

The Imago Dei – “The Image of God”

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Genesis 1:27

March 19, 2023

Well, good afternoon. Every once in a while, Pastor John likes to bring up the old guy. I think it's just to see if he's still vertical, see if we can get through this and stay vertical. I want to talk to you about an issue that you all know about, but I'm not too sure how about you know. That is, the Imago Dei. The Imago Dei is a Latin term. It simply means "The image of God," that God created us in his own image. Do you understand what that means? Do you understand why that's a big deal?

Paula and I moved a few years ago into our seventh decade. I've been told that it isn't about aging, it's about sagging. That's cute, but that's baloney. I'm not real excited about this aging thing, because it has everything to do with changing. Things are always changing, but I think not just for me. I think all of us are in transition, whether it's junior high, high school, high school, college, college, young married, whatever it might be and what's happening is that there was a time that things weren't changing and I was in charge of some stuff.

Now, nothing. I was a Senior Pastor of Scottsdale Bible Church for 25 years. I was the President of the Phoenix Seminary for 23 years. Now I'm Pastor Emeritus to Scottsdale Bible, and Chancellor at the Seminary. I think they mean the same thing in Latin, "The old man's still breathing. What do we do with him?" So, there's meetings going on all around me. My first thought is, well I don't have to go to that meeting. Then my second thought is, I don't get to go to that meeting.

So, so there's new seasons and there's transitions, and things are changing. And yet, changing into what? If I'm moving into a new season, then I better figure out before I get stuck in this new season of being older without any sense of purpose. What do I take with me? What do I leave behind? There's some stuff just because of the age you got to leave behind. But what is it that never changes and continues to go with me? I've mentioned from time to time that we have this tendency to throw little pity parties, and notice no one ever comes, and you sit there and you got to blow out your own candles and the thing you're really thinking about is, is the fun over?

For some of you who are older, remember in 5th grade? That was fun. 7th grade sucked. But then the rest of high school, fun, fun. I really enjoyed the seasons of my life. I really did. I've had a blast. But, I look in the mirror today and I go, "What? What happened? I look better than that, and I know I feel better than that looks." But Solomon says that our life is given to us as a gift. The word he uses in his journal, Ecclesiastes, is "Hevel", not hell, Hevel. Hevel means vapors. That life just flies by. When you're 10 years old, one year is a 10th of your life. As you get older, it's just like a big toilet paper roll. It starts off real slow, and you get my age towards the end, and... It's just kind of flying right by.

With the seasons of life, you then say, "What do I take with me? Is there something that doesn't ever change no matter how older I get?" Some of you, few of you, would have been around in the mid-60s. Do you remember the the rock group, The Birds? Remember, they made Pete Seeger's lyrics top of the music charts? And he ripped them right out of the scriptures, out of Solomon's Ecclesiastes. Remember the song? Well look at this, a little beta going on here. Turn, turn, turn.

"There's a season," it says, "A time to every purpose under every season under Heaven," that every season in your life has a purpose. Some purpose doesn't change. Solomon tells us... I used to tell people over 60, "Don't read Ecclesiastes 12, because there's a description of aging and and it's really horrible, things falling off, things don't work." Then you end with you die. Then when you die, your body goes back to dust from where it came, but then your spirit's released and goes before God, the one who gave it.

Well, that's good news. The only thing is, what am I going to tell God I did with his body? We talk a lot about our soul, our spirit. But what about this body? Is there some kind of purpose for this body? Why did God even give us bodies? In Romans, the first 11 chapters, Paul talks about all the mercies of God that he's poured on us. I mean, he provided a way back. Because he loved, he sent his Son to take the wrath of God in my place for my sin. Not only am I forgiven, he puts part of himself in me called the Holy Spirit within my spirit, making me come alive.

He preserves me. He adopted me into the family of God. Then in chapter 12, he starts begging. He says in verse one, "Now I am begging you to present your body a living sacrifice." Now, aren't you glad it's a living sacrifice? But that word "present" is an interesting verb because it means punctiliar action, in error's tense. It means, once and for all, make up your mind. What are you going to do with your body? Will you present your body once and for all to God? He says, which is your reasonable service. That's the word, Latresia. It's used for temple worship.

We sing. We praise God. But worship seems to have more to do with what we do with these bodies. Say, "Okay, here it is. I present this body to you, God. What do you want to do with it?" Well, read on. He says, "Stop being conformed to the thinking of this world," doing what everybody does with their bodies. Is your body there to bring pleasure to it? He says, "But rather, prove something with your body." Prove what? Prove that the will of God is something good, perfect, complete.

See, Paul knows most people, especially out there, are terrified of the will of God. There's an amazing number of Christians who are fearful of the will of God. Do you really think God wants to break your legs and make you play the flute, that God's this cosmic killjoy thing, and "boy, you don't want to do the will of God." God says, "I need some PR down here. I need some of my children who follow Christ to make up their mind, to once and for all present their body a living sacrifice," proving, letting their body prove the will of God is not something to be afraid of. A life given over to the will of God, the body, it carries out the will of God, is something that is perfect, good, and is complete.

An old friend, Kenny Pore, he headed up Hume Lake in California for years. Old Kenny, he's with the Lord now, but he would say, "The main thing is to keep the main thing the main thing." So, what's the main thing? Is there really some purpose for this body? Absolutely. It's called the Imago Dei. That's what this thing is all about. The Imago Dei gives purpose for my body.

You see, there's all kinds of themes. There's themes to books. There's themes to movies. There's themes to songs. Have you ever wondered what the theme of the universe is? The theme of all creation? Psalm 19 makes it pretty simple. "The heavens and the earth declare thy," what? "Thy glory." God says, "Look at what I've created. You'll learn not only that I exist, but you'll learn something about me." Now, it's Paul who picks up on this in Romans 1:20. Paul says, "If you're an atheist, you are without excuse," because God made himself known by what he created. Specifically, he says two things. It's the eternal power and his divine nature.

What's this eternal power? Carl Sagan used to say that the universe is so huge, there's got to be life on other planets. Well, Carl Sagan's got that straightened out now because he's dead, and he's probably talked to God about it. Because Paul gives us another possible explanation, why the universe is so huge. If you were God, and you wanted to communicate not just power, but that you have eternal power, how big would you make the universe? I think it's about the right size.

If God wanted to show his eternal, notice his divine nature, that's his intelligence, his infinite mind. How complicated would he make the universe? We're still studying the thing, and discovering new stuff. I think it's complicated enough. And so, God basically says, "Look around. Think him of the universe. Heavens and earth declare God's glory." And yet, Paul comes along in I Corinthians 6:19-20, and Paul says, "Don't you know you're not your own? You've been bought with a price. Therefore, glorify God with your body."

Now you go, what does it mean to glorify? I usually say it and people, "Okay, let's all glorify God with our bodies," and people smile. What do you do? How do you do that? The word is doxazo. It means to partake of glory and manifest, reflect the glory that you've partaken of, glorify God. That's the purpose of your body. But how do I know I can pull that off? The Imago Dei. See, that's what Genesis 1:27 says, that when God created you, he created you both male and female. He created you in his own likeness, in his own image. That's the Latin, Imago Dei. It's the image of God.

Nowhere in scripture do we find that angels are created in the image of God. Nor do we find that animals bear the image of God. Well, then what is this glory, glorify God with my body? What is that? Because God's invisible, other than his eternal power and divine nature. The only problem I have with that is when I was in elementary school I was a little bit of a wiener. I mean the bullies just beat the spit out of me. A lot of those bullies were very smart and and very strong. So, I read that God is very smart and very strong. How do I know he's not just another bully on the playground messing with us?

Isn't like this God want us to know anything else about himself? Because service creation, that's what he's manifested. That's why a lot of people are afraid to even interact with him. And yet, it was Moses in Exodus 33. Remember the golden calf deal that kind of went south? Remember,

those have got to back up Mount Sinai and give a report. In Exodus 33, that's where Moses asked God the question, "God, show me your glory." What is Moses asking God when he says, "Show me your glory"? He's basically saying, "God, what is it about you you want us to know? What is your name? What is the manifestation of your glory?" It's interesting, because God gives a list. In the next chapter, chapter 34, God says, "I'll declare my name. Here's what I want you to know about me, more than just my eternal power and divine nature. He says for I am compassionate. I am gracious. I am patient. I am slow to get angry, and I love." Twice, is the Hebrew word, I love. I care about the wellbeing of what I create no matter how it turns out. God says, "That's what I want people to know about me."

But how is that ever going to happen? The Imago Dei. That's why when God introduces himself to us in Genesis 1:1 simply is, "Hi, I'm God and I made everything." First thing he wants us to know. Then that he makes us. In verse 26, 27 he says, "And God said "Let us make man in our image after our likeness. Let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the heavens, over the livestock, and over all the earth and every creeping thing that creeps on the earth." So, God created man in his own image. In the image of God, he created him. Male and female, he created them. God creates us in his image.

Now I guess this a big deal because later on in chapter nine God says, "You kill something that bears the image of God, and you forfeit your life." Not only get the controversy of capital punishment, but I will say this, apparently this thing, this image of God I bear, is important enough to God that the consequences of somebody destroying me is they should forfeit their own life.

So, why is this such a big deal? Image of God doesn't mean that I share the same body, or some biological form with God, that's what my Mormon friends tell me. Jesus said in John four that God doesn't have a body, but God is what? God is spirit. Some theologians take the context of ruin over creation, over the fish, or the animals, that one sense to be created in the image of God means that we're God's caretakers. The only trouble is, God's caretaker, that's more of a job. That's a task much more than a reflection of his likeness. So, what does it mean? Well, the second person of the Trinity, God the Son honored the human body by taking one on. The fact is, we've been studying the Gospel of John with Jon. At the speed he is going we're going to be there for a while.

John 1:1, "In the beginning was the word, and the word was with God, and the word was God," and to make sure we really nail it, verse two says, "God creates all things in him, the word. All things came into being." Without him, nothing is coming to being. So, here is deity. Here is God the Son. In verse 14, like I've said before, Christmas. Because remember, the word became flesh. God the Son took on a body. It says he took on a body, why? One, so he could provide for our forgiveness and die on that cross.

There's another reason. In verse 18 of John chapter one, it says, "No one has seen God at any time," but God the Son, because he took on a body, he has explained his nature. He has shown what God is like. That's why in Colossians 1:15 it says, "Who's the visible image of the invisible

God?" The Son. Who's the fullness of deity dwelling in bodily form? The Son. And yet, here you got Jesus is with the boys upstairs in John 14 and He's going to be arrested in four hours. 12 hours, he's going to be tortured and crucified. He just shares with the poor boys, he says, "Let not your heart be troubled. You believe in God, believe in me. In my Father's house are many dwelling places. If it were not so, I would've told you. I go to prepare a place for you. If I go to prepare a place, I will come again, receive you to myself so that where I am, you'll be with me." So, he lays it all out there. He's just saying, "This is going to be good news," to the guys. And then Philip... I would not want to discuss his IQ on this one. Philip's sitting there and he says, "Jesus, just show us the Father and it's enough." I would have said, "Philip, you idiot," but I am not Jesus and he's more gracious than I am. Remember what Jesus said? "Philip, if you've seen me, you have," What? "You've seen the Father." You've seen the Father create a body as a purpose, and that purpose is to manifest the very likeness. What likeness? I can't show his eternal power and divine nature. I'm not that smart, and I'm not that strong. But can I with this body show compassion, graciousness, patience, slow to get angry, forgiveness, and love? That's what God wants people to know about him. His problem is invisible, but he's created us Imago Dei, bear his image so we could actually manifest to the world.

Theologians go round and round on the concept of the image of God and the likeness of God in Genesis 1:26-27, but what they really come up with is that they're interchangeable. Both mean the same thing in the Hebrew, "a copy", that Jesus Christ is the expressed image of God manifested through a body. Jesus took the body bearing the image of God and he reflected the very nature of his Heavenly Father. That's why in Hebrews one, the writer says in the very first verse, "God's spoken to us in many ways, many portions, in his prophets. But in these last days he's spoken to us in his," what? "In his Son." How? Because he is the inheritor of all things because he is the radiance of the exact nature of the Father. And so, Jesus is using this body as this body was designed to bear the image of God to reflect the very likeness of the very nature of the Father.

The theologian, Carl Barth, believed that the image was a reflection of relationship because there's relationship in the Trinity, therefore, to be bearing the image of God means we have relationship. The only problem is, the angels have relationship, animals have relationship. But he's not far off. There's a portion of scripture in Ephesians that I think maybe makes this really clear. Look at Ephesians, or just listen to me. I'm going to read verses 23 and 24. Ephesians four, here's what he says, "He says," verse 22, "To put off the old self which belongs to your former manner of life." What's old self? That's using my body the way I want, any way I want, to do whatever I want. He says, "But that is to corrupt through deceitful desires." He says, "And be renewed in the spirit of your minds." I got to make a choice here. What choice?

What am I going to do with this body that bears the image of God? He says, "To put on the new self." I made the choice to put on a new self. What's the new self? The new use of this body. What is that? This body created after the likeness of God and true righteousness and holiness. That's the new self. That's what this body was designed to do in the first place. Paul says the exact same thing really in Colossians. In Colossians chapter three, listen to verses nine and ten.

Paul says, "Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old self with its practices, but you've put on the new self." What new self? You're being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator.

So the whole point of this body is to manifest God. When I came to Christ, my sins were forgiven. He put this big want in me because he put part of himself, the Holy Spirit of God within me, giving me this deep desire that any kid has who loves his Father. Remember when we were little kids we used to brag on dad? My dad was a butcher. He'd come home with blood all over his shirt. It made me so proud. I scared all the neighborhood kids. "Yeah, that's my dad. He'll cut you up. My dad can beat up your dad. Your dad can't..." We used to brag because we'd want everybody in the neighborhood to know about our dad. Well, that's the nature of a son, of a daughter.

So, it is we want people to know and understand what our Father is like. Then my problem is, I got this big want, but I don't know how. I want to show off my Heavenly Father. I want people to see he's a good good guy. How do I do that? Well, that's why we're disciples of Jesus Christ. We're not disciples of the Father because we want to honor the Father. We're not disciples of the Holy Spirit. We're followers, disciples of Jesus Christ because remember the famous verse in Romans 8:28, "God works all things together for good to those who love God and call according to his purpose."

But what purpose? Next verse, verse 29, "For all whom he's for known. He's predestined to be conformed to the image of his son." Why? So that he could be the firstborn among many brethren. We have a relationship with Jesus as our savior and our Lord, but firstborn means he has authority over the family, Big Brother. I have this desire to want to honor God, and I've got this big want to do it, but I don't know how to use this body to do it. Oh, I know a guy. I know a guy. Matter of fact, this guy heard twice from Heaven, "This is my beloved son in whom I'm well pleased." Once at his baptism. Once at his transfiguration. He's the guy who happens to be God the Son, who honored the body by taking one on so he could manifest the beauty and cause us to understand what it means, Imago Dei. To manifest. To manifest what the Father's like.

Well, unlike angels and animals... Study angels in the Bible. They're busy. They're busy obeying God. But you don't learn anything about the nature of God from angels. Animals, I know you've got your cute little puppy. You can hug and love your little puppy, but you're never going to learn anything about the nature of God from your puppy because they do not bear the image of God. Only we do.

John Calvin wrote, "Man resembles God, and that in him God's glory is contemplated as in a mirror." Now. the Westminster Confession, for you good-looking, smart, Presbyterians, here's what you say. Here's a definition of Imago Dei, "God created man, male and female, with reasonable and immortal souls indued with knowledge, righteousness, true holiness, after his own image." We got a problem. Our problem is, we have smudged up the image.

So, I look at at how people use their bodies, and I see a lot of ugly out there. I see vengeance, no forgiveness, anger, selfishness, narcissism. I feel sorry for the world. They're trying to get a

picture of what their creator's like, so they look at human beings made in his image. With human beings, we're showing everything and a lot of contradicts each other. So, of course, they run. Of course, they want nothing to do with God, because they've never had a clue what the Heavenly Father is really like, what God wants. And that's why he says, "I'm looking for someone who once and for all makes up their mind to present their bodies as an act of worship to manifest the beauty of the Heavenly Father."

See, it's the very purpose of the universe. Maybe my purpose, I take it with me no matter how old I get. It's the same purpose, Imago Dei. I can do this with an old body as much as I can do with a younger body. Matter of fact with an older body, more people are surprised when they actually see I don't act like an old... You fill in the word. But actually, I really show what my Father's like. Again, Paul helps us with Romans chapter eight. Here, Paul makes an interesting statement in Romans eight. He says in verse 14, "For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons, daughters of God. For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you received the spirit of adoption as sons and daughters by who we cry out Abba Father." So the Spirit himself bears witness with your spirit, reminds your spirit again and again who you really are. You're a child of God. A child of God, you've got a big want. A big want is honor your father.

How do we honor our father? We follow Christ because that's how we learn to be able to manifest the beauty of what our father's like. By the way, we relate to people around us. You see, many have questioned the existence of the soul. I mean for many, we're just a big piece of meat. Everything about us, you are simply a piece of meat. Although, some have questioned the existence of the soul. Again, our medical researchers don't want to use the word "soul", so they use the word "consciousness". Consciousness is your awareness to make choices, awake. So, this is very interesting because these neurobiologists debate the origin of consciousness. It's called the Cartesian Dilemma. Look it up yourself. The Cartesian Dilemma. Here's what it is, did the body evolve and through its evolution create consciousness? Or was consciousness breathed into man's body? Well, Genesis 2:7 tells us God took the body, the dirt, the dust and He breathed into it, and it became a what? A living nephesh. A living soul. Apparently, at conception in the mother's womb.

To this day, God breathes into that which is forming a body. God breathes and instills a soul. Here's the thing, there's no proof or explanation existing how the body could evolve a consciousness.

So next time you're in school, college, or in some kind of debate, and somebody's waxing Elkin on evolution, if you're in a classroom just raise your hand. Why you would do it that way, I don't know. Just raise your hand, "Professor, as you're pontificating on Darwinism and evolution, I have one question." Now remember, he knows this area better than you, so he'll slice you to pieces on detailed debate. But you have one question he cannot answer. "Professor, through your evolutionary theory, let me ask you this, how was human consciousness evolved from nothing?" He can't answer it. Nobody can answer it. That's why it's the Cartesian Dilemma.

So, it still remains a mystery for science, but not for theologians. That's why our little pitty parties I throw, they smudge the Imago Dei. Sin. Sin is fun. Hebrews 11 says, "There's pleasure in sin, for a season." Let's own up. Tell the truth. If sin is pleasurable even for a season, why don't we just sin? Answer, sin is dirt on the Imago Dei. I've got to make a decision with my mind about my body that's made, and created, and designed to manifest the beauty of what God is like. Sin is dirt on my Imago Dei. Do I want to smudge up and confuse the world around me as to what my Heavenly Father's like because I want to sin? Sin is dirt on the image. I don't want to.

Paul writes in II Corinthians 3:18 that when we view Christ, we learn more about Christ, so we know more about him than we know more about how he responds and he treated people. Therefore, I can therefore manifest God as I'm imitating Christ in my life. He says, as we look at the face of Christ, the Holy Spirit transforms us from glory to glory. Do you know what that means?

Let's take Pastor Jeremiah for a second. Let's say Pastor Jeremiah was a real jerk. But then he comes to Christ. He hears the gospel, probably a very good-looking young lady got his attention, shared the gospel. And all of a sudden, the Spirit of God convicted old Jeremiah there, that he had some flaws. He he needed forgiveness. He was a sinner, like the rest of us. When he finally understood that Jesus Christ died on the cross, God poured his wrath for his sin onto his on Son, and he humbled himself and asked for that forgiveness provided by Christ. God put part of himself in Pastor Jeremiah. His spirit awakened his soul. That night, he goes to sleep. He wakes up the next morning. What is he the next morning? Well, he's a Christian.

No, he's a Christian jerk, because you don't become Christ overnight. Now, he is like Christ now. I have observed him. But back then when he first met Christ, because we are being transformed from glory to glory, we're learning. We don't have this down. We are cleaning up the Imago Dei. We're getting the dirt off the Imago Dei. Little by little as I follow Christ, people see my life and they begin to understand what my Heavenly Father is like.

Now, this is where Carl Barth gets close, because if they're going to see the Imago Dei, the beauty of my father through me, what beauty? Compassion, graciousness, patience, slow to get angry, forgiveness, and love. It can only be seen in relationship. You can't get into a closet and manifest any of those things. It's got to be a relationship. That was the whole point. Here's the takeaway of this whole message, if I am created in the image of God, I bear his image, the Imago Dei. And so, I have a capacity with this body to manifest the beauty and what God wants known.

Everybody can see his eternal power and divine nature, but I'm talking about his personal nature, and he desires to manifest that through me. See, if I recognize that I am created in the image of God, that means I can recognize you bear the same image. Whatever tribe, whatever race, whatever language, every human being bears the image of God, and is recognized by somebody who understands that they bear the image of God. Therefore, how do people see? They see the image of God through me one way, the way I treat people.

No matter what age, watch me, how I treat people. Because that is how we un-smudge the image. You know, the good news, for those of us who are aging, that doesn't change. Everything else

seems to be changing around me. A lot of stuff I used to be able to do, I can't do anymore. As a matter of fact, this car, this is back in the early 60s, you would have dated him. I had new tires. I had the coolest 327 cubic inches, positive attraction rear end. I had a great rear end. You would have gone crazy.

The only trouble is, looks what happens 60 years later. Now, my tires are blown out. My window in the back is busted. My rear-view mirror's been torn off. My my brakes don't work. My carburetor is all gunky. You just learn to... It takes more wisdom, and stay on the kicking road. But if you're quiet, your quiet you can hear my soul. Listen. Do you hear it? "Get me out of here. Get me out of here."

Remember fractions when you were kids, introduced to fractions in 8th, 9th grade? Home school for second grade, whatever. Remember fractions? If they would have started with the bigger the bottom number, the smaller the top number, that would have been really helpful. But okay, bottom number, eternal soul. Top number, 73 over eternal soul. Whoa, that's more like how I feel. I'm still really a puppy when it comes to eternity. Therefore, I bear the image of God just like you do. Something doesn't change with any transition, I'm in cahoots with the universe. The theme of the universe, I could not be doing anything more right than using this body so when this body dies and I go back to dust, and God says, "What did you do with the body I gave you?" "God, I presented it to you" and with the Imago Dei, I did my best to manifest the beauty because I wanted people to understand who my dad was. So, they would be drawn to him and just drawn to Christ. That's what we do with these bodies. Does that make sense? Oh brethren, then walk worthy of it.

Heavenly Father, thank you for your graciousness. Thank you for only redeeming our soul, but Lord you've redeemed our bodies. There's a purpose in these bodies. So, may we be faithful with them. May people see the way we treat each other and the way we treat children, the way we treat people around us, and they may see that compassion, that graciousness, that patience, that slow to get angry, that forgiveness. They might see the love and get a clue of what their creator is really like, and be drawn to you for your son, Jesus Christ. And it's his name we pray this. And God's people said, amen. Walk worthy.