

MADE IN GOD'S IMAGE

Genesis 1:26 says God made man in His image. What does that mean? Today I'd like to explore the rich meaning behind that and how it affects our Christian lives today.

The word "image" is used a lot in society today, but interestingly it now means virtually the opposite of its former meaning of "likeness". These days a politician hires an "image maker," a job applicant dresses to create a certain image, a company advertises to project a certain "image." In other words, an "image" has become an illusion of what something is presented to be, rather than the essence of what it really is!

Photographers use the word to describe their finished pictures, which are meant to be as close as possible to the original, and a baby who is the "spitting image" of his father shows that image actually means "close likeness."

Notice Genesis 1:26-27 ²⁶"Then God said, "Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground." ²⁷ So God created mankind in His own image, in the image of God He created them; male and female He created them."

What does "made in God's image" mean? Theologians have argued about that for centuries. Some say it is talking about our physical shape and form, others say it is referring to human reason, to domination over the animals, to creativity, etc. It doesn't say here what the image of God means, but it gives a couple of clues.

Firstly, it is something about the difference between humans and animals. Because we are in God's image, we have dominion over the animals. Secondly, it hasn't got to do with our size or shape, because men and women are both in God's image. No matter how big or small, short or tall a person is, we are all in God's image.

The next mention of the image is in Genesis 9:2-6: ²"The fear and dread of you will fall on all the beasts of the earth, and on all the birds in the sky, on every creature that moves along the ground, and on all the fish in the sea; they are given into your hands. ³ Everything that lives and moves about will be food for you. Just as I gave you the green plants, I now give you everything. ⁴ "But you must not eat meat that has its lifeblood still in it. ⁵ And for your lifeblood I will surely demand an accounting. I will demand an accounting from every animal. And from each human being, too, I will demand an accounting for the life of another human being. ⁶ "Whoever sheds human blood, by humans shall their blood be shed; for in the image of God has God made mankind."

This again shows that the image of God is the way humans are different to animals. Killing an animal means one thing, killing a fellow human being is an entirely different matter, because we are made in God's image.

We are like the animals in that we have a physical body, bones, organs, muscles and skin. Some animals are stronger than us, run faster than we can, can see or hear or

smell better than we can! So the “image of God” must be something we contain inside us, something the animals don’t have.

The Old Testament doesn’t mention the image of God again, so now we go to the New Testament, and we find out what it is.

Colossians 1:15 “The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation.” Jesus was the image of God.

Hebrews 1:3 “The Son is the radiance of God’s glory and the exact representation of His being, sustaining all things by His powerful word. After He had provided purification for sins, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven.”(NIV)

Jesus was “the express image of God’s person”, as the KJV puts this. What does this mean? He looked just like an average Jew, yet He revealed God in a way the average Jew didn’t. He was born in an average small town, people scoffed at Him and called Him “the carpenter’s son” and said “can anything good come out of Nazareth?” He was judged to be insane, illegitimate. Even His brothers didn’t believe Him. He rode on a lowly donkey—He was hardly the image of a King or God! He was despised and rejected of men, His bruised and bleeding body was nailed to a Cross—yet He was the image, the exact likeness of God!

Obviously the way He was the image of God was something **inside** Him, His character, His morality, His love, the spiritual qualities He had, not the physical.

We naturally think of an image or likeness in physical terms—to us images are visual. But God is invisible, He doesn’t have a physical body, so an image of Him must be spiritual.

That’s why the second commandment says we shouldn’t make idols or images of Him! (Exodus 20:4) because that reduces and limits our concept of Him (Isaiah 40:18-31).

In Colossians 1:15 the Greek word used for Jesus being the “image” of God is ikon. This is a term used a lot in computing. You click on a small icon and it brings up the real thing. It opens up all the program it relates to. It is the exact representation of that program.

Perhaps this can help us understand what happened at the resurrection of Jesus? When Jesus died, the icon was removed (briefly, for 3 days), but the program was and is still there.

But what has all this got to do with us? How does it apply in our lives?

One thing is to realise everyone is created in God’s image and so when we look at people, we shouldn’t judge on the basis of external, physical appearances, but to try to see the image of God inside.

We tend to give inordinate regard to the physical body we live in—what counts for success in our eyes is strength, intelligence, wealth, beauty, power—but that hasn’t got very much to do with the image of God inside a person. It’s hard for us to see beyond the disabilities of a person to the inherent worth, the image of God inside!

Mother Teresa said that when she looked into the face of a dying beggar in Calcutta, she prayed to see the face of Jesus, so she might serve the beggar as she would serve Christ.

Romans 8:29 “For those God foreknew He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters.”

We are called to be conformed to His image! How does this happen?

Colossians 3:10 “and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator.”

The new person is being renewed in God’s image.

What does sin do to the image of God? If we sin it doesn’t mean we are no longer in God’s image. We see in Genesis 9:6 that humans are still in the image of God even after they sinned.

Sin is a spiritual condition. Animals don’t have a spiritual condition—they can’t sin. Spiritual qualities are what make us in God’s image. When Adam and Eve sinned, their spiritual condition was affected. But they didn’t lose God’s image totally. However their connection to God was lessened, and the image of God was tarnished or distorted, but not removed.

That damaged image of God needs to be restored, renewed. That’s what Colossians 3:10 is talking about. We see more in 2 Corinthians 3:18 (NKJV).

“And we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord’s glory, are being transformed into His image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.”

As we look at the life of Jesus Christ, we are changed to be more and more in His image. As we put into practice what He says, as we model our lives on Him. When we repent and Christ’s blood is applied to cover our sins, God looks on us as perfect. He looks at us and sees His Son, sees His image there, in spite of our weaknesses.

Remember that Jesus was despised and rejected, just an average-looking person, not rich and powerful, he was called mad and illegitimate—yet He was the image of God. So we have hope! We do have value.

We might be a small congregation of average people, nothing wonderful to look at, but it’s what is inside that counts!

We possess the image of God, and that is growing stronger and more glorious in us day by day, as we focus on Him and yield ourselves to Him.

What a fantastic thing it is that God made us in His image!

Let’s truly show the world the image of God—that’s our challenge!