

3. The Image of God in Genesis 1:26

• The whole person

• Includes the idea of 'shape'

3. A third way of considering the image of God is to study Genesis 1:26 as fully as we can. God says 'Let us make man as our image, according to our likeness'.

First of all we may note that we should not speak of humankind being 'in' the image of God. God made man 'as' the image of God.¹ This is important. It is the **whole** person who is the image of God. It is not that men and women are 'in' anything. It deals with what they **are**. They **are** the image of God.

The word 'image' includes the idea of 'shape'. It may seem strange to say that men and women are made as the shape of God! But the word 'image' does include the idea of shape! The word 'image' has spatial properties in Old Testament usage and includes the idea of physical form.

We know that 'God is spirit'. He does not have a body; He is not material. Yet we also know that there were times when God took on a visible appearance. He was causing something to be visible which represented Himself. It was not that people were seeing God, but they were seeing what represented God. When God did this and appeared in visible form, in Old Testament times, He always took the shape of a man¹. When the Bible says that man is the image of God it includes man's body. 'Image' means shape. God does not have a body² but there is a shape that is appropriate to God³. Our human 'shape' is God's 'shape' first. It does not mean that God has a body, but it does mean that there was a shape that God chose to use. The whole man is the image of God; it includes the body!

Genesis 1:26 speaks of man as the image of God. It does not talk of **part** of man being in the image of God. It certainly does not talk of the 'soul' as being in the image of God. And certainly the image of God is not the 'immortality of the soul'.

4. Images in the ancient world

4. A fourth way of considering the image of God is to remember how 'images' were used in the ancient world. In the thinking of the ancient Near East images were representations of a king or of a god. A king might have a statue of himself set up in a temple. Symbolically it meant that he was ever in the presence of his god praying to it. Sometimes the king himself would be thought to be the living 'image' of the god he worshipped. This kind of thinking was familiar to the first readers of Genesis. The point of this for us is that we are God's representatives, His living image here in His world. Let us now come to consider what this teaching about 'the image of God' ought to mean to us.

1. The second commandment

1. It helps us to understand the second commandment. The reason why Israel was forbidden to make an image of God is because the human race itself is to be the image of God.

2. Sin

2. It helps us to understand what sin is. It is falling from the glory of God. It is damaging the original righteousness in which God created the human race. After man fell the image was damaged. New human beings were more the image of Adam than the image of God¹. Yet the image is not totally lost (see James 3:9 which implies man is still the image of God).

3. Why life is sacred

3. It helps us to understand why life is sacred. The fact that man is the image of God makes murder a very serious sin¹. Capital punishment was required as a punishment for murder.

¹ see Judges 13:21, 22; Ezekiel 1:26, 28

² see Deut. 4:12; Isaiah 40:18

³ Ezekiel 1:26

¹ 5:3

¹ see 9:6

4. Men and women

4. **We must remember that both men and women are the image of God.** Genesis says ‘*Let them rule...*’. The earth is given to man for him to care for. Genesis 1:28 comes to both men and women (although 1 Corinthians 11 says that in the matter of authority the image functions under man).

5. Jesus

5. **Jesus is the perfect image of God.** Only He is the perfect man. He is fully God’s image¹.

6. God’s people

6. **One day the image will be perfectly restored in God’s people.** Man will be fully restored to the image of God². He will have perfect dominion. Psalm 8 will be fulfilled. 1 Corinthians 6:3 will come to pass.

It begins now. Man now is to be the image of God. The possibility is still open to him. The process of getting back to being the representative of God starts when we have fellowship with the Lord Jesus Christ³. Progressively we get to be like Jesus.

Procreation and dominion

After telling us about the image of God¹, Genesis 1:28–31 goes on to tell us how the human race was given commands concerning procreation and dominion². Food is provided for him³ (meat would be provided later). Vegetable food is given also to the animals⁴. The whole of creation is said to be good⁵.

Man and the animals

It is worth noticing the difference between human beings and the animals. They have a lot in common. Man and the animals

• **Have a lot in common**

- (i) share the same day;
- (ii) were both created from the dust¹.
- (iii) They have much in common in their functioning, as we see in Genesis 1:22 and 28. A difference is in the words ‘*said unto them*’. God talks to the human race; He does not talk to the animals!
- (iv) They have a digestive system in common, feeding habits in common. They both maintain life with food².
- (v) Each reproduces after its kind. This is not mentioned explicitly, but it is implied.
- (vi) Both are said to be ‘living being’.

• **But man is uniquely made in God’s image**



Man has something in common with inanimate nature. He is made of the dust of the ground. Man has something in common with animate nature. He has many resemblances to the animals. What then makes men and women unique? They are made in the image of God.

Footnote

¹ It uses what scholars call the **beth essentiae**, a preposition meaning ‘as’.

¹ see John 12:45; 14:9; 2 Corinthians 4:4; Colossians 1:15; Hebrews 1:3
² see 1 Cor. 15:49
³ see 1 Cor. 3:18
¹ 1:26-7
² 1:28
³ 1:29
⁴ 1:30
⁵ 1:31

¹ 1:24; 2:7; 3:19
² 1:28, 30; 2:7

	<p>Dr Michael Eaton is highly respected internationally as a theologian, author, preacher and teacher. He lives in Kenya where he is one of the leaders of the Chrisco Fellowship. His <i>Preaching Through The Bible</i> (PTTB) books are highly popular worldwide. Michael Eaton puts the theological and practical meaning of the Bible in a clear and down-to-earth way so that what is written can be easily understood by the reader.</p>	
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