It is this soul that allows us to form a personal relationship with our Creator.

God reveals something about Himself by creating a creature capable of forming a relationship with Him. We consider it human nature to form relationships with others. We seem to possess a natural inclination to form strong personal ties with members of our own family, and we continually attempt to extend the quantity of our personal relationships by forming bonds with friends. Yet, here is evidence that God also possesses this very trait, as He seeks to deepen and add to the spiritual relationships that He has formed.

2. FREEDOM TO CHOOSE⁵

Each of us is capable of comparing the options before us, and are free to choose and make decisions. Like the angels, human beings possess free will. We may use this freedom to worship God or to curse Him. We may choose a path of righteousness or lead a life of iniquity. God tries to guide each of us in the proper direction, but He does not force His will upon us.

While God is always reaching out in an attempt to develop a relationship with us, it is we who must choose to accept His invitation. God’s ability to forgive, and the unwavering patience He displays in waiting for us, far surpasses the patience and forgiveness that we display to our fellow man.

3. SOVEREIGNTY

We are like God in the sense that we have been given sovereignty over the entire Earth. God is responsible for the creation of the universe, and likewise, we are responsible for our world. This sovereignty, however, is not a birthright of ours. It is a sacred gift, given to us from God; it is a delegated responsibility. Just as God has created and formed our world to His liking, we are capable of changing it and managing it to our liking.

This responsibility that has been entrusted to us must not be taken for granted, because ultimately we are answerable to God for the conditions of planet Earth and the state of our fellow human beings.

4. WISDOM

None of us possess the wisdom of Almighty God, and few of us approach the legendary wisdom of Solomon. Yet, wisdom is a characteristic that both God and man possess. Only human beings, alone among all of God's earthly creatures, possess the ability to understand right from wrong, the ability to reason, and the maturity to make intelligent choices without allowing selfish motives to consume us.

Throughout the centuries, mankind has searched the world for this desirable quality. We have climbed majestic mountains, trampled through thick rain forests, and have explored virtually every remote region of our world, seeking the ancient culture or the ancient writings that will reward us with wisdom. We have turned to the elderly, hoping their life's experiences have endowed them with wisdom. We have questioned the prophets, seeking their divine guidance in our search for wisdom. The intellectuals, the educated, and the philosophers have all been credited through the ages as having possessed some extraordinary wisdom. 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.

5. KNOWLEDGE⁶

Unlike the animals, human beings are capable of acquiring knowledge. The vast reservoir of knowledge that we have accumulated in the past century alone has expanded to a level that is virtually incomprehensible to the average man. Quantum physics, laser technology, virtual reality, nuclear fission, global communications, personal computers, jet engines, television, and supercomputers are all words and phrases that have become common in our society. We have landed astronauts on our satellite, the moon, and safely brought them

home. We have landed space ships on Mars, and have sent probes beyond the limits of our solar system. We have discovered distant galaxies billions of light-years from Earth, and have developed microscopes that can see the tiniest virus. We have unleashed the awesome power of the atom, and have developed computer microprocessing chips so efficient that they can perform billions of instructions every second.

Medical research has produced almost mind-boggling possibilities. We have cloned animals, transplanted internal organs, performed laser surgery, created workable prosthetics, and developed machines that take x-rays, resonance images, sonograms, and monitor the heart, the brain, and other organs. Dialysis cleanses our bodies, while heart bypasses and chemotherapy adds years to our already increasing life expectancy. Genetic research, new drugs, bio-research, and new medical treatments hold promise for an even greater future.

The explosion of knowledge in our modern technological society is an important development in the progression of our culture. In fact, it would be difficult to envision our technically dependent society without these advances. The progress that we have made has virtually transformed our planet into a global community. Even the remotest regions of the world will not remain isolated much longer.

With the advancements and the knowledge that we have acquired, mankind can no longer hide behind the pretense of ignorance. We are now 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 mankind's wisdom has kept pace with the technological advancements that we have made.

There is another type of knowledge that only mankind possesses. We are aware that life is only temporary, and that death is inevitable. We are also aware of an afterlife.⁷ 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.

6. LOVE AND COMPASSION

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. It is difficult to know whether animals such as dogs, cats, and horses experience the same diversity and depth of emotions that we experience. But many animals do appear capable of love and compassion. We have all seen the mother cat cleaning her kittens, or ducklings swimming behind their mother.

Elephants are weaned well into their teenage years, and puppies are nurtured and protected by their mother. In each of these cases, we witness some level of concern or affection between nonhuman creatures.

While it may be interesting that some animals exhibit the tender quality of love (and possibly compassion), there is at least one distinct difference between the love that animals and human beings are capable of displaying and sharing – only man has the ability to recognize, love, and worship God.⁸

7. MORALITY

Man is the only creature of God that understands the concept of morality. We have actually written morality and rules of conduct into the social-binding contracts that are contained in our laws. Human beings possess a conscience, which seems to be derived from our soul.⁹ Perhaps our ability to comprehend what is right and wrong best exemplifies the way that we are most like God.

MAN'S PLACE IN CREATION

Although we may never totally understand what is meant by these verses, the overall meaning of the passage is clear. In mankind, God has completed His final creation of the Creation Story. Consider what King David said of our creation and our special place among all of God's creations.

When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, what is man that you are mindful of him, the son of man that you care for him? You made him a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned him with glory and honor. You made him ruler over the works of your hands; you put everything under his feet: all flocks and herds, and the beasts of the field, the birds of the air, and the fish of the sea, all that swim the paths of the seas. – (*Psalms 8:3-8 NIV*)

We have all been made in the image and likeness of God, and because of this, each of us is capable of determining our own destiny. Unlike the plants and animals, God has endowed us with the ability to form a relationship with Him, the ability to increase our knowledge and wisdom, and the responsibility of caring for the world that He has given us.

The fact that we are made in His image and likeness should inspire us with a sense of duty and purpose. As His primary creations, we are

obligated to emulate and exhibit His divineness. We may find it complimentary that we have been made in His image, but all too often we have neglected the responsibilities that it entails. Above all of His Earthly creations, God has endowed each of us with a unique soul – making us accountable for all of our actions.

NOTES:

1. P.R. Ackroyd, A.R.C. Leaney, and J.W. Packer, eds., *The Cambridge Bible Commentary: Genesis 1-11* (Cambridge: At The University Press, 1973), pp.24-25
2. Ibid.
3. *The Broadman Bible Commentary, Vol.1* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1973), p.125
4. Ibid.
5. William Neil, *Harper's Bible Commentary*, (New York and Evanston: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1962), p.16
6. Matthew Henry, *Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible, Vol.I.* (New York, London, and Edinburgh: Fleming H. Revell Company, n.d.), p.10
7. Hugh Ross, *Genesis One: A Scientific Perspective, Rev. Ed.* (Pasadena, CA: Reasons To Believe, 1983), p.13
8. Henry M. Morris, *The Genesis Record* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1976), p.74
9. Hugh Ross, *Genesis One: A Scientific Perspective, Rev. Ed.* (Pasadena, CA: Reasons To Believe, 1983), p.13