

Life

Whose Image Is This?



Jesus was approached numerous times during His ministry by those who wished to trap Him in His words so they could discredit Him. On every occasion, Jesus perceived the trap and skated through it without a scratch. One such trap, recorded in Matthew 22:15-22, involved the payment of taxes; you know, the always joyful payment of money to the government for the goods and services it provides.

In Jesus' day, the government was the wicked, foreign power of Rome that had conquered and subjugated God's covenant people. Should taxes be paid to this pagan nation? Some said yes; others said no. The debate was ripe for tripping up Jesus, so two groups asked Him in public for an answer to this question—"Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar or not?"

"Show Me the coin used for the tax," Jesus said. Holding up a denarius, a day's wage, He asked, "Whose image and inscription is this?" "Caesar's" was the reply. So He said to them, "Therefore give back to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's."

The image on the coin was that of Caesar, the pagan emperor. Because of this imprint of his likeness, he was rightly owed the tax and it needed to be paid.

But Jesus went on to say that God was owed as well. What is His image on? Actually *who* is a better question. We as human beings were created in the image of God (Gen. 1:26-27). We belong to God and owe Him our very lives.



Pause and Reflect

- What does it mean to owe God our lives? How are you living out your obligation to Him?
- What is the result of failing to pay your rightful taxes? What is the result of falling short in what we owe God?
- Does ignorance of the tax code free you from your obligation to pay taxes? What does this say for those who do not know about the image of God?

Life Unveiled

2 Corinthians 3:18: “We all, with unveiled faces, are looking as in a mirror at the glory of the Lord and are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory; this is from the Lord who is the Spirit.”

We recognize the somber longing of the sunset afterglow, knowing it will soon fade away. We've heard of a mother's glow that accompanies her pregnancy. These are sweet, peaceful images. But can the glow of someone's skin be frightening?

In Exodus 34:29-35, we find that the answer is yes. Moses descended Mount Sinai after spending 40 days and nights with the Lord receiving the Ten Commandments and other laws. His skin shone from being in the Lord's presence. I think that would have been awesome to witness, but what do I know—the Israelites were afraid of him. So after calling them to obey the commands of the Lord, he put a veil over his face to hide the glory of God beaming out. The people trembled at God's voice (20:19); they hid from His secondhand glory (34:30). There may have been a veil on Moses' face, but a deeper one covered their hearts and separated them from their God (2 Cor. 3:15).

Moses wore the veil in the presence of the people, but he would remove it upon entering the presence of the Lord. In the same way, those who turn to God have their veil removed (3:16), but it is “set aside only in Christ” (3:14). As a result, believers see in Jesus the full glory of God, and by being in God's presence unveiled, we are being transformed by the Holy Spirit to look more and more like the glorious image of God in His Son, Jesus Christ.



Pause and Reflect

- Would you say that your heart is veiled to God's presence or unveiled in Christ?
- How does the glory of God shine forth in your life? What areas are most in need of transformation by God's Spirit in order to reflect Christ?

Life

God's Blessing, Our Response



Ben and Mary drove from their college campus to the next town. They were seniors, each already approved for advanced degree study. They set a wedding date for late summer following their graduation. Both Christians, they vowed abstinence before their marriage. But in a moment of weakness, they broke their vows and conceived a child. They panicked and concluded that ending the pregnancy was the wisest course for them to follow.

They arrived at an abortion clinic. As Ben killed the engine and started to

open his door, he heard Mary's muffled sobs. "I'm sorry, Ben. I can't do this! I love you, but I will give you your freedom before I will end this life within me." The weeks and months that followed were agonizing. Ben opted out of the relationship. Mary's parents lovingly took her in, and rearing the beautiful little girl became Mary's joyful priority and privilege with the compassionate support of her parents.

The child grew to adulthood, completed law school, and became a respected family court judge. Though she once hung briefly in the balance between life and death, by God's grace she survived because her mother knew the value of a human life that bore God's image.



What are some ways people attempt to show that they value human life? In contrast, what are ways people demonstrate a lack of respect for human life? How do you show others that you value their lives?

In this session, we will see that every human being bears God's image. Therefore, we should be accountable for human life, praise God for the gift of life, and value and protect life. These conclusions are confirmed and grounded in the incarnation and purpose of Jesus Christ.

1. Accountable for the Image of God (Gen. 9:5-6)

After the flood, recounted in Genesis 6–8, God told Noah and his family that every living creature would be food for them. But God instructed Noah and his sons to drain the “lifeflood” from the meat before they ate (9:4). Later, the Scriptures pointed out the connection between life and blood (Lev. 17:14; Deut. 12:23–25). The animal’s blood represented the life force. Thus, the blood sacrifices under Mosaic law substituted the animal’s life—represented by its blood poured out—in place of the offerer’s life, thereby avoiding God’s judgment.

Although God provided animals for sustenance, He regarded them as living creatures needing care, not to be wantonly abused. God called “good” the living creatures He made for the sky, sea, and land (Gen. 1:20–25), and Adam’s responsibility to “watch over” the garden included the animals in the garden (2:15).

Why do some people seem to value animal life over human life? According to Genesis 1, what is the difference between humans and animals? How should we properly exercise our God-given authority over animals?

God cares for His creation, but He places a higher value on His creation of man, as Genesis 9:5–6 shows.

⁵ I will require the life of every animal and every man for your life and your blood. I will require the life of each man’s brother for a man’s life.

*⁶ Whoever sheds man’s blood,
his blood will be shed by man,
for God made man in His image.*

God places a high value on human life. In fact, God treats human life with added caution because He created it in His image. The former prohibition against eating meat with blood did not state a penalty against the offender. In Genesis 9:5, however, God warns about great consequences for anyone who takes a man’s life. Why is this the case? Because “first and foremost, the taking of human life is offense against God... Killing a person who is made in the ‘image of God’ is a blow against God himself.”² Genesis 9:5–6 points to the sanctity of human life in its judgment of murder and reflects God’s unwavering concern for enforcing justice against those guilty of murder.

Voices from the Church

“Disregard for the gift of life was an affront to the Giver of that life, for life was deemed ‘good’ as a creation edict.”¹

—Kenneth A. Mathews

We can be sure each and every human being counts as important to God. No one's life and well-being is outside God's concern or attention. Furthermore, God expects us to take responsibility for one another because we all bear His image. We are assigned to uphold His standard of accountability concerning the value and welfare of human life.



How do we hold one another accountable today and display value for every human life? Where do we fall short? What steps can we take to increase our value of life?

2. Praise for God's Gift of Life (Ps. 139:13-16)

¹³ *For it was You who created my inward parts;
You knit me together in my mother's womb.*

¹⁴ *I will praise You because I have been remarkably and wonderfully made.
Your works are wonderful, and I know this very well.*

¹⁵ *My bones were not hidden from You
when I was made in secret,
when I was formed in the depths of the earth.*

¹⁶ *Your eyes saw me when I was formless;
all my days were written in Your book and planned
before a single one of them began.*

Psalm 139 is a majestic hymn of praise to an all-knowing, ever-present, and all-powerful God. Its central message declares boldly, "God knows me!" In verses 13-16, David praised the Lord for forming him in his mother's womb and for watching over him even before he was born, which spoke of his uniqueness. As David contemplated his life before birth, he did not think of himself as a fetus, an embryo, or even mere tissue—as many do today. David's words, inspired by the Holy Spirit, plainly teach the individuality of a child in a mother's womb. This truth is echoed in the commission given to Jeremiah (Jer. 1:5) and the circumstances surrounding the incarnation of Christ (Luke 1).



Voices from Church History

"Those, whom the Lord forms, he also supports; he supports them even in their coming forth...He is our supporter, for he has supported us with his hands. He is called a supporter as the Creator of the human race. And he is our supporter, for he has supported us by his visitation, that he may protect us...The first support is that of God's working in us, the second in that of his protection of us."³

—Ambrose (circa 337-397)

David stood in awe because of the incredible way God made him. He offered praise to this Creator God, for he had been “remarkably and wonderfully made.” As David continued to reflect on the miracle of his beginning, when he was made in secret, he knew God had a purpose for his life. He rejoiced because God recorded all his days (his life span) in His book before he was born, before a single one of them began.

This psalm says a clear no to those who would kill a life in the womb by abortion or by euthanasia at a much later stage in life. The conclusion we reach as we read David’s inspired words in this psalm is that at each stage of existence, from conception to death, an individual is precious in God’s sight. For this we should praise God.

?

How do you feel when you recognize that God knows you? Does it lead you to praise God as David did or cause other reactions?

3. Value God’s Gift of Life (Prov. 1:10-11,15-16,18)

¹⁰ *My son, if sinners entice you,
don’t be persuaded.*

¹¹ *If they say—“Come with us!
Let’s set an ambush and kill someone.
Let’s attack some innocent person just for fun!*

.....
¹⁵ *my son, don’t travel that road with them
or set foot on their path,*

¹⁶ *because their feet run toward trouble
and they hurry to commit murder.*

.....
¹⁸ *but they set an ambush to kill themselves;
they attack their own lives.*



Voices from Church History

“It is good for the hands to be consecrated, and the feet... that they be not swift to shed blood, nor to run to evil, but that they be prompt to run to the Gospel and the Prize of the high Calling, and to receive Christ Who washes and cleanses them.”⁴

—Gregory Nazianzen
(circa 330-390)

Before admonishing his son concerning sinners, this father reminded him that his parents faithfully taught him the right way to live (vv. 8-9). From his childhood they taught him godly principles for living in a way that values life as God does. But this father realized his son, leaving the security of home and parental protection, must recognize potential dangers. Sinners would entice him to join them in their evil pursuits.

Some people are hardened in evil’s way, committed to a life of sin and destruction. “Come with us!” is their alluring call. But failing to value life means you will reap what you sow: the loss of your own life (v. 18; see Gal. 6:7-8).



What reasons do people give for devaluing the unborn? The elderly? The physically/mentally challenged? The terminally ill?

Those who devalue life and shed innocent blood ignore the sanctity of human life and make sport of the solemn truth that God created all persons in His image and thus all persons are valuable in His sight. The warning from the father in Proverbs 1 is don't travel that road with them, for in the end sinners wind up in the same trap they have laid for others.

Those who dishonor human life ultimately destroy themselves. Conversely, those who respect human life honor the God who gave it and enrich themselves in the process. May all believers set godly examples in their actions and lifestyles so oncoming generations will be less likely to travel the road of devaluing human life.

4. Protect God's Gift of Life (Prov. 24:10-12)

¹⁰ *If you do nothing in a difficult time,
your strength is limited.*

¹¹ *Rescue those being taken off to death,
and save those stumbling toward slaughter.*

¹² *If you say, "But we didn't know about this,"
won't He who weighs hearts consider it?
Won't He who protects your life know?
Won't He repay a person according to his work?*

In these three verses, the writer pointed out that God expects His people to act to protect innocent victims whose lives are threatened. The popular excuse for avoiding helping those in need is "I don't want to get involved." But if we fail to assist, our strength is limited. We are spiritual weaklings. About us are innocent victims being threatened with death. They are people taken off to death and who are stumbling toward slaughter. We must consider it our business and our duty to know about these injustices and not plead ignorance. After all, we are accountable to the Lord who weighs hearts. He does know what we do and fail to do. Furthermore, He will repay a person, reward one's deeds, on an individual basis.



In what ways can believers avoid or ignore injustice and crimes against human life? Why do you think this is the case? How well do guilt and fear motivate our actions?

It is easy for the conclusions in this session to become law and slavery for us—be accountable, praise God, value and protect life. And Proverbs 24:12 makes this problem explicit—if we do not live up to this standard, we can expect to be repaid in kind according to our failing work. No one among us has fulfilled God’s standard of valuing the image of God that He has placed on human beings, that is, except Jesus Christ—the very image of God (Col. 1:15).

In the fullness of our difficult time, Jesus—the image of God—took on flesh to rescue those dead in sin. In the fullness of His strength, He laid down His life on a cross to save those who stumble far from God. He has been repaid according to His faithful work—resurrected and exalted. Now through repentance and faith in Jesus, we find ourselves in Christ—children of God free from slavery and law. We are free to love our neighbor in the power of the Holy Spirit, free to value, protect, and praise God with grateful hearts for His image that He has placed on us all.

Voices from the Church

“How would the church be different if we were known for *telling* people about Jesus and His love as well as *showing* people what Jesus did with His love? We need to embrace that the mission of the church is found both in the demonstration and proclamation of the gospel.”⁵

—Ed Stetzer and Philip Nation

 **How do we know that the heart of God is for believers to love others and seek to protect them? How can our actions be rightly motivated by the love of God shown in Christ?**

Conclusion

A difficult time is common to every generation. Granted, people can bring trouble and anguish upon themselves. Still, every human being bears God’s image and is precious in His sight. Because God values human life, we must join Him in valuing and protecting those who are helpless and, without Christ, hopeless. Because God knows our hearts and protects our lives, we ought not stick our heads in the sand when it comes to helping the most vulnerable members of society. Rather, we ought to joyfully embrace the opportunity to share God’s love in Christ with others, both through our actions and our words. Now, how will you show that you value human life—today?

 **What actions can you take to demonstrate that you value human life? Where in your community are the helpless who need support or protection? Who is hopeless in need of Christ?**

Life Blinded

2 Corinthians 4:3-4: "But if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. In their case, the god of this age has blinded the minds of the unbelievers so they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God."

Blindness. Pervading darkness. Some live it; most can't imagine it. Closing your eyes can't approximate the reality of blindness because you have to exert effort to keep your eyes closed, and once you run into something, your eyes fly open to check the wound. No, the reality of blindness is having your eyes open and not being able to see.

In our dark world, people are blind to spiritual realities, and that as a result of the god of this age—Satan. You see it in the bewildering support for abortion on demand to the defeated actions that accompany euthanasia and suicide and everywhere in between. The blessing and responsibility of God's image on humanity is shrouded and the glory of God in Christ as *the* image of God is veiled to a blinded world. What hope exists for such darkness?

The answer ever and always lies in the gospel of Jesus Christ. But didn't Paul just say that Satan has blinded people to the gospel? That's why it is important to read Scripture in context.

"We were shown mercy, [so] we do not give up" (4:1). We live as "an open display of the truth...not proclaiming ourselves but Jesus Christ as Lord" (4:2,5). And the Creator God who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," He shines in the hearts of blinded people to "give the light of the knowledge of God's glory in the face of Jesus Christ" (4:6). Our God of light overcomes this world of darkness.



Pause and Reflect

- Where do you most sense the darkness of this world? How might God be calling you to respond to that darkness with the light of the gospel of Jesus?
- As believers, we are to commend ourselves to every person's conscience in God's sight by an open display of the truth (4:2). How would you evaluate your motivations and actions in this regard? Ask God to renew your mind and heart with His mercy.

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Introduction

Welcome to *The Gospel Project* Sanctity of Human Life Special. In light of God's special creation of humanity in His image, we are called to praise God for His blessing of life and to strive to value and protect life in all its stages. May this study renew our commitment to honor the image of God in others and call us to live life more faithfully in the pattern of the Giver of life and the very image of God—Jesus Christ.

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