

Genesis: Foundations of the Faith 2) The Image of God

Genesis 1:26-28 • 2020-06-14 • Series: Genesis - Foundations of the Christian Faith



I've always enjoyed watching documentaries and shows which deal with design.

You've probably seen one of those shows where someone purchases an old, worn-

down house and completely renovates it. Or you might have seen a documentary about a spectacular engineering marvel like Hoover Dam. My favorite part is when the person behind the project explains what they planned to accomplish and how they planned to build or design it. Sometimes you get to listen to an interview with the architect or engineer behind the amazing new designs. Wouldn't it be great to have behind the scenes insight on God's designs for his creation? Today we look once again at the first chapter of the Bible and we see just that: God revealing his design plans to us. We're going through a six-part series together looking at the foundations of the faith in the book of Genesis. And today we get to see another one of the foundations of the Christian faith found in the first chapter: The Image of God.

Recall how God made everything very good. There's no engineer who could ever claim a flawless design. But our God does. He carried out his design by the power of his Word and everything came into being. God ordered and arranged all of creation "and it was so," just as he willed it. Near the end of the creation account we come across something that stands out. It is the end goal of all of God's designs. It's the reason he made the universe and formed the stars. It's the reason for all the formations of land and water and all the plants. It's the reason that he made every living creature. From eternity he planned out all his creation for the sole purpose of this final creature's existence. This creature was so important in his design that God even planned to hand over the rule of his creation without any limits. It is all there for this most important creature: humans.

Before he made them, God revealed his design plan. He paused and said, "Let us make man in our image, in our likeness." This section of the creation account particularly stands out. It is poetic in form in the Hebrew language. And it is unique in content. We can note that behind the plural "our image" and "our likeness" is the mysterious revelation of God as three persons. We find in Scripture that he is three in one. God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit have a special plan for mankind. They are designed to bear his image, his likeness. Many Bibles rightly set apart this important section with a poetic indentation. The poetry stands out even further as the word, "create" comes up three times to describe how the Triune God made mankind. Man and woman are made in his image. This is what separates us from every other creature: we were created in the image and likeness of God.

So, what does Moses mean by saying that God created them in his image? We can rule out several mistaken understandings. Being in God's image, in his likeness, can't refer to physical appearance. God is a spiritual being, not a created physical being. There are other understandings we must rule out. We are not made to be God. We are made to be like God. God alone is all-powerful. He did not make mankind to be all-powerful. God alone is all-wise and all-knowing. God did not make mankind to be omniscient. God alone is all-present. But God did not make his creatures, including man and woman, to be omnipresent. He gave them a body in which they are limited by travel and space. Nor does being made in God's image just mean that man has authority over creation. Rather, the image of God is what mankind must have in order to rightly carry out the role of ruling over all creation.

What the image of God characterizes is the *mindset of mankind*. God created them to know his will and reflect his goodness and upright mindset. Man and woman were created holy and without any sin. What God willed, they willed. What God considered good and delighted in, they also considered good and delighted in. They were made to reflect and represent the holiness of God as they ruled over his creation. And with God's image they could rightly carry out their role of ruling over creation. This is one of the foundational truths of the Christian faith: God designed and created the first man and woman as a perfect likeness of his will and his holiness. This is a tremendous blessing! God blessed us with his image that so that we could live according to his good purposes.

We have a hard time grasping such a state of existence, don't we? The image of God doesn't seem to be reflected in man and woman anymore. Mankind can't even get along with itself between different social classes, cultures, and ethnic groups. Where is the image of God now? Does a man act like God when he abuses his wife with his words, his actions, or his failure to show her love? He doesn't look like the image of a holy God when he takes all that is good and ruins it for his own personal whim and pleasure. Does a woman look like she was created to be like God when she abuses her body with substance abuse? She doesn't look at all like the divine, loving author of life when she contemplates the whispering temptation to end life that has begun inside her womb --life which God designed to bear his image.

And how about you? Do you feel like you deserve the title, "made in God's image?" Look at your own use of the blessings which God has given you. I can tell you that I feel anything but holy and righteous when I look at all the times I devoured creation and all it offers and sought to serve myself rather than the perfect will of my God. Jesus preached, "be perfect as your heavenly father his perfect." Are you? The



prophet Isaiah once asked, "With whom will you compare God? What likeness will you set up for comparison with him?" (Is 40:18) And sadly each of us must answer "not me, I do not compare with God in likeness. I contrast in likeness."

And that is true of every human being. As we'll see later in our series the first man and woman gave into the whispering lie that to be like God means giving into fear and faithlessness. Man and woman gave into fear. They turned faithless. And they tossed aside the image of God for following the devil.

I bought a student violin for a six-year old once from a store that claimed it was quality made in Ireland. Imagine my disappointment when I received the violin and found it was poorly constructed and it wasn't even setup correctly. It arrived with some broken pieces and was just like the poorly constructed violins you can buy for far less from a factory in China. Even though it came from a company based in Ireland, I was surprised to find a little sticker on it. Maybe someone forgot to remove the sticker. On the bottom a sticker remained which read, "*made in china.*" I replaced a few parts and it works, but it still has trouble holding in tune. Our condition is even more tragic. We are not what we were made to be. We come ruined and unable to hold a tune. Each of us has a label left on us that reads, "from Adam." And we don't resemble the perfect harmony and tune of our Creator, we resemble our fallen father.

With that corrupted state of birth, we bring ourselves and all of creation under us into ruin. People have a lot of choices to make in life. But those choices are not guided by the mindset of God. They are guided by a lost and fallen state of mind. They are guided by the sinful heart that by nature only knows fear and unbelief. The image of God is his design for us. But by our own designs and will we have tossed it aside for the likeness of Adam and Eve in whose image we were born. And so, we are born into a mindset of fear and unbelief and live in that mindset. And we deserve to die in it under God's curse, not his blessing.

How can we ever attain the blessing that was lost and be restored to perfectly bearing God's Image? It's not how many people think. The lie of the fallen human mind is that you must first improve yourself and then God will want to love you or bless you. In sinful pride every man-made religion teaches that you must attain perfection. Every false religion dictates proper living in order to attain a right relationship with God.

But the foundation of the Christian faith is just the opposite. Proper living can only come when we have a right relationship with God. The Christian faith puts attaining God's image backwards from all other methods. He made mankind in his image. And he alone restores us in his image. Adam and Eve were holy because they shared God's image and had his mindset. It is only after tossed aside trust and his love for unbelief and fear that they lost the ability to live for God. They were perfect from the start. Adam and Eve were able to live holy lives because they knew God's will and his love. He created mankind perfect and loved mankind before anyone could ever do anything. God first let man and woman know his goodness and his great love. It says in these verses, "God blessed them...." That comes first. First, we must know God and know his goodness. We must hold in faith onto him. Living out a holy life only comes after that; not before. That is a foundational truth of the Christian faith. Right living doesn't make us like God. Trusting our loving God's great blessing and love for us, however, does.

And here is the goodness of God we can trust now: he restores us. We could never attain or restore the image of God. So, God restores us. Scriptures reveal that Christ bore the likeness of sinful man, only he was without sin. He took on human flesh and was born into this world. When people saw him, they saw not just a representation of God's image, but the very image. He was perfectly holy and righteous. He only willed what the Father willed and was holy. And that meant that he willed we be restored in the image of God. But he knew that none could ever attain what was lost. So, the perfect Son of God took our place and lived a perfect life for us. And he took our suffering for us. To bear God's image is to give up everything for the good of those under you. God did that for us. Our sins are forgiven. Our relationship with God is restored. We are made new by the washing of rebirth and renewal of the Holy Spirit who calls us to trust in Jesus.

And his goodness and renewal go even further for us. In 1 Corinthians 15 the apostle Paul describes what is in store for us. He explains that we are renewed according to the image of the second Adam, that is Jesus. And will soon bear the image of the heavenly Adam, that is the living resurrected Jesus. We were created to bear God's image. And we will through faith in him. Someday when this body of sin is dead, we will all be changed. Our bodies will rise anew and once again bearing the perfect image of God. We will live forever in the peace, joy, and love that comes from the mindset of our God. John writes, "Dear friends, we are children of God now, but what we will be has not yet been revealed. We know that when he is revealed *we will be like him.*" (1 Jn 3:2)

God's design plans come full circle. What was ruined by fear and doubt is restored by love and faith. God has revealed his design plans for us. With that gospel plan we live a new life each day in his likeness. We get rid of the old self and more and more put on the new self-created to be like God. (Ephesians 4) It's his design! "Let us make mankind in our image."

This is a foundation of the faith: God created us to be in his image, in his likeness. And through faith in him who loves us and restores us, we are renewed into his likeness.