

THE223 Christian Narrative 1 Creation and Fall

Unit 3b Imago Dei 1

Presented by the



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Hello and welcome to Session 3B, Christian Narrative 1. In this session, we will begin to look at humanity as created in the image and likeness of God. So our main teaching idea in this session is that mankind uniquely shares God's likeness. In our first session in this unit, we looked at the fact that humanity is unique among creation, that nothing else that God created compares with humanity. We looked at a number of the distinctive features of humanity recorded for us in the Scriptures and the importance that Scripture itself places on the creation of humanity. But today, we will key in on what we are told in Genesis 1:26-27, namely that humanity, both male and female, were made in the image of God.

So let us then read that important passage where God reveals to us the reality that we share his likeness. "Then God said, 'Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over 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." The first thing that I want us to notice about this passage is that the terms image and likeness are actually used interchangeably throughout the Bible. So we are not looking to understand our twofold reflection of the likeness of God. Rather, we are looking to understand the sole way we reflect the likeness of God. So here in Genesis 1:26, we see both of the words used (likeness and image), while in verse 27 [Genesis 1:27], only the word "image."

We take a step outside of this passage and move a little bit later on to Genesis 5:1. We find likeness but not image. There it reads, "This is the book of the generations of Adam. When God created man, he made him in the likeness of God." Further, in Genesis 9:6, we find the word "image" but not the word "likeness." There it reads, "Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed, for God made man in his own image." The New Testament offers us similar proof. Colossians 3:10 uses "image" alone. There it reads, "Put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator." And in James 3:9, we see "likeness" used alone. There it reads, "With it we bless our Lord and Father, and with it (speaking of the tongue) we curse people who are made in the likeness of God." So we see that these two words, likeness and image, are indeed used interchangeably throughout Scripture. And so as we read them, in Genesis 1:26-27, we should see them talking about the same thing.

However, the capital question facing us now is what exactly does the likeness of God entail? What does it mean to be made in the likeness or image of God? If God is the original and we are but a carbon copy, how can we tell that we look like the original? So what remains for us to do then is to understand what are the essential elements of God's image. What we have to see is that many theologians have laid out the various essential components of what it means to bear the image of God. So on this slide, there are but three of the countless excellent theologians who have, throughout the centuries, recounted this list. Notice that moral is included in every list, and spiritual as well as mental. However, each of these lists, as with each theologian, offers a slight nuance to understanding the image of God. What I'd like for us to do is hit a few of the bigger ones, which will then help us understand what it means for mankind to bear the image of God. What are those unalienable essential aspects that make up God's image?

We have to first start with what we call original righteousness. To be made in the image of God means that humanity was made with what theologians call this phrase original righteousness. This concept is derived from many places, but at its foundation stand two key passages: Genesis 1:31 and Ecclesiastes 7:29. First, in Genesis 1:31, we read, "And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was

very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.” Now, peel away everything else except what you see there in bold. What I want us to see is that mankind, and creation in general, was declared to be **very good** by God. This entails that a certain righteousness must be present in humanity, that in other words, mankind was created in right standing before God. And Ecclesiastes 7:29 substantiates what we read there in Genesis 1. There it states, “This alone I found, that God made man **upright**, but they have sought out many schemes.” All right. So here, Solomon is talking to us about the idea that God originally made man **upright**. Man in himself has, as an aspect of his original constitution, a righteousness, an original uprightness. And this in part is what it means to be made in the image of God, that when God first formed from dust and breath, mankind was originally righteous.

Now, we can further dissect and so better understand this original righteousness in the pages of the Bible. Through further study, what we come to discover is that our original righteousness includes three key components: knowledge, righteousness, and holiness. Two important passages that help us understand these three components are Colossians 3:10 and Ephesians 4:24. Colossians 3:10 states, “Put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator.” Speaking of our new life in Christ, but notice there we are renewed in knowledge, as if some knowledge that we used to have is being brought back to us. Also, in Ephesians 4:24, “Put on the new self.” Again, the concept of the new self being regenerated. We’ll talk about that more in another lesson. But in this new self, which is “created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness,” we’re putting on a new self. We are being renewed in these things, righteousness and holiness, after the image of God, which we were first created in.

Knowledge, righteousness, and holiness make up what we call the moral image of God, or the image of God in a more restricted sense of the word. You see, mankind was created with an understanding of God, a true image which comes to us through knowledge, righteousness, and holiness. These three things, this idea of original righteousness was lost in the fall, but as we read both in Colossians and Ephesians, they were regained through Christ as the Scriptures declare. But it’s important for us to understand in a conversation about the image of God, what does it mean in its essential nature to have God’s image, was that when God created mankind originally, mankind was originally created with righteousness or original righteousness.

Now, there are some other things, some other essential qualities to the image of God that I want to talk about as well. And I have them listed out here for us so that we can understand them at a high level. First, we notice that rationality is part of the image of God. Intellect and affection are part of the image of God. So as an example, we see that murder, the willful choice to allow passion to extinguish the soul of another, is sin because it strikes against the image of God. Murder is contrary to bearing the image of God. So that’s why we read in Genesis 9:6 that “Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed, for God made man in his own image.” So rationality carries with us the ability to think, to reason, to decide, to share these kinds of things. And the ability of mankind to be rational is because mankind shares God’s image.

Next, we see that moral freedom is also an aspect of God’s image. The fact that murder can and does happen or occur reveals to us that moral freedom is within our bounds. Mankind is free to do whatsoever he chooses, morally speaking. This freedom is a reflection of God’s image within us, the ability to obey or disobey God. So not only original righteousness but rationality, moral freedom as well.

Then we move to spirituality. We recognize that not only is God spirit, but man is spirit as well. We saw that as the breath of life was breathed into him. So bearing God's image means that we are spiritual beings, that there is an immaterial aspect of our essence. We may not be exactly spiritual as God is spiritual, but we share this image of him. We share his spiritual nature. Man is a spiritual being like God is a spiritual being.

Now, we move from there to immortality. This one is an interesting one for us to stop and consider for a moment. The phrase I have next to it on the slide there in front of you is "created without the seed of death." What is clear from Scripture, both in the creation account and in the subsequent Scriptures that come, from the beginning to the end of the Bible, is that humanity, when it was originally created, was not created with the seed of death within it. So humanity was created immortal, to live forever. And this is important for us to grasp because what we discover is that death is a consequence and punishment of sin. So death is introduced into humanity, but it is not inherent within humanity. Now we are cursed. We are under the curse of sin, and death is, what we would seem to see, to us, universal, right? It is affecting every human being. But not so in the beginning. Bearing God's image means that we have an immortality about who we are. It is also a part of the image of God in man. We see this in man that he was created without the seed of death. So original righteousness, rationality, moral freedom, spirituality, immortality.

And then we come to this one, the ability to relate. The ability to relate is talked about by some different theologians, and it really is kind of a phrase that I'm using to describe a variety of different aspects of God's image. So I've coined it here as the ability to develop deep relationships with others and thus form society. When Grudem speaks of it, he talks about the ability for community to form, for marriage to exist, and for dominion to occur as God gave the command for humanity to rule over the world. Thiessen talks about deep human love. He talks about the ability to have social interests. Other theologians have talked about the ability for humanity to communicate, that all of these kind of social or relational or effective kind of components are parts of God's image. So the ability to relate. Relationship. These are all essential concepts of God's image, because the million-dollar question facing us is what does it mean to be made in the image of God? So, so far, we say being made in the image of God means that we are originally righteous, that we're rational, morally free, spiritual, immortal, and relational beings.

There's one last aspect to God's image that I want to talk about here because it needs a little bit of explanation, and that is that a body is part of what is included in God's image. While God is spirit (I think the Bible makes that pretty clear), the Bible also argues that a violation done against the body is not simply an attack on the body itself but is actually an attack on God's image. Genesis 9:6 is probably the clearest of this. We've already read it once before, but it simply says, "Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed, for God made man in his own image." An attack against the body is an attack against the image of God. So it is therefore suggested that the body should be included in the list of things which represent God's image. And a number of theologians talk about this. Grudem talks about it. Berkhof talks about it. Many talk about this. And as we try and kind of wrap our heads around how is it that a body can be included in the essential aspects of God's image, consider that our bodies can help us become more like God. So we read in Ephesians 5:1, "Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children." Or we read in 2 Corinthians 7:1, "Since then we have these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from every defilement of body and spirit, bringing holiness to completion in the fear of God." And we read in 1 Peter 1:16, "You shall be holy, for I am holy." It is our bodies, in many ways,

that allow us to pursue those things of holiness, of perfection, of Godlikeness or Christlikeness, as the New Testament comes to refer to it. So we see that our bodies can actually help us become more like God. So we need to understand that part of God's image also includes a body.

What we've tried to set out to do in this section is talk about how mankind uniquely shares God's likeness. Yes, in our last lesson, we said God created us uniquely. But in this lesson, we want to see how it is that we uniquely share God's likeness. So God's likeness was original righteousness, rationality, moral freedom, spirituality, initial immortality, the ability to relate, and a bodily existence. These things encapsulate the likeness of God, God's image, something that was uniquely given to us as mankind. As we close this session, I don't want you to miss the nature of this conversation. We can leave it in the academic, but bring it into your heart for a moment. Last lesson, we looked at how God uniquely created us. This lesson, we looked at how we uniquely share God's image in the world. Unlike anything else in creation, God created us so uniquely and gave us his likeness so that we can think and act and love and freely decide. He made us with spiritual components and physical components. He initially created us to be immortal and created us so that we could relate to one another. The richness, the care, the obvious love of God should shine through when we look at Genesis 1 and 2, and as we discover how involved God was in our creation and how uniquely we've been created and how special we are in that we share God's likeness. My prayer for you as we close today would be that you not only come to cognitively understand how God has created us, but that you come to appreciate all that God has done, not only in your mind, but in your heart as well. Pray that this lesson helps you worship God better.