The Image and Likeness of God

What does that mean?

“So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them..” - Genesis 1:27/ESV
Image “In the Image of God” from
# Image and Likeness of God

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Image and Likeness of God

What does it mean to say that human beings are still created “in the image of God”? How does “the image of God” relate to the views known as dichotomy and trichotomy? Why is that idea of humans being in “the image of God” still important for our contemporary society?

We do not know from Scripture specifically what it means, after Adam and Eve, to be “in the image of God”. We get hints at its meaning from looking at the condition of our first parents who had some resemblance to God’s attributes of intelligence, morality, relationship, and immortality. These are the hints that we get. Overall and since the Fall, man has a tarnished, imperfect, sinful image of His Maker. Man has intelligence as demonstrated, for example, by his efforts in the sciences. Man seems to have morality for only the briefest of prayerful moments (Hebrews 4:16), but his character is no longer moral (Matthew 15:19; Matthew 19:16-17; 1 Corinthians 2:14). Man has - needs - relationship with other people and with God. However, these relationships are marred by our sinful nature. We must pray over our interactions with other people that we reflect Jesus’ character, and we must pray for help in retaining our belief in Jesus’ saving work (e.g., example in Mark 9:24). Man has immortality in the large sense that he was born into eternity, will have physical death on earth, but will then be raised to the rest of his eternal life.

“The image of God” relates to the views known as dichotomy and trichotomy in this way. Dichotomy is a view that man is a two-part union composed of a body and a soul. The idea is that the body dies an earthly death, the soul lives on and is eventually joined to a new, perfect body in the resurrection a the end of the world. Trichotomy is a view that man is a three-part union composed of a body, a soul, and a spirit meaning that Christians have the holy Spirit (Called to Believe, Teach, and Confess pp. 137-139). This appears to be an attempt to equate the “image of God” in man to God’s triune essence.

The idea of humans being in “the image of God” is still important for our contemporary society to maintain the sanctity of human life (e.g., as God mandated in the law of Moses; c.f., Exodus 20:10). When society loses a sense of the sanctity of human life, then we bring on abortion on demand for convenience, euthanasia, withholding medical services for those no longer productive in society (e.g. certain insurance and legal constraints), and similar aberrations to what God wants for us.

Authors and Organizations Mentioned in the Article and Bibliography

Koehler, Edward W. A. Edward W. A. Koehler (1909–51) was a long time professor at Concordia Teacher's College Addison/River Forest. He is most famous for A Summary of Christian
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Mueller, Stephen P. | Stephen P. Mueller is the editor of the book Called to Believe, Teach, and Confess published by Wipf and Stock. His biography could not be found on the Internet.
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Piper, John | John Stephen Piper (born January 11, 1946) is a Calvinistic Baptist Christian preacher and author currently serving as Pastor for Preaching and Vision of Bethlehem Baptist Church in Minneapolis, Minnesota.
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Theopedia | Theopedia is an encyclopedia of Biblical Christianity.
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Tverberg, Lois | Lois Tverberg has been teaching and writing about the Jewish background of Christianity for the past fifteen years. With Ann Spangler she authored the best-seller, Sitting at the Feet of Rabbi Jesus: How the Jewishness of Jesus will Transform Your Faith (Zondervan, 2009). The book explores the first-century world of rabbis and disciples, festivals, prayers and the Torah, and how restoring Jesus to his Jewish reality sheds light on his life and ministry.
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Bibliography


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1 “In rabbinic literature, the contrast was often made of man, made in the image of God, compared to idols and statues made in the image of earthly kings. One rabbi said that ‘A king mints a thousand coins with his image on them, and every one is exactly the same. But the Lord makes multitudes of human beings that all bear his image, and they are all different!’ It shows the infinite glory of God that he can represent himself in so many ways.” (Lois Tverberg, “To Be the Image of God”)

2 These attributes are found in Called to Believe, Teach, and Confess Chapters 7, 10. The term “resemblance” to God’s attributes is used, because even the first humans, before the Fall, could not be as perfect as God.

3 This analysis is based on material presented in Edward W. A. Koehler, DD, A Summary of Christian Doctrine, “The Divine Attributes” pp. 58-63; John Piper, Desiring God, “I AM WHO I AM”; and, Theopedia, “God’s Known Attributes”. Those sources list more detailed attributes than those given in Called to Believe, Teach, and Confess, Chapter 6.

4 I have read interpretations that the spirit is any spirit, good or evil that dominates man.