

# Reflecting God's Image

## Dr. Greg Bourgond

When I was growing up in Sault Ste. Marie, Michigan, I was told by many people that I was the spitting image of my father. Somehow, they saw him in me. I'm not sure they meant it as a compliment or a criticism. I chose to accept it as a compliment. If you were to see my daughter, you would undoubtedly say that she was the spitting image of me.

What does it mean to be the image of someone else? Webster's Dictionary defines image as *"the reproduction or imitation of the form of a person or thing; an exact likeness; a person strikingly like another person."*

If someone says to you that you're the image and likeness of someone else; the comparison may not be physical but emotional, or characterological. In other words, you might have a similar personality, a similar temperament, a similar intellect, a similar emotional makeup.

For instance, look at **Genesis 1:26-27** and **5:1-2**.

In **Genesis 1** God said . . . *"Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground." So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them."*

In **chapter 5** we read . . . *This is the written account of Adam's line. When God created man, he made him in the likeness of God. 2 He created them male and female and blessed them. And when they were created, he called them "man."*

Now, God is Spirit and not a material being—therefore, we don't look like God physically. However, unlike animals, we bear His imprint in that we possess a capability to love, a volitional will, a conscience, a sense of moral responsibility, and a capacity for worship.

When the Bible mentions our resemblance to God it generally focuses on His moral qualities such as righteousness (Eph 4:24), ethical consciousness (*Matt 5:48*), purity (*1 John 3:2ff., 9*), love (*Jn 13:14, 35ff; Titus 3:4; 1 Jn 3:10, 16-18; 4:7-10*), forgiveness (*Mt 6:14ff; Col 3:13*), humility (*Phil 2:3-11*), holiness (*Eph 4:24, Lev 19:1*), and knowledge (*Col 3:10*).

Tomorrow, we will celebrate the birth of the Son of God, Jesus Christ. The Bible makes it clear that Jesus was in very nature God (*Phil 2:6-8*), the image of the God (*2 Cor 4:4*), the likeness of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation (*Col 1:15*), the Word that was God (*John 1:1, 14, 18*), the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of His being (*Heb 1:3*). He is Immanuel—God with us (*Matt 1:23*), God in us, and God upon us.

The Bible is very clear that we humans are created in God's image, the events of September 11<sup>th</sup> notwithstanding. The carnage of this atrocity, the mayhem we observe on our streets, in our homes, and around the globe may cause us to question this proposition—that we are all created in God's likeness and image. Never-the-less, it is an absolute fact, an absolute truth.

In this message I would like to explore what it means to be created in God's image. We will look at this amazing proclamation from three perspectives: *God's image upon us*, *God's image within us*, and finally, *God's image through us*.

## I. **God's Image Upon Us . . . Genesis 1:26-27**

Every human being ever born and that will ever be born has and will be created in God's image. Before Adam and Eve fell into sin, they possessed the moral qualities possessed by God—His communicable attributes. From the beginning, man and woman were God's image bearers.

The writer of Ecclesiastes states that God has placed eternity into our hearts. Men and women are born with a sense of the eternal—yet not so that they know with absolute clarity what God has done from the beginning to the end (*Ecccl 3:11*). As I have told you on other occasions, this 'sense of the eternal' is God's general revelation of Himself— a truth we can choose to deny, but a truth never-the-less. This sense of the eternal compels every human being to question their purpose in life, their progress through life, and the significance of their life.

One of my favorite Christian authors is *J. I. Packer*, theology professor emeritus of Regent College and world class theologian. I have found no one who can improve upon his description of God's image upon us. He explains it like this . . .

*When God made man, He communicated to him qualities corresponding to His spirituality, freedom, power, along with His moral attributes such as goodness, truth, holiness, righteousness, justice, etc. This is what the Bible means when it tells us that God made man in His own image—namely, that God made man a free spiritual being, a responsible moral agent with powers of choice and action, able to commune with Him and respond to Him, and by nature good, truthful, holy, upright (Eccles 7:29): in a word, godly. (Knowing God, pages 89)*

*We are familiar with the thought that our bodies are like machines, needing the right routine of food, rest, and exercise if they are to run efficiently, and liable, if filled up with the wrong fuel—(such as) alcohol, drugs (or) poison—to lose their power of healthy functioning and ultimately to 'seize up' entirely in physical death. What we are, perhaps slower to grasp is that God wishes us to think of our souls in a similar way. As rational persons, we are made to bear God's moral image—that is, our souls were made to 'run' on the practice of worship, law keeping, truthfulness, honesty, discipline, self-control, and service to God and our fellow (man). If we abandon these practices, not only do we*

*incur guilt before God; we also progressively destroy our souls. Conscience (shrivels up), the sense of shame dries up, one's capacity for truthfulness, loyalty, and honesty is eaten away, one's character (slowly) disintegrates. One not only becomes desperately miserable; one is steadily being de-humanized. (Knowing God, pages 102-103)*

Before the fall, Adam and Eve possessed God's moral attributes to their fullest—they were truly human as God intended. But their sin began the process of de-humanization. God's image became marred and corrupted. Man's perceptions became distorted, his world view became warped. He no longer saw things as God saw them. Packer again offers a helpful perspective at this point. He says . . .

*The moral qualities which belonged to the divine image were lost at the fall; God's image in man has been universally defaced, for all mankind has in one way or another lapsed into ungodliness. (Knowing God, pages 90)*

In other words, as one Bible scholar (*Lambert Dolphin - Made in the Image of God*), puts it, "the human race is fallen, self-centered, corrupted and mortally damaged by the sin of Adam. All aspects of our humanity have been affected (some more than most)."

Even at our best, we exhibit God's moral qualities darkly, in a distorted fashion, warped and twisted bearing little resemblance to their perfected state. For instance, our appreciation of beauty, our sense of justice, our appreciation of humankind, our moral stability, our ethical balance, are owed to God's image in us.

One minor exception must be noted - Packer, and others, suggest that "*the moral qualities which belonged to the divine image were lost at the fall.*" The Bible, however, speaks of man after the fall as continuing to bear God's image. The image survived the fall. Though blurred, it still exists.

In God's covenant with Noah in Genesis 9:6 He says, "*Whoever sheds the blood of man shall his blood be shed, for in the image of God has God made man.*"

Paul in 1 Corinthians 11:7 makes the following comment. "*A man ought not to cover his head, since he is the image and glory of God.*"

James 3:9 states, "*With the tongue we praise our Lord and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in God's likeness.*"

In summary then, sin disrupts and defaces the image of God in us; it mars and distorts that image. Even in the sad state of alienation from God, man still bears God's image, even if only a trace, even if only in an inconsistent and perverted way. Paul, in Romans 3:23, declares that "*all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.*"

Without the God's direct intervention through Christ, His Son, we are left with the inevitable conclusion of a slow but sure disintegration of our humanity moving further

and further away from who God created us to be, further and further from any resemblance to our Creator, further and further away into ungodliness—capable of despicable behavior, inhuman atrocities, and all manner of evil.

*“For from within, out of men's hearts, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance and folly. All these evils come from inside and make a man 'unclean.' (Mark 7:21-23)”*

## **II. God's Image Within Us . . . Ephesians 1:13-14**

What real beauty we recognize, what justice we stand for, what righteousness we proclaim, what transcendent morality we claim, what little goodness there is within us is due solely to God's image upon us.

It is only through Christ, God's perfect reflection, image and likeness, that we have any hope of restoring God's image in us to radiance once again. *J.I. Packer* once again sheds some light on this issue. He says . . .

*The Bible tells us that now, in fulfillment of His plan of redemption, God is at work in Christian believers to repair His ruined image by communicating the qualities (of His character and moral excellence) to them afresh. This is what the Scripture means when it says that Christians are being renewed in the image of Christ and of God. (Knowing God, page 90)*

In 2 Corinthians 3:18 we read . . . *And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.*

In Colossians 3:5-10 we read . . . *Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry. Because of these, the wrath of God is coming. You used to walk in these ways, in the life you once lived. But now you must rid yourselves of all such things as these: anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language from your lips. Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator.*

In Ephesians 4:17-24 we read . . . *So I (Paul) tell you this, and insist on it in the Lord, that you must no longer live as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their thinking. They are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts. Having lost all sensitivity, they have given themselves over to sensuality so as to indulge in every kind of impurity, with a continual lust for more. You, however, did not come to know Christ that way. Surely you heard of him and were taught in him in accordance with the truth that is in Jesus. You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; to be made new in the attitude of your*

*minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.*

One of the most formidable computer commands is format. If you format your hard drive you completely wipe out whatever is on the drive. You must reinstall your operating software to operate your computer at all. In effect, the old must be replaced with the new. Similarly, our old nature must be replaced with our new nature if God's image in us is to be operative again. It is God's redemptive action through the blood of Christ that makes it possible for the believer to be His image bearer once again. In Christ we have the ability to bear His image afresh.

Christ is the original image of God, being an exact replica of God's image. As Hebrews 1:3 reminds us, *"The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of His being."*

If you make a copy of an imperfect photograph the copy will be imperfect as well. Perfect copies can only be made from a perfect original copy. If you try to copy from a defaced copy, you will only get defaced copies. Your only recourse is to go back to the original or to a perfect copy.

Christ is the perfect copy of the Father. Man apart from Christ can only be a defaced copy at best. If you model your life from an imperfect copy, from man, you can only expect an imperfect representation. To be restored in God's image, God must turn us away from our fallen nature in Adam and re-create us in Christ, who is both the original (*John 1:1*) and a perfect copy (*Hebrews 1:3*).

In Romans 8:29 we read . . . *For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.*

In Ephesians 4:11-16 we read . . . *It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming. Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ. From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.*

### **III. God's Image Through Us . . . Titus 2:11-14**

The world is frantically looking for authenticity wherever it can find it. What does it mean to be authentic? Trustworthy; not imaginary, false or imitation; *conforming to an*

*original so as to reproduce essential features: being actually and exactly what is claimed.*

What does an authentic Christian look like? An authentic Christian is one who conforms to the original, Jesus Christ and reproduces those features which reflect His character. Such a person leaves little doubt to whom they belong because they bear the imprint of the Master. They carry in their person God's *certificate of authenticity*. They bear, in their person, the imprint of the Master, Christ.

In other words, the authentic Christian reflects the image of God to the world around them. People see the Father, in His Son, through the believer. It is this stark contrast between those of the world and those of the family of God that causes those who don't know God to take notice. Living for God through Christ in the power of His Spirit is what disturbs the world and compels those in the world to find out what's the difference.

The Bible is clear about the 'image' we should project to the world around us. *"The grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men. It teaches us to say "No" to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, while we wait for the blessed hope--the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good." Titus 2:11-14*

This season we celebrate the coming of our Lord and Savior, the exact replica of the Father, the exact representation of God. When you open your gifts on Christmas Eve or Christmas morning remember the greatest gift of all, Christ our Lord. By receiving His atonement for our sins through His life, death, and resurrection we can once again reflect the image of God in us and see the world through God's eyes, love the world through God's heart, and live a godly life in this world through God's empowering Spirit.

Christmas for believers should be a celebration of the birth of Immanuel, God with us and God in us. May the spark of His image within us turn in a raging conflagration that will bring blinding light to a lost and dark world.

Is the image of God apparent in you? Renew your soul through confession and forgiveness. Commit to becoming God's radiance in whatever you do and wherever you are.