



The following is the summary of the Sunday sermon that is sent to the body at Steadfast in an email called "The Weekly"

You Are Created in the Image of God

You are Fearfully and Wonderfully Made

The "image" and "likeness" of God is not a human achievement, but a gift conferred on all humans through God's creative act. According to Genesis 1, God's creative activity reached its apex on Day 6, when the divine counsel determined to create man in God's "image" (*tselem*) and "likeness" (*demut*). [Theologians call this the *imago Dei*.] These two terms define the first and fundamental truth about the human race: That humanity was created in God's "image", which means that humans represent God. Humans have the capacity to mirror God in everything—and are commanded to do so. Since God created male and female in His image (Genesis 1:27), both equally share in that image—both represent God. [The Hebrew term for "image" is used 17 times in the Old Testament. It always has the idea of representation.] The term "likeness" has the idea that human beings resemble God. Since God is spirit (see John 4), we understand that humanity's resemblance to God excludes the notion that God has a body. Rather, "likeness" means that human beings resemble God in what are usually called the communicable attributes of God (e.g., intellect, emotion, will).

That humanity is created in the image and likeness of God to both represent Him and resemble Him stipulates humanity's uniqueness, dignity and honor as God's creatures. No other part of God's creation shares this position of dignity and significance. Note too that after God created Adam and Eve in His image and likeness, He greeted them with a benediction (1:27)—to fill the earth and have dominion authority over His world (1:28). Human beings are thus God's vice regents; His dominion stewards. And as we examine God's creative activity in the days of creation, we can discern that this dominion authority means that humanity is to imitate God as Creator in His person (character and being) and in His work (conduct and action). What does this mean?

- God the Creator demonstrated His dominion authority over the components of His creation by speaking them into existence and then by calling them by name. Thus,

Adam mirrored God; he spoke as God spoke; and it is Adam who named woman and the animals as God had named the day, the night, heaven (sky), earth (land), and the seas. As Adam exercised dominion through his word, he reflected the image of God in his person.

- God the Creator brought form and fullness to the unformed and unfilled earth. In the first three days, He ruled the darkness and the deep to form the cosmos. In the next three days, He filled the visible heavens and earth with fullness and life. On the seventh day, he rested. The same is to be true for humanity: Work six days and rest the seventh—a day sanctified by God for rest. As humanity engages in the weekly cycle of work and rest, humans reflect the image of their Creator.

In summary, the human race is both lowly in origin (from “the dust of the earth”) and yet exalted in purpose. As a created person in God’s image and likeness, humanity reflects the person and work of God the Creator and has the privilege of an intimate, personal relationship with God the Creator, both in time and in eternity. If our Postmodern culture is ever to recover from its addiction to narcissism and radical autonomy, it will be by discovering once again the biblical truth that the image of God is fundamental to humanity’s relationship to God and to one another.

THE IMPLICATIONS OF THE *IMAGO DEI*

1. The *imago Dei* results in several profound stewardships, entrusted by God to humanity:

- Humans have a stewardship responsibility to God for everything we do (Genesis 1 and 2; 1 Corinthians 10:31;)
- Humans have a stewardship responsibility for themselves, for we are accountable to God (Genesis 1 and 2; Ephesians 2; 1 Corinthians 6:19-20)
- Humans have a stewardship responsibility before God, as His dominion stewards, over His physical creation (Genesis 1:26ff).
- Humans have a stewardship responsibility to other human beings (Genesis 4:9; Leviticus 19:9-19; Luke 10:25-37).

2. Since all humans share in the *imago Dei*, we can conclude that a facet of human nature as created by God is communal, the “community of man.” The Human Community Concept means that God created humanity as relational/social creatures (e.g. marriage, Israel, the Church). Humans were created by God to live in community, with the Trinity as the model (e.g., diversity within unity). This stipulates that humans cannot be properly understood as an individual in isolation from a communal context. There is only one race—the human race. Hence, the folly of racism. As Christ’s disciples, we are interested in serving and helping meet both the physical and spiritual needs of fellow human beings. All are of worth and value to God—and therefore to us.

3. Did the Fall of the human race into sin and rebellion (the subject of sermon #4) destroy the *imago Dei*? Genesis 9:6 answers that question decisively as God mandates accountability for premeditated murder because humanity is created in God’s image. To attack a human being is to attack God, the Creator. Sin did not destroy the image; it effaced and distorted it. [More about this in sermon #4.]

4. The doctrine of *imago Dei* is foundational for all Christian ethics, for it teaches that the lives of all human beings have intrinsic, not merely instrumental, value. Theologian John Jefferson Davis writes, “Human beings have inestimable value in the sight of God, irrespective of gender, race, state of health, dependency, or social and economic utility, but simply and profoundly because human beings, among all God’s creatures, have been designed and created for the purpose of enjoying a personal relationship through Jesus Christ with the Creator of the universe.” Let’s consider two ethical implications:

- In Genesis 9:6 we read “Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed, for God created man in his own image” [ESV]. An attack on the life of a human is an attack on the majesty of God who created humans to be His representative on earth. Most theologians see this as the basis for capital punishment. Following the command of Genesis 9:6 is an act of justice from God’s perspective.
- The Bible affirms the dignity of all human beings in many ways. For example, in James 3:9 we read, “With [the tongue] we bless our Lord and Father, and with it we curse people who are made in the likeness of God” [ESV]. James points out the absurdity of praising God and cursing human beings, since to curse a human is in effect to curse God. James’s admonition on cursing can be extended to all forms of verbal (and physical) abuse of the person; such abusive and destructive language is contrary to the inherent dignity of the person created in God’s image. Verbal abuse, domestic violence and torture are all abhorrent to God.

5. The *imago Dei* concept also speaks to the important issue of equality, so precious to American civilization. It is quite clear that human beings are not in fact equal in ability, gifts, education, or achievement, but are equal as image-bearers of God—a key aspect of our identity, of who we are. The *imago Dei*, sourced in God’s Word, has profound implications for our lives in the 21st century. Consider these illustrations:

- The concept of democracy finds its basis in the equality of all human beings as image-bearers of God. The principles of “one person, one vote” and the principles of political equality and self-government are consistent with the equality of all humans as image-bearers of God.
- The sanctity-of-life ethic (see sermon #5) is rooted in the *imago Dei*. It affects how we think about racism, abortion, euthanasia, genetic and reproductive technologies, etc. Innocent human life is inviolable and must never be destroyed for someone else’s benefit. Human life has transcendent value in the eyes of God from the moment of conception on into eternity—and must always be respected as such.

This foundational, biblical doctrine calls on all Christians to honor the dignity and value of all persons, at all times and in all circumstances, in our thoughts, words, and deeds. When we deny someone’s status as an image-bearer, we risk denying them dignity, which can take us down the dangerous paths of slavery, communist oppression, and genocide, all of which have been ugly parts of human history.

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