

# Genesis: Foundations of the Christian Faith

## “Are We Still in God’s Image?” (Genesis 1:26-28)

God said, “Let us make man in our image, according to our likeness, and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the sky, and over the livestock, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that crawls on the earth.” God created the man in his own image. In the image of God he created him. Male and female he created them. God blessed them and said to them, “Be fruitful, multiply, fill the earth, and subdue it. Have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the sky, and over every living thing that moves on the earth.”



“You’re the spitting image of your dad!” Perhaps most of us have heard something like that as people see resemblances to someone else in the family. So they point out to you the similarity they see. I’ve been told that I look like different people on both sides of my family. I don’t know if I necessarily see it, but they do. Family members resemble each other because of traits that are passed down from one generation to the next so that you are the “spitting image” of whoever.

When God created the world, a world that he ultimately declared “very good”, he created the first people in his image. In a poetic way, Moses, the writer of Genesis, offers commentary about what God did after divine consultation. “God created the man in his own image. In the image of God he created them. Male and female he created them.” It is that image which helps us to understand the relationship between Creator and creation in the beginning. That was then. Today as we focus on the image of God and man’s relationship with God, we consider this question: Are we still in God’s image?

Before we can really answer that question, we need to understand what is meant by the image of God. God uses two distinct words to speak about what he was about to create - image and likeness. Both of those words in Hebrew communicate a little different connotation. Both highlight the idea of representation. However “image” has more of a concrete copy connotation. “Likeness” stresses the fact that something is an exact replica. So what exactly did God mean when he made Adam and Eve to be copies and replicas of himself?

Was it that physical similarity like a family resemblance, a picture, a copy, an exact replica of something, or a clone? No that’s not what the image of God is at all. Adam and Eve did not look like God since God is a spirit. So if it’s not a physical resemblance, then what of God was given to man so that they were in his image and likeness? It was a spiritual image, a likeness of thought and action that was perfectly in tune with God’s way of thinking and acting. Man’s will was a copy of God’s will. They were in complete harmony. Nothing separated them. Adam and Eve had an understanding of God’s thoughts. They were able not to sin. Therefore they felt joy at being in God’s presence. God and his creation looked at things in the exact same way because mankind was perfect and holy, completely sinless.

We see this to be true simply from the command that God gave them concerning the world he had made. He entrusted dominion over the entire world to man without limitation. Man’s will set goals that pleased God, and chose good, God-pleasing means to achieve that goal. Man would not destroy anything as long as he bore the image of God. Instead he would rule everything in harmony with God’s will and desires for the world.

Understanding what is meant by the “image of God”, we examine the world we live in and even ourselves as people who are born in this world. Are we still in the image of God? It’s quite obvious that mankind is by nature no longer in God’s image. After that beautiful poetic statement about man’s creation in God’s image, a few chapters later in Genesis the image of God is again brought up and Moses describes for us what happened as a result of Adam and Eve’s fall into sin. Genesis 5 tells us, **“In the day that God created man, he made him in the likeness of God. He created them male and female and blessed them, and on the day they were created, he named them “mankind.” Adam lived 130 years, and he became the father of a son in his own likeness, according to his own image, and he named him Seth.” (5:1b-3)**

That once perfect relationship between God and mankind was lost. Sin separates people from God and natural man no longer thinks in line with God. We live in a fallen world where people are born with a sinful nature in the image of sinful Adam bent toward thinking and doing the opposite of God’s will. What we have seen over the last couple of weeks and society in general demonstrates the reality that mankind is no longer in God’s image.

Protestors speak hurtful, hateful, and abusive words to policemen who are trying to do their job right. Racism and prejudice are practiced toward others of different ethnic backgrounds. Conclusions are made that just because a few think, speak, and act in one way a majority must be like that too. Peaceful protests become angry riots in the streets. Violence and destruction consume our streets as some of those protesters are intent on harming others, destroying property, ruining businesses, and stealing. None of that is in line with God’s will and how he thinks. Clearly mankind is no longer in God’s image. All of those things disgust me, but when I look at myself, I get that sick feeling in my own stomach.

You and I cannot forget in all of that we are by nature no different. We have that same sinful nature. We are not perfect. Our thoughts and actions are not always in line with God’s. We are not in God’s image either, but are born in the image of fallen Adam. Our way of thinking is so quick to do things not in line with God’s will. We confessed that already today. “Holy and merciful Father, I confess that I am by nature sinful and that I have sinned against you in my thoughts, words, and actions. I have done what is evil and failed to do what is good.”

People are talking a lot about change. Change society. Change the world. Change yourself all for a better future. My friends, we cannot wipe the past out like it didn’t happen. Without repairing our relationship with God, a relationship that once was in harmony and peace, the future looks no different and neither does our hopes of life. Nor can that change happen from within ourselves since mankind is by nature no longer in God’s image. It has to come from outside of us. It is God who took the initiative to restore what was lost.

God in his grace restored the broken relationship we had with him by sending his Son Jesus to take the sins of the world on himself. God acted out of love for the people of the world when none of them could fix what they broke. He is the one who took the necessary step to repair our relationship with him. Jesus said, **“For God so loved the world that he gave his only-begotten Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish, but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.” (John 3:16-17)** Through faith in Jesus we are reconciled to God. We are at peace with God. Now that our relationship with him has been restored because of Jesus, the image of God which thought and acted in line with God’s thoughts and will, an image that once was lost by sin is being restored in us through that same faith in Jesus.

There is a change that occurs within us. We no longer want to think and do the sinful things that separated us from God. Through faith in Jesus, the Holy Spirit is renewing God’s image within us so that as we

live our lives of faith our thoughts and actions are in harmony with God's thoughts and his will. The Apostle Paul wrote to the Colossians, **"But now, you are to rid yourselves of all of these: wrath, anger, malice, slander, and filthy language from your mouth. Do not lie to each other since you have put off the old self with its practices, and put on the new self, which is continually being renewed in knowledge, according to the image of its Creator."** (3:8-10)

God's goal is unchangeable. Man is to be in his image thinking and acting in perfect harmony with his will. Even though God has restored our relationship with him through faith in Jesus, even though the Holy Spirit is working in us continuing renewing that image in us so that our lives are lived in harmony with God's will, we still are not really in his image. We are not perfect. We are at the same time both sinner and saint. Even though we have the desire to do what is good and God-pleasing, we still battle a sinful nature which daily does not think and act in harmony with God. That image of God will never be really restored in us until we are brought into God's perfect heaven.

For Adam and Eve there was value in being made in God's image. It was their whole being in complete and perfect harmony with their creator. We can't find value in something we don't possess. Yes it is being restored in us, but not completely. Having lost that image of God, where do we find our value? We find our value in what God was willing to give in love to restore that once perfect, harmonious relationship with his creation. For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son. Through him sin is forgiven and people who are by nature no longer in his image are saved through faith in Jesus. As that faith is continually strengthened through Word and Sacrament, may he continually restore and change our hearts so that we then think and act in harmony with his will until the day his image is completely restored in us. Amen

