04

Image

God Loves

Thirteen points every follower of Jesus should know. A study by Pastor Andy Cisneros.

Image: *God Loves*

Then God said, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. . . .” So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. GENESIS 1:26–27

What does it mean to be human?

That question has implications for every study, from theology to sociology, history, biology, psychology, etc. It is this doctrine that answers questions regarding how mankind is different from God and His creation. It also reveals why we can believe in such things as compassion and equality—truths that an evolutionary worldview simply cannot permit.

It is important to note the historical development of the Western understanding of the human person, which is seen nearly entirely today in terms of an individual rather than as the member of a community. There was a day in which people did not think of themselves in primarily individual terms. Instead, what it meant to be a person was largely defined by one’s relationship to such communities as family, history, parents, ethnicity, nationality, city, religion, and trade.

Everything changed in the days of Augustine. In writing his book Confessions, he set in motion a historical trajectory that has forever changed how we answer the question of what it means to be human. Augustine did not look outward to his social network but rather inward to his feelings, convictions and desires. This elevated the importance of the individual in understanding the essence of humanity.

Building on Augustine and Descartes, Jonathan Edwards, taught that the autonomous reasoning individual can be saved and improved by God’s grace to God’s glory. The influential non-Christian philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau then taught that the essence of what it means to be human is that the autonomous reasoning individual can be improved by self-acceptance and self-love; thus, we are to look in to self and not out to God for our identity and betterment. According to his teaching, we are not sinners who long for God’s acceptance, but rather good people who need to accept ourselves and love ourselves so that we can become better versions of ourselves.

The influential American psychologist William James said that the autonomous reasoning individual can be improved by self acceptance and self-love aided by psychology. One’s hope was then to be found in a trained professional and not ultimately God and his grace. This ideology that human beings are essentially machines that can be worked on by psychology led to the trained professional as a functional savior who makes people’s lives better.

Finally, American psychologist Abraham Maslow said that the autonomous reasoning individual is improved by self-acceptance and self-love aided by psychology to self-actualization, which is the defining principle of what it means to be human.

Therefore, the nearly millennium-and-a-half transition from Augustine to the present day has resulted in the commonly held belief that God does not save us for His glory and to make us part of His people, the church, to grow in holiness. Rather, we essentially save ourselves through loving and accepting ourselves and heeding the counsel of psychology. The ultimate goal of this is not that we would glorify God, but rather that we would achieve our potential, experience our greatness, or, in theological terms, live for our own glory as worshipers of ourselves, being all we can be, experiencing all we can experience, and doing all we can do.

In light of this historical transition, the average person, including the average Christian, is far worldlier and less biblical in his understanding of who he is and why he exists than he is aware. He thinks in worldly categories rather than biblical categories because the culture in which he lives is so fundamentally unbiblical in its thinking. Sociologist Christian Smith has said that the true religion of most people in the West today, regardless of what religion they profess to participate in, is moralistic therapeutic deism. By moralistic he means we are good individuals who can get better, not sinners who need actual salvation. By therapeutic he means that it is counseling and therapy, not God or the church that enable our betterment. By deism he means that God is not really involved in our lives; we are essentially on our own with the occasional exceptions of God answering a prayer we send him or sending us a quick insight to aid our betterment.

The historical reasons for the current poor, prevailing perspective on personhood are obvious, but we still need to understand what God teaches about who we are as human beings. This is incredibly important, as one rabbi has said: “We become what we think of ourselves. . . . What determines one’s being is the image one adopts.”

The Bible Reveals the Origin of Human Life?

Ludwig von Feuerbach was a nineteenth-century atheist who curiously declared that God did not make us, but rather, we made God as a figment of our imagination. Students of his thinking include Karl Marx, who applied this politically, Sigmund Freud, who applied this psychologically, and Friedrich Nietzsche, who applied this philosophically.

In Genesis 1 and 2 we see that we did not create God, but rather, God created us in His image and likeness. The main verses on the origin of human life are found in Genesis 1:26–27: “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 number of verses in Scripture clearly declaring that God made human beings in His image and likeness (also commonly referred to by the Latin phrase *imago Dei*) are few. However, it is not enough simply to search the Bible for the phrase "image of God." Sinclair Ferguson writes, "While statistically the phrase is infrequent, the interpretation of man which it enshrines is all-pervasive."

There are eleven truths revealed biblically that we were made in the image and likeness of God. Taken together, they provide the essence of a biblical anthropology.

1. We were created as persons by a personal God. The Scriptures make note of this by explaining how, unlike the rest of creation which was made solely by God's word, God formed us and then breathed life into us.

2. God originally made mankind without sin. Genesis 1:31 calls our first parents "very good" in comparison to the rest of creation, which God simply called "good." Ecclesiastes 7:29 says, "God made man upright." Therefore, all human sin is fully the responsibility of sinners and not of God our creator. In addition, all the effects of sin and the curse were not originally part of the world God created for us in love.

3. God blesses us. God reveals to us that He is a good God who does not need to be prompted or compelled to give grace; rather, He delights in doing so and does so without request.

4. Unlike the animals who were made according to their "own kind," we are made in the "image of God." This makes human life distinct from and superior to all other created things. We are altogether unique and bestowed with particular dignity, value, and worth.

5. God gives commands to us because He made us as moral image bearers. We can know right and wrong, and we can respond to God with moral obedience as an act of faith and love.

6. God made us curious and granted us permission to explore His creation through everything from a telescope to a microscope. Because God made us this way, we have a curiosity that begins once we are born and continues throughout our life as we seek to experience and learn, travel the world, and explore every part of creation.

7. God created us to be creative and invited us to make culture. This explains the love people have for everything from fashion to film, music, theater, architecture, painting, photography, dance, storytelling, etc.

8. God created us to be reproductive and have children. This explains why many people long to be parents and consider children a great blessing.

9. God made us with meaningful work to do. This helps to explain why there is a drive in most people to work.

10. God created us in His image, but not because He needed us in any way. He bestowed on us the dignity of being His image bearers for our benefit, not His own.

11. We were created to live all of life in the presence of God, under the authority of God, by the Word of God, to the glory of God. We were created to live all of life before the face of God, knowing that nothing in our life is secular or separated from the sight of God, because all of life is sacred. To live otherwise is sin. God created our first parents in His image and likeness. We then see that they, unlike the rest of creation, related to God in a unique way. Paul David Tripp sees this as evidence that the image and likeness we bear enables humans to act as revelation receivers, interpreters, and worshipers. Tripp says, "Immediately after creating Adam and Eve, God talks to them. He didn't do this with anything else he created. He simply rested and moved on. . . . Why did God talk to them? God knew that even though Adam and Eve were perfect people living in perfect relationship with Him, they could not figure out life on their own. They were created to be dependent. God had to explain who they were and what they were to do with their lives. They did not need this help because they were sinners. They needed help because they were human."

This is the first instance of personal ministry in human history. The Wonderful Counselor comes to human beings and defines their identity and purpose. We were and are given the ability to communicate with God and one another, a blessing that no other creature was given. We can hear God's Word and live in light of revelation from Him. Even in their sinless state our first parents were dependent upon God and needed to hear from God. In our sinful and fallen state we even more desperately need to hear from God. This is because, unlike lower creation such as plants and animals, our relationship with God is tethered with words—He speaks to us through Scripture and other forms of revelation, and we speak to Him in such things as prayer, action and song.

As interpreters we are able to make meaning out of the revelation we receive. We can think, ponder, consider, and learn unlike anything else God has made. For us to correctly understand and apply the revelation we receive we must do the hard work of loving God with all our mind so that the facts we receive can become, not just information, but information that contributes to our transformation.

As worshipers, revelation and interpretation come together in exaltation. Because they were created in God's image, our first parents were created to worship God in thought, word, deed, and motive. All of their lives were supposed to be lived in light of who God is, what God does, and what God says. They were supposed to interpret all of this revelation and respond to God in ways that would both bring Him glory and them joy as they were doing what He created them to do.

We Are in God's Image

Because the defining feature of what it means to be human is that we are created in God's image, there are few questions regarding our humanity that are more necessary to correctly answer than - **what does it mean that we are God's image?**

The Bible is clear that men and women, unlike the rest of creation, are made in the image of God. The Bible repeats this truth *after* sin enters the world, which means that, even though sin has stained and broken us, as we will examine more thoroughly in the next chapter, we remain God's image bearers.

The word image is often translated "idol." An idol is something that makes an invisible god visible. The Bible renounces idolatry emphatically and repeatedly. Therefore, we want to be clear that we are not endorsing idolatry (Colossians 3:5 - 10).

We are renewed after the image of God. We learn, on the one hand, what is the end of our regeneration, that is, that we may be made like God, and that His glory may shine forth in us. On the other hand, what is the image of God, of which mention is made by Moses in Genesis 9:6? Man reflects, like a mirror, the wisdom, righteousness, and goodness of God. Paul speaks somewhat differently in the Epistle to the Ephesians (5:1 – 2), but the meaning is the same. Paul, at the same time, teaches us that there is nothing more excellent at which the Colossians can aspire, inasmuch as this is our highest perfection and blessedness - to bear the image of God.

To image God is to "mirror" His invisible attributes to the world, somewhat like Moses, who radiated the glory of God after being in God's presence. We are *not* to reflect Adam, the culture, or even ourselves, to the world. God has bestowed upon us the amazing ability and awesome responsibility to be His mirrors on the earth, reflecting His goodness and glory to all for His glory and our joy. All persons are God's image in a basic sense, but Christians image Him more than non-Christians and mature Christians do so even more.

Image is both personal and communal. By personal I mean that we as individual worshipers must continually ask whether we are good reflections of our God. By communal we mean that churches, families, and Christian communities, must continually ask whether they are good reflections of God to one another and to the world.

This understanding of our created purpose (and one source of our joy) is radically different from the world's understanding of being true to oneself, or simply reflecting one's sin nature to the world. This understanding of *imago Dei* is even radically different from many Christian teachings about why we exist. Biblical counselor Edward T. Welch describes how the word *need* is one of the more confusing terms in the English language. Its field of meaning is broad and ambiguous, containing ideas that are completely

unrelated but often confused together. He then defines the various popular uses of the term and the history of the concept in the field of psychology before looking at how the idea of "psychological needs" has become grafted into contemporary Christian counseling.

Welch describes how the biblical teaching on the image of God leads us in a different direction by showing that we are not empty cups needing to be filled by God. Rather, we are broken mirrors that need to be put back together by God, beginning with our regeneration and continuing every day in our sanctification, so that we can better and better reflect God. Welch says, "Instead of a love cup . . . the image is more accurately that of Moses literally reflecting the glory of God. . . . The center of gravity in the universe is God and His glory-holiness." Welch deconstructs the experience of "feeling empty" and so deconstructs the erroneous notion that God exists to fill our empty cup of needs. He replaces that view with the biblical idea that we exist to mirror God.

Imaging God means that we will mirror both his moral and non-moral likeness. Mirroring God's moral likeness means we will exercise decision-making power, have dominion over lower creation, live in social relationships with others, feel our emotions, love, serve, and communicate. Mirroring God's non-moral likeness means that we use our intellect and reason to think and that we can be creative with the materials God has created; it also includes the fact that we are immortal and will live in the Kingdom when the perfect reflector Jesus Christ comes and establishes his Kingdom upon this earth.

If we are to reflect God well, we must know who He is. God is not merely an idea or a proposition, but instead, He is a living and free being who is completely "other," or holy. Speaking about this entirely other God is difficult. In an effort to explain God according to Scripture theologians have distinguished between His unshared attributes that belong to him alone (also called incommunicable attributes), and God's shared attributes which he bestows upon us to a lesser degree than that which He possesses (also called communicable attributes).

Before examining God's attributes as revealed in Scripture two points are important. First, God's attributes are not merely characteristics attributed to him, but they are qualities inseparable from His very being. They are evident in every way that God exists. He exists without limit, that is, in perfection. Secondly, we know God by our experiences through our relationship with Him. We recognize His presence all around us when we recognize His provision in our lives. WE acknowledge His presence when we confess our sins and accept His grace to live by faith. In His loving friendship we come to a fuller realization of who He truly is as revealed in Scripture.

Unshared Attributes

Omnipresence: God is everywhere at all times.

Omniscience: God has complete and perfect knowledge of all things, including the past, present, future, and everything actual or potential.

Omnipotence: God is all-powerful and able to do all that He wills.

Immutability: God does not change in His essence, character, purpose, or knowledge but does respond to people and their prayers.

Eternal: God has no beginning or end and is not bound by time, though He is conscious of time and does work in time.

Sovereignty: God is supreme in rule and authority over all things, though He does allow human freedom.

Shared Attributes

Holiness: God is absolutely separate from any evil. We mirror God when we hate sin and love holiness by repenting of our sin and fighting against sin in the world.

Love: God alone is perfectly good and loving, and He alone is the source for all goodness and love. We mirror God when we love Him and others (Matt. 22:37 – 40). We start by loving our families, friends, and fellow church members and extend it to strangers through hospitality and even to our enemies for reconciliation.

Truth: God is the source of all truth. He is the embodiment of truth. We mirror God when we believe biblical truth over lies and speak truthfully as an act of worship.

Righteousness: God does not conform to a standard of right and wrong, but right and wrong flow out of His character. We mirror God as we fight oppression, injustice, and evil and pursue justice—particularly for those without power, such as the unborn, sick, poor, defenseless, and abused.

Mercy: God does not give some people what they deserve because He is loving and gracious. We mirror His mercy when we forgive those who sin against us and do well to those who do evil in an effort to bring them to repentance.

Beauty: God is beautiful and His creation reflects His beauty. God made men and women in His image and likeness to also create works of beauty. We mirror God when we create and enjoy beauty in a holy way, such as by stewarding God's creation (including our own bodies and health), enjoying the arts.

What Does It Mean, He Made Male and Female?

In Genesis 1 God declared what He made "good," except for the man and woman, which He declared to be "very good." The only thing that we are told is not good before sin and the fall is Adam's being alone. Even sinless we were made for human contact, friendship, and love. Even though Adam had God above him and

creation beneath him, he lacked an equal with whom to be in community, one who would enable him to function in partnership as “one.”

God’s answer to Adam’s lack was the creation of Eve as Adam’s wife and helper. It is important to note that the word helper does not belittle Eve; in fact, God is also referred to as our helper (Ex. 18:4; Psalm 10:14; 118:7). The first woman was taken from the side of the man, which illustrates that she belongs alongside him in partnership, not behind him (as chauvinism teaches) or in front of him in domination (as feminism teaches). Though the woman was taken from the man, in the consummation of the marriage the two again become one.

While God is not a gender, He does reveal Himself as Father. He makes both men and women in His image. This means that though they are in some ways different, the man and woman are equal in dignity, value, and worth by virtue of the fact that they are equally God’s image bearers.

It is important to note that God created the covenant of marriage. He alone defines what it is. His definition of one man and one woman, husband and wife for life, as one flesh, eliminates the alternatives such as bestiality, homosexuality, fornication, polygamy and adultery. At the first wedding Adam sang to his bride on their wedding day (Gen. 2:23). These are the first recorded words of any human being.

Genesis 2:24 then explains how a man can overcome his state of being single and alone, a condition that is not good. First, a man should leave his parents’ home and be his own man. Second, a man should marry a woman he loves and who loves him and loves the Lord. Third, their marriage should be intimate in every way including sexual consummation, and they should spend the rest of their lives becoming “one”. Both Jesus and Paul repeat this process throughout the New Testament as the pattern God intends for marriage and sexuality.

(Andy – The paragraph above is undoubtedly good advice as a marriage counselor in our generation, but I think it’s a little iffy Biblically. You say “Marry the woman you love.” Paul says, “Love the woman you marry.” (Eph. 5:25). There is a difference. Too many husbands “fall out of love” and get divorced, instead of working to love their wife. In 1 Cor. 7 Paul suggests that it might be better not to marry. In fact, he says you’re better off not married because a married man will face many troubles. I’m sure Paul was hoping that these people would consider themselves married to Christ and devote themselves to His service rather than encumber themselves by having to serve a wife and family.)

In the creation account God establishes an order to the covenant of marriage and organizes the family with the husband as the leader and head. This is evidenced in five ways:

1. God calls the race “man” and “mankind.” Genesis 5:2

2. By naming Eve, as he did the animals, Adam was exercising authority over her.

3. Although the woman sinned first, God came calling for the man and held him responsible because he failed to lovingly lead and protect his family from Satan and sin. Our first father, sat by and did nothing while his wife was being deceived (2Cor.11:3, 1Tim.2:14)

4. It is Adam's sin that is grafted to the human race because he is our head, and that sin can be removed only by Jesus, who is called "the last Adam."

5. Echoing the creation account of our first parents, the Bible repeatedly declares that husbands are to lovingly lead their homes as Christlike heads and wives are to submit to their husbands (Eph. 5:22 – 33).

This biblical teaching (called complementarianism) does not mean that a husband is in ultimate authority; God is. There are also other authorities over the man, such as the state and church. It does not mean that a wife does not have independent thoughts or seek to influence her husband, or must obey her husband's command to sin, or is less intelligent or competent than her husband. This does mean that a husband and wife are equal with complementary roles (like a left and right hand that work together, though one is dominant). It does mean that wives are to submit to their husbands like Jesus does to God, that husbands are to lovingly lead their wives as Jesus does the church, that a woman should only marry a man she respects and trusts enough to follow, and that marriage is supposed to reflect the gospel, where Jesus pursues us in love and takes responsibility for us as an example to husbands and fathers.

Sin has caused much pain and misunderstanding surrounding this teaching. It has culminated in what some have called "the gender wars" or "the battle of the sexes." God declared to our first parents that there would be conflict between men and women. God told Eve that rather than trusting and submitting to her husband, she and her daughters since would want to rule over their husbands (?? Scr. Ref), like sin sought to rule over Cain (the same language is used to describe both situations). For Adam and his sons since, it was promised that everything under their dominion would be cursed and would fight against them; providing for their families would be a cursed experience designed by God to humble men and provide insight into how difficult it is for God to be his head when he is disobedient.

What Are the Aspects of Our Humanity?

The Scriptures speak of human beings in many ways and with terms that, when understood together, give us a thorough picture of the aspects of our humanity.

Aspects of Our Humanity in the Old Testament

The Bible speaks of the soul (*nepesh*). Nepesh refers to the person as a creation in relation to God rather than an immortal, immaterial substance. The term is occasionally used for God. In the broadest sense, it connotes all biological life. Both humans and animals are called living *nepesh* in Genesis, which simply

means, “living creature.” It is not that people possess souls, but that we are souls.

The Bible speaks of spirit (*ruach*) in reference to God, people, and animals. The basic meaning is “wind” or “breath,” especially when speaking of the Holy Spirit. In humans it can mean “mind,” “resolve,” or “will.” (Isa.19:3). None of these comes from humans themselves, but from God who breathed life into dust in creation to make us alive, a living being (*nephesh)* (Gen. 2:7 NIV).

The Bible speaks of flesh (*basar*), one-third of the time in reference to animals and never to God. It refers to what humans share with animals in contradistinction to God. Most often it means flesh as characteristic of bodily existence. It often stands for the human body as a whole—a concept for which Hebrew has no distinct word. Flesh in the Old Testament has none of the sinful connotations that we find in Paul’s usage throughout the New Testament where he speaks of our sinful nature.

The Bible speaks of blood (*dam*). It refers to the physical life of humans and animals. Subsequently, shedding blood is shedding life.

Lastly, the Bible speaks of the heart (*leb*) and almost always in reference to humans. Only rarely does it refer to the anatomical heart. The heart is the focus of the personal life—the reasoning, responding, deciding, caring self. It is the deepest center of the human person, the driving force, the most fundamental values from which our acts and attitudes come. It is so deep that only God fully knows it (1Sam.16:7). The heart is the source of the deepest wishes and desires and decisions of the will. The heart is the center of the intellectual and rational functions that we usually give to the mind (1 Kings 3:9, 12). It appears one hundred times in Proverbs alone, and the distinction between head and heart is totally foreign in the Old Testament. A godly person is a person after God’s own heart (1 Samuel 2:35; 13:14).

Aspects of Our Humanity in the New Testament

The many words and images in the New Testament that speak of the aspects of our humanity are broken into the categories of the *inward* and *outward* person. Our outward existence is visible, physical, and world-oriented. It primarily involves our physical body. Our inward existence is invisible, spiritual, and God-oriented. It involves our mind, heart, and spirit. These are both aspects of one person and not independent entities that operate apart from the other. The New Testament does distinguish between, though not divide, these aspects of our humanity.

Breath of Life

Man’s physical nature consists of two elements, the dust of the ground and the breath of life. This combination results in man becoming a living soul or person (Genesis 2:7). Theologian Alva Huffer states in his book *Systematic Theology*: “Man is made of the ‘dust of the ground’ (Gen.2:7). The phrase the dust of

the ground refers to the chemical elements that constitute man's body. God has made all things by using various combinations of approximately one hundred basic ingredients that men have named chemical elements. After death man's body decomposes and the chemical elements return to the earth (Gen.3:19, Eccl. 3:20). Man was inanimate until he received life from God (Gen.2:7). The *breath of life* is a gift from God which enables man's body, brain and nervous system to have life.

Facts about the breath of life

- The breath of life is constantly present in us and is given as a common gift to all people until God takes His breath of life back. (Psalms 146:3 - 4). This means that man's spirit (Heb. *ruach*) is his breath of life.
- The breath of life returns to God when we die (Psalm 104:29; Ecclesiastes 12:7).
- Spirit means power, animation, breath, wind and the many ways we manifest our own power and how God works personally in His people. We receive His breath of life or spirit from the Holy Spirit (Job 33:4; 27:3). We receive many more gifts from His Holy Spirit when we accept His Son.
- All living things have the breath of life. Animals have the breath of life (Genesis 7:21-22).
- Mans breath of life is not a being in itself. Instead, the breath of life gives us the ability to think, act, feel, and even have willpower, on our own.
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Living Soul

When the New Testament speaks of the body it is referring to the physical aspect of a person or animal (1Cor.13:3; Galatians 6:17). In this way the body is our outward existence in contrast to our inward existence. What is the meaning of the word *"soul"*? The word translated "soul" in the bible means primarily *life* and secondarily *creatures that possess that life.* God breathing into man gave him life and man became a living soul. Genesis 2:7 says *"and the LORD God formed man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils and man became a living soul."* The word "soul" in this verse means creature or being. To say that a person is a soul is to say that he is a creature. Adam became a living creature. Alva Huffer puts it this way, "The existence of the living creature required the union of the dust-formed body and the breath of life. The creation equation is as follows: the dust formed body plus the breath of life equaled a living creature. Before Adam received the breath of life, he was an inanimate (soul) creature. After he received the breath of life, he was a living (soul) creature. When he died and the breath of life left his body, he became a dead (soul) creature. The soul (Gr. *psuche*) for Paul throughout the New Testament refers to the whole person created by God with an inner life of motive, thought, feelings. At times Paul also speaks of the soul negatively. It is that part of our being that is stained by sin or is living without God in view (1Cor.2:14;15:44). When the Bible speaks of the human spirit (Gr. *pneuma*) it describes our inner

being as connected with our outer being (Romans 8:10). Man's is one unit. These parts form one living unit. They cannot be separated or divided. One does not live on apart from each other. (Be careful not to confuse the *pneuma* that gives life to all mankind with the *Pneuma hagion* that directs a man after he's accepted Christ..)

Emotions

When the New Testament speaks of the **heart** (Gr. *kardia*), as Jesus often does, it is speaking of human beings as emotional and intellectual beings, having feelings, thoughts, and a will to make moral decisions. It is used to help us understand that which is central and vital in our human nature.

By **mind** (Gr. *nous*), the New Testament speaks of the human person as knowing, thinking, judging, self-determining, and responsible. In many contexts, mind indicates one's outlook on life, or what is called "worldview" today. It refers to the rational activity of the person and is not exalted as the highest good of our being, but rather, a very vital and helpful part of our person. In speaking of the **conscience** (Gr. *suneidesis*), the New Testament is referring to the capacity of universal moral judgment. The primary role of our conscience is to give warning when an action violates it. While modern thinking sees conscience as a reliable standard of morality, the Bible sees it as a tool to be trusted only when it is enlightened by God.

While the Bible speaks of aspects of our humanity in various terms, it is not in as neat and tidy a manner as some would prefer. A debate has ensued over the nature of man. Does he consist of two parts (*a dichotomy*) or three (*a trichotomy*)?

Dichotomy teaches that we are basically two parts—that which is material and physical, and that which is immaterial and spiritual. Christian dichotomists note that the Bible does distinguish our existence into the two major groupings of material and immaterial and note that upon death we are only two parts that are separated until our resurrection. They also note that "soul" and "spirit" are terms the Bible often uses interchangeably.

Trichotomy agrees with dichotomy, with a notable exception. Unlike the dichotomist who sees the spirit and soul as usually synonymous terms in the Bible, trichotomists say that we have a spirit with God-consciousness and a spiritual capacity through which we relate to God in addition to a soul with affections, desires, reason, emotions, will, and self-consciousness. Those Christians arguing for the trichotomist position do appeal to Scripture (Matthew 20:28; 27:50) do see places where a distinction is made between the spirit and soul, and do see that the Holy Spirit works with the human spirit (Romans 8:16. This has profound implications for how we treat and care for people and how the church views the nature of man.

(Andy, I might be way off base, but I question your definitions above. I understand the dichotomists view as the person (soul) consists of two parts, body and spirit. The trichotomist sees the soul as that third part. It is the real "us" that has eternal life and goes to God or to hell upon death. The Holy Spirit is not a part of

the natural man, but is God working with our spirit *after* we've accepted Christ.)

When Jesus said "what shall a man give in exchange for his soul"? He was talking about his life. When Jesus gave his soul he was giving his life. Jesus actually died. He gave his life as a ransom and sacrifice (Isa.53:10, Acts 2:27; 31). What these scriptures teach us is that Christ literally died. He had to. He was not immortal as some claim (nor are we). If Jesus was immortal then he could not have died. He was unconscious in death until God raised him to immortality. Man's soul refers to the man himself and to the life he has. The soul is not an entity distinct from self. It has no conscious existence apart from man's body. This means that the soul is mortal. The soul goes to the grave at death (Eccl. 9:10). It can be destroyed in the second death if the person is not a Christian. As we can see the bible teaches that the Spirit is man's breath of life, the God given force of life. The soul is man himself and the life he possesses. The word of God gives testimony that neither the spirit nor the soul is a consciousness that exists apart from the body. No man continues to live after he dies until the Resurrection at the return of Jesus Christ.

The Image of God Distorted

There are, generally speaking, three categories of error regarding the image that Christians are prone to. The first is not maintaining the rightful place of humanity in God's created order. The second is reductionism that seeks to make one part of our humanity the defining aspect of what it means to be human. The third is defining what it means to be God's image bearers in terms of something we do rather than who we are. We will deal with each category of error in succession.

First, error occurs regarding the understanding of image when there is a failure to maintain the theological tension that Scripture does. Genesis 1 and 2 (especially 1:26) reveals that mankind was made by God in and over the rest of creation. Nearly every error in anthropology puts us up to be divine like God or pushes us down to be animals like the rest of creation.

The former is common when human depravity is overlooked and/or there is an erroneous belief that we are somehow part of the divine. This is common in pantheism and panentheism. It's as if we had at least a spark of divinity within us.

The latter is common when humans are seen as little more than highly evolved animals incapable of denying our instincts. This explains why such things as sexual sin are often tolerated in our culture. We are little more than animals and do not have the ability to live above our base desires, which is really a simple way of excusing and promoting sin with an evolutionary excuse. Also, those holding to evolutionary thinking, radical environmentalism, and animal rights activism are most prone to place humanity at or near the same level of plants and animals. Examples of this error include the occasional legal efforts to extend human rights to animals such as chimpanzees that are actually being heard in some courts as legitimate cases.

Only by seeing ourselves between God and the animals can we have both our humility and dignity; there alone are we in the right place that God intended for us at creation. By noting our position under God as created beings we should remain humble toward and dependent upon God. By understanding our position in dominion over the rest of creation we should embrace our dignity as morally superior to animals and expect more than is common from ourselves and others as people made in God's image. It is important that we know that our place is between God and the rest of creation. Our English word *human* gets its meaning from the same Latin root word as *humility*, which means "knowing your place."

Numerous errors emerge when it is believed that, rather than being God's image bearers, we bear the image of God in some specific part of us. This is called the substantive view and has been the predominant position of mankind historically. Paul Ramsey writes that in this mode of thought, the *imago Dei* refers to "something within the substantial form of human nature, some faculty or capacity man possesses" that distinguishes "man from nature and from other animals."

The truth is that it is not just a part of us that bears God's image while the rest of us does not. Instead, we are in totality the image of God. When a part of us is thought to be the image of God, or at least the defining aspect of what it means to be human, it is lifted up above the rest of our person in various ways.

For some, it is the mind and our ability to reason, communicate, learn, and the like, that is the defining aspect of what it means to be human. This kind of belief was perhaps most popular during the era of modernity, which was marked by rationalism.

In some Eastern religions (e.g., Sikhism, Bahá'', Hinduism) our physical body has little worth which explains why meditation and yoga are used in an effort to connect with one's soul and disconnect from one's body.

Quite popular since the Romantic period is the belief that the essence of our humanity is to be found in our emotional feelings. In this ideology, to be human is to be most deeply connected to one's feelings, and the worst of sins is to not be true to one's emotions. This kind of thinking is continued by such things as pop psychology and the prevalent teaching about self-love and self-esteem. The result is that we are defined, not as much by God's love for us, but rather, by our love for ourselves. Some even try in vain to Christianize this thinking by saying that learning to feel love for ourselves allows us, in turn, to love God, when the Bible says God loves us first. The implication of this teaching is that we must be true to our feelings over and above God's commands. This excuses much sin in the name of being true to oneself, which is often, at the same time, being untrue to God.

The teachings of psychologists such as B. F. Skinner have become popular. Their idea that people can and should define themselves in light of their environment has become increasingly common.. This teaching says that who we are is in large part the result of our environment so that, generally speaking, we are victims of environmental conditions beyond our control. In popular terms this explains why people are

prone to blame their genes, father, socio-economic background, media, and the culture for who they are and how they act. In some ways this is little more than a more mature version of the blame shifting that our first parents did when God confronted them about their sin.

The problem with each of these errors is found in Romans 1:25 which defines idolatry as worshiping anything created. By taking any aspect of our being and elevating it to be the defining aspect of what it means to be human, we are guilty of worshiping that part of our being instead of seeing ourselves as one whole person who bears God's image.

The third error regarding *imago Dei* occurs when we define our humanity in terms of things we do. This view is often called the *functional view* because it emphasizes a human function, usually the exercise of dominion over creation. The problem with this view is that those who are not able to function as most people do would logically be considered somehow less human than the rest of us. Yet, the unborn, the sick, the comatose, the disabled, and the elderly, are as much image bearers of God as those who can do certain things.

There are five things regarding man being made in the image of God.

1. Human beings alone are God's image bearers.

2. Human beings are under God and over lower creation. (great error arises when they are pulled up toward God or pushed down toward animals).

3. Human beings are the image of God, and this fact is not reduced to any aspect of their person or performance.

4. Human beings have particular dignity, value, and worth.

5. Humans were made to mirror God as an act of worship, which is only possible as we turn toward God.

When Does Life Begin?

Because human beings are God's image bearers and given particular dignity, value, and worth, the question of when life begins is incredibly important. The importance of this question is amplified because of the widespread practice of abortion and the issue of whether it is, in fact, the taking of a human life and therefore murder.

Scientifically and medically it is beyond debate that human life begins at conception. From the initial joining of sperm and egg, the tiny baby is alive, distinct from its mother, and living and growing as a human. While the ability to express humanity and personhood changes throughout the life cycle, human essence and human personhood are innate to the living being. No matter how tiny or weak humans deserve support and protection because they are God's image bearers. Princeton professor and former

member of the President's Council on Bioethics, Robert P. George, says: "Human embryos are not . . . some other type of animal organism, like a dog or cat. Neither are they a part of an organism, like a heart, a kidney, or a skin cell. Nor again are they a disorganized aggregate, a mere clump of cells awaiting some magical transformation. Rather, a human embryo is a whole living member of the species Homo sapiens in the earliest stage of his or her natural development. Unless severely damaged, or denied or deprived of a suitable environment, a human being in the embryonic stage will, by directing its own integral organic functioning, develop himself or herself to the next more mature developmental stage, i.e., the fetal stage. The embryonic, fetal, child, and adolescent stages are stages in the development of a determinate and enduring entity—a human being—who comes into existence as a single-celled organism (the zygote) and develops, if all goes well, into adulthood many years later."

Does this mean that the human embryo is a human person worthy of full moral respect? Must the early embryo never be used as a mere means for the benefit of others simply because it is a human being? Yes.

There are many verses that confirm human life does begin at conception and that an unborn baby is an image bearer of God. Psalm 51:5 reveals that we are not only human beings but sinners from conception: "Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me." God called both Isaiah and Jeremiah for prophetic ministry from their mothers' wombs. Luke 1:15 says that John the Baptist "will be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother's womb."

Psalm 139:13–16 says: *"For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well. My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place, when I was woven together in the depths of the earth. Your eyes saw my unformed body; all the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be."*

Right-to-life arguments have typically been based completely on moral and religious grounds. In *Embryo*, the authors eschew religious arguments and make a purely scientific and philosophical case that the fetus, from the instant of conception, is a human being, with all the moral and political rights inherent in that status. The authors argue that there is no room for a "moral dualism" that regards being a "person" as merely a stage in a human life span. An embryo does not exist in a "prepersonal" stage that does not merit the inviolable rights otherwise ascribed to persons. Instead, the authors argue that the right not to be intentionally killed is inherent in the fact of being a human being, and that status begins at the moment of conception. Just as none should be excluded from moral and legal protections based on race, sex, religion, or ethnicity, none should be excluded on the basis of age, size, or stage of biological development. Jer. 1:5. *For you formed my inward parts; you knitted me together in my mother's womb. I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are your works; my soul knows it very well. My frame was not hidden from you, when I was being made in secret, intricately woven in the depths of the earth. Your eyes saw my unformed substance; in your book were written, every one of them, the days that were formed for me, when as yet there was none of them.*

Christians have always followed the teaching of the Old Testament Jews, that abortion of a preborn child and exposure of a born child are both murderous sins. In the *Didache*, which was an ancient manual for church instruction, we read, "You shall not commit murder. . . . You shall not procure abortion, nor commit infanticide."

Some will argue that there is a difference between a child in a mother's womb and one outside of it, yet the early church saw both as equally living people and the taking of life in either state as equally murderous. Their convictions were based on Scripture, which uses the same word (*brephos*) for Elizabeth's unborn child (John the Baptist) as that used for the unborn baby Jesus in Mary's womb and also for the children brought to Jesus. God reveals to us that a child in the womb and a child singing and dancing around Jesus in worship are equally human beings who bear the image of God, and thankfully, Mary did not abort the "tissue" in her womb.

The Bible assumes that an unborn baby is a human life and assigns the death penalty for anyone who takes an unborn life because it is murder. Exodus 21:22–25 says:

When men strive together and hit a pregnant woman, so that her children come out [yasa, a live birth—not shakal, the typical term for miscarriage], but there is no harm, the one who hit her shall surely be fined, as the woman's husband shall impose on him, and he shall pay as the judges determine. But if there is harm, then you shall pay life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burn for burn, wound for wound, stripe for stripe.

Not to extend legal protections to preborn children because of age, size, or phase of development is a grievous discrimination and injustice the same as racism, sexism, and ageism.

Who Has Best Imaged God?

Jesus alone has imaged God perfectly. Many New Testament Scriptures, and even Jesus himself, declares this:

- Christ, who is the image of God. (2 Cor. 4:4)
- He is the image of the invisible God. (Col. 1:15)
- He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of His nature.

(Heb. 1:3)

- Whoever sees me (Jesus) sees Him who sent me. (John 12:45
- Whoever has seen me (Jesus) has seen the Father. (John 14:9)

This means that we are completely incapable of knowing anything about mirroring God until we look at Jesus Christ. As Harold Best has written, "Because God is the Continuous Outpourer, we bear his image as continuous outpourers. Being made in the image of God means that we were created to act the way God acts, having been given a nature within which such behavior is natural. The difference between God and humankind is that we are limited and unique. God is not limited in any way. Whatever character or attribute God inherently possesses and pours out, we are created finitely to show and to pour out after His manner.

Jesus' mirroring of God results in his continually and ceaselessly pouring himself out for the glory of God and the good of others. To understand what a life of love, grace, mercy, justice, truth, compassion, holiness, righteousness, grief, suffering, poverty, pain, loneliness, and friendship that mirrors God is supposed to look like, we must look to Jesus Christ. Often we look at sinful people—cracked mirrors—as our standard for what a truly holy imaging life is. Or, we define noble qualities apart from Jesus and then aspire to them rather than imitating him."

How Can We Best Image God?

We remain God's mirrors, but mirrors that have been thrown to the floor and broken and scattered into pieces. We reflect the glory and goodness of God infrequently and poorly. The restoration of the image of God, or proverbial collecting of the pieces and restoration of our mirror, is found only in the renewing power of the gospel. The Gospel has brought about the restoration of that image. Intellect and will indeed have remained, but both very much impaired. And so the Gospel brings it about that we are formed once more to that familiar, and indeed, better image, because we are born again into eternal life or, rather, into the hope of eternal life, by faith, that we may live with God and be one with Him, as Christ says (John 17:21).

This is precisely what Romans 8:29 means when it says, *"For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers."* To be conformed to the image of Jesus means God, by His grace and through His Spirit by His gospel, bit by bit, causes the mirror of our life to be increasingly like Jesus Christ's so that we image God the way Christ does.

The renewal of the image of God in man is a process that God works in believers over the course of their lifelong sanctification by the Spirit. This is not merely something passive that God does for us, but something that, by His grace through His Spirit, we have the honor of participating in as an act of mirroring him. Colossians 3:9–10 speaks of the *"new self . . . renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator."* In 2 Corinthians 3:18 Paul says, *"We all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the LORD."*

As Christians we do sin, chase folly, and in our worst moments seem to be breaking our mirror again while God is repairing it. Regardless, to image God requires ongoing humble repentance and a fiercely devoted steadfastness to change as God commands and, with God, pick up the pieces of our life shattered through sin.

In this effort we must constantly choose to believe the truth— that this reflecting God alone is a great life. It is not an easy life, or a simple life, or a perfect life. But it is a wonderful life in that it is filled with evidences of God's grace, healing from our past, and hope for our future. Because mirroring God is the essence of our true humanity. As we reflect His glory we discover the source of our deepest joy, even when life hurts the most.

Paul describes this mirroring we will experience to God's glory and our joy in the resurrected and perfected state: *"Just as we have born the image of Adam, we shall also bear the image of the son of man. We await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself."* And again, the Apostle John writes, *"Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is."* (1 John 3:2).

What Does a Life That Images God Look Like?

Humans worship or "outpour" continuously, as Harold Best writes: "We were created continuously outpouring—we were created in that condition, at that instant, imago Dei. We did not graduate into being in the image of God; we were, by divine fiat, already in the image of God at the instant the Spirit breathed into our dust. Hence we were created continuously outpouring."

A life that images God is one in which we are sanctified by the Holy Spirit to be more and more like Jesus, thereby enabling us to mirror the glory of God in a way that is like how Moses radiated the glory of God after meeting with him on Mount Sinai. This worshipful reflecting of the glory of God is done in multiple ways.

1. We image God by connecting with God in an informed and passionate way through repenting of sin, believing in Jesus Christ, and living in an ongoing humble and repentant relationship with God.

2. We image God by submitting to godly authority and ultimately to God's authority.

"For a man ought not to cover his head, since he is the image and glory of God, but woman is the glory of man" (1 Cor. 11:7). This submission to godly authority includes wives submitting to husbands, children submitting to parents, church members submitting to church leaders, players submitting to coaches, employees submitting to employers, citizens submitting to governments, and so on. This submission to

authority is ultimately done in submission to Scripture, which is our highest authority as God's Word (this does leave open the rare exception when not submitting to a lesser authority is required because the lesser authority has commanded someone to sin and violate the higher authority of Scripture).

3. We image God by serving Him in ways that advance His kingdom, including making culture that honors Him. This also includes fighting injustice, evil, and oppression by working for justice and mercy. Theologian D. A. Carson says, "As God's image bearers we have peculiar responsibilities toward the rest of the created order—responsibilities of governance and care, as we recognize our oneness with the created order and our distinguishing place within it."

4. We image God by respecting all of human life, particularly the weak, oppressed, sick, elderly, and unborn. Because people bear God's image, we are not only to promote life, but also, not to commit the sin of murder. As Genesis 9:6 says, *"Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed, for God made man in his own image."* This means that racism is absolutely inexcusable and that previous attempts in America's history to define blacks as only partly human and also partly animal were nothing short of false teaching that maligns Scripture and mocks God.

5. We image God by refusing to live autonomous lives and by contending for community. This includes fellowship with Christians in our church and other churches, honoring our parents, forgiving our enemies as Christ forgave us, and practicing hospitality by welcoming strangers into our homes.

6. We image God by suffering well. When the clouds of trial, pain, loss, hardship, hurt, and tears roll in, we must never forget that our Lord Jesus Christ imaged God well even when suffering. When Jesus was hurting the most, as he hung on the cross for our sins, he reflected the mercy and justice of God perfectly. Jesus invites us to not waste the worst moments and seasons of our life, but rather, consider them treasures to be invested purposefully in glorifying God by imaging the character of Jesus by the power of the Holy Spirit. This is Jesus' point when he says, *"If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me."*

Unlike so many half-true theologies that speak only of the victories of Christian life and how to image God when we are winning, Jesus shows us that, if our aim is to image God, then, whether we win or lose and as we live and die, every moment is a sacred opportunity to be used for His glory.

JOURNAL

Notes & Reflections

What stood out to you in this study? Write down questions, verses to look up, and what God is teaching you.