

Genesis 1:26-30 The Image Matters

²⁶God said, “Let us make man in our image, according to our likeness, and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the sky, and over the livestock, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that crawls on the earth.”

²⁷God created the man in his own image.
In the image of God he created him.
Male and female he created them.

²⁸God blessed them and said to them, “Be fruitful, multiply, fill the earth, and subdue it. Have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the sky, and over every living thing that moves on the earth.” ²⁹God said, “Look, I have given you every plant that produces seed on the face of the whole earth, and every tree that bears fruit that produces seed. It will be your food. ³⁰To every animal of the earth, and to every bird of the sky, and to everything that creeps on the earth, in which there is the breath of life, I have given every green plant for food.” And it was so. (EHV)

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Why do people running for office often seek professional help with their appearance and even with the way they talk? Why do businesspeople – men as well as women – invest in plastic surgery, expensive clothing, and the best in hair care? Why do rappers and actors, athletes and newscasters, even high school Goths and cheerleaders, go to great efforts to make sure they are seen in just the right way?

It’s because, in this world, image matters. While most people would probably say it would be better if such things were unimportant, and if everyone could be judged just on who they are and what they do, the reality is that what people see when they look at you, or remember when they think of you, makes a big difference in how effective you are in doing what you want to do – whether that’s becoming more popular in school, being successful in your career, getting famous, winning an election, or something as simple as asking a favor.

And as Christians we do not get to exempt ourselves from this reality. It matters to our mission. How you personally or Christians generally are perceived can have a big effect on whether an unbeliever you want to share the gospel with is going to listen to what you have to say – even though it’s the most important news he or she could ever hear. And certainly when it comes to social and political issues we need to recognize that being seen as rude, violent, hateful, or just plain angry is going to make it hard to persuade our fellow citizens to protect life in the womb, guard our children’s innocence, and generally promote what is good, wise, and godly. Image matters.

But all that is strictly *human* – how other people see us as people doing and saying the things people do and say. What about an image that very few of us talk or think about anymore – the image of God? You probably remember it being taught about in your catechism or instruction classes, and have heard it in some sermons, but does the divine image matter as much as and in the same way that “human image” matters? And what does it have to do with our mission as Christians, with our daily lives, and with the complicated issues of life, family, sex, marriage and more?

As it turns out, the image of God matters quite a lot, for these and many other things. Consider how the very first thing we learn about the creation of man, from God’s account of the very first things in the very first chapter of the very first book of the Bible, is the Trinity taking advice within itself and saying, “Let us make man in our image, according to our likeness.” And in the very next verse the point is repeated, twice:

²⁷God created man in his own image.
In the image of God he created him.

So it is clear that regardless of what anyone else might think about it, God creating man in his image was a very big deal to *him* – and so it was a big deal to man as well.

Because what “the image of God” meant and means is amazing. While the words “image” and “likeness” make us think of physical appearance, in this instance we know that cannot be the case, because God is *spirit*, not flesh. The “image of God” given to man was a spiritual gift, but it affected the entire being – soul, mind, and body. Now, it’s impossible for any of us today, in our imperfect states, to fully define or describe the image of God, but perhaps the simplest way to explain it is that Adam and Eve, from the moment of their creation, were like their Creator in holiness and righteousness and were entirely aligned with his will and nature. Their emotions, will, and reason were in perfect harmony with God, but that didn’t make them anything like preprogrammed androids incapable of acting on their own. They freely chose to do and say what pleased the Lord because that was what they truly wanted to do and say.

It’s pretty much beyond our abilities to express how great a blessing this was. The image of God clearly set man apart from every other creature – something underscored by how God then placed man over creation as its steward – to rule and manage it for everyone’s good and to the Creator’s glory. Since being made in God’s image meant they were absolutely holy and righteous, Adam and Eve had no sin to corrupt their bodies or to give them any reason to expect, let alone fear, death. And this perfect relationship with God meant that the relationship between them was also perfect – and if they had had children while still in that state, their offspring who filled the earth would also have enjoyed this same perfection of life and spirit.

Sadly, things didn’t go as the Creator planned. Their great gift – the image of God – was squandered just a short time later in the world’s greatest tragedy. Eve, then Adam, gave in to the temptation set out by Satan in the serpent, and did the one thing their Creator had commanded them not to do: eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. They chose not to trust God and instead trusted themselves and their own wisdom, and in so doing they cursed themselves, their descendants, and the whole creation. And since they were no longer holy, righteous, and perfectly aligned with the Lord’s will, they no longer had the image of God. Genesis 5:3 tells us that after this Adam’s children were born in *his* image.

But that doesn’t mean that the image of God in man no longer matters. The fact that every human being was intended, even designed, to bear God’s image still gives a special value to every human life. And we can say that every one of us still has the “shell” of that image, in that while the heart and core of it – holiness and righteousness – were destroyed by sin, we still have the emotions, will, and reason from God that set us apart from the rest of creation, and they can be and are restored to their perfection when we put our trust in his gracious work in Christ.

This is why, when the Lord is laying down the law to Noah after the Flood, making it clear that violence and murder will not be tolerated, he says,

“I will hold each man responsible for the life of his brother. ⁶Whoever sheds man’s blood, by man his blood shall be shed, *for God made man in his own image.*” ¹

¹ [Holy Bible: Evangelical Heritage Version](#) (Ge 9:5–6). (2019). Northwestern Publishing House.

Right now we don't need to talk about the punishment called for there. What we want to emphasize is that even as God makes clear that he is the only One with the authority to determine the time and place of any person's death, he grounds the prohibition of killing others in the fact that every human being has been made in God's image.

So the image matters when it comes to human life. It means we will respect it – not just in avoiding murder, but just as much in our everyday attitudes and actions. We won't be careless with our own or anyone else's health. We won't embrace violence or recklessness. We won't look down on anyone else as somehow less worthy of life because of illness, disability, size, age, race, politics, opinions, background, the offense they have given us, or any other reason – we all have the same value, because we all have the same gift of life – a gift crowned with the very image of our Creator.

Now, we would like to think that this respect for life would go without saying, but increasingly in our world and nation we find people adopting the view that some lives are more worthy of living than others. In the 70s and 80s, and into the 90s, the advocates for abortion usually argued that it was morally acceptable because what was in the womb “wasn't a human life”; since science and technology have very well shown that to be untrue, now they basically contend that it doesn't *matter* if the fetus is a life or not – the mother's right to live her life free of that child is simply more important. Similarly, when it comes to the end of life, more and more people are comfortable saying that the severely ill or disabled, those suffering from pain or an incurable condition, or those who have just grown weary, no longer have lives that are worth living – and so it's acceptable, perhaps even desirable, to end those lives through euthanasia or assisted suicide. But no, every life has great worth and equal worth, before God and before us. The image matters.

But there's something more. It's not just that it's *wrong* to usurp the Lord's authority and kill others or kill yourself. It's also that ending a life, whether it's brand-new or very old, hidden away or out in the open, also ends that person's opportunity to hear the gospel, repent of his or her sins, and trust in Christ. This is particularly tragic when a child's life is taken in the womb, before he or she has ever even drawn a breath, let alone had a chance to be baptized, but it's always a matter of deep concern to us as believers, because we know too well what happens to anyone who dies without having his or her sin forgiven. We don't want anyone to suffer eternally in hell.

And we don't want anyone to miss out on regaining what our first parents lost for us. In love, God sent his Son, and Jesus went to the cross in our place, so that we might once again enjoy perfect righteousness and holiness, and a renewed relationship with our Father: he wanted to give us back the image of God that has always been his intention for us. In Colossians 3, and also in Ephesians 4, the Apostle Paul makes the connection clear: when we put our trust in Jesus and what he did for us, not only are our sins forgiven, but we are made new creatures in Christ. We leave behind our old selves, with their sinful attitudes and practices, and we put on our new selves, “which [have] been created to be *like God* in righteousness and true holiness.”² In other words, we are once again given what was given to man at creation: the image of God.

So when someone's time of grace is terminated, because someone else has determined that that person's life is somehow inconvenient or not worth continuing, it is not just immoral arrogance but an appalling spiritual crime. And even if someone were to say, “Well, I'm sure Grandma is going to heaven, so we're actually doing her a favor by arranging for her to die” – now, rather than later – there is a gross presumption involved, because only God knows the

² [Holy Bible: Evangelical Heritage Version](#) (Eph 4:24). (2019). Northwestern Publishing House.

actual state of a person's soul – and even with a believer, we can never know what plans the Lord might still have for his or her life in this world.

You see, just as at the beginning, when God had a purpose in placing his image in and on man as an innate part of his being, even now, when that image is transferred from Jesus to believers, the image matters for how we live and what we do. We still have a sinful nature to deal with, which wasn't the case at creation, but as we live by the Spirit, as our new selves, we are once again aligned with Father, Son, and Holy Spirit and their united will and desires.

This means that we love what the Lord loves, and hate what he hates. What he thinks about something is what we think about that thing. So when it comes to the issues that my organization, *Christian Life Resources*, exists to address with education and action, the image of God in us as believers responds to the image of God that still echoes in others and gives value to their lives. We feel compassion for the lonely, the hurt, and the suffering, as our Father in heaven does. We love and serve when we see the needs of others, even at great cost, just as God's Son loved sinners and gave himself to save a world lost to sin and death. We speak the words the Holy Spirit gives us to speak, whether it's sharing law and gospel with souls who have never heard about Christ and his cross, or standing up to defend the defenseless, correct corrupt ideas, or convey uncomfortable truths.

This is why as an organization we operate a network of pregnancy care centers, not only to advocate for unborn lives but also to help mothers and families in both body and soul. It's why we have a home for single mothers in Milwaukee, *New Beginnings*, through which we make clear that our interests in women and children are a lot bigger than just stopping abortions. And it's why we offer a wide range of resources on all sorts of issues relating to life and death, marriage and sex, health and family, and much more – God creating man “male and female” and designing marriage and family already on that sixth day addresses a lot of today's hottest issues. The image of God in others calls to us, and the image in us inspires us to support and promote God's values and God's designs – which ultimately, are the only way to true joy and blessing in who we are and what we do.

You know, we can only imagine what it would have been like for Adam and Eve to learn that they had the responsibility to be stewards over all creation – they were just two people. Things are flipped now, of course: with billions upon billions of people on the earth now, it can be hard to think of ourselves personally as stewards over it – especially when so much has changed from the day God looked at all he made and said, “Very good!”

But the fall into sin didn't remove that role the Creator gave mankind. The image of God makes human beings special – exceptional – and separates us from all of his other creatures. But that also means that we have a special – exceptional – *responsibility* to take care of what God has made and placed into our hands. And the greatest part of that responsibility is also our great joy: life itself.

The Triune God decided in the beginning to make us in his image, and as believers who have had that image restored, we rejoice to protect and promote that blessing in and for all our fellow human beings, no matter what age or stage of life they are in. This is love. It's what we were made for. The image matters.

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