



IMAGE: GOD LOVES

Part 1 of Doctrine

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Image: God Loves. Okay, we've looked at God, how he speaks, how he creates, now we'll look at how he makes us. We now start to deal with human life. Up until this point, all we've talked about is God, need to know who God is and what God says and what God does before who we are and what we should say and what we should do makes any sense at all.

Theologically, you'll hear the term *imago Dei*, a Latin phrase meaning "image of God." Image of God. Where does this come from? Well, Genesis 1:26–27, again, Genesis says this, "Then God said, 'Let us—'" there's the Trinity—"make man.'" And the word there for man is mankind. It's the same thing in Genesis 5, God named the race Adam, he named the race man, so mankind. "In our image, after our likeness. . . . So God created man"—and mankind includes the man and the woman. The man is made as the head of the race—"in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them." I'll read it again, "Then God said, 'Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. . . . So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.'"

The Bible says that we're the image bearers of God. When we get into the fall lecture, you'll look at the fact that we sin and even though we sin, we still bear the image and likeness of God. Genesis 5 says we still bear the image and likeness of God. Genesis 9 says you can't murder people because they bear the image and likeness of God. Jesus' brother James, around chapter 3 in his epistle in the New Testament, says, don't yell at people and cuss them out because they bear the image and likeness of God.

So we're made in the image and likeness of God and even though we sin, we still bear the image and likeness of God. We'll deal with that more thoroughly in the fall. But the big issue is this, what does it mean to image God? Now John Calvin, one of the greatest Bible teachers in the history of the world, he used an interesting analogy in his commentary on this issue from Colossians 3, and he said that to image God is to mirror or reflect God. That's what it means, that the source of our life and our goodness is not ourselves. Unlike Easternism, which says to go into your self through yoga and meditation, to get to know your deep, true self and then reflect your goodness and glory to the world, the Bible says, no, no, no, we're not to go into self, we're to go out to God. We are to reflect, mirror, image God. That's what we are. We're not the source of light, we're the reflectors of God's glorious light, that's who we are. And so by image bearer, that's what it means.

This does not mean that we bear God's image inasmuch as we are God's image bearers, so we are to think thoughts that reflect the glory of God. We are to feel feelings that reflect the glory of God. We are to speak words that reflect the glory God. We are to do deeds that reflect the glory of God. We are to treat our body as stewards in such a way that we reflect the glory of God. And I'll let you in on a little secret: this is the key to your joy, this is what'll make you happy because this is what you were made to do, and so when we do this, we have joy.

What this means as well is that we image God in moral likeness. I'll give you some examples. When we make decisions; when we exercise power; when we exercise dominion over lower creation like animals and creation care and good stewardship of the earth; social ability, when we communicate and laugh and love and speak and write; emotions, as we feel. These are all means by which we reflect and image God.

It includes non-moral imaging as well. We have intellect, we can think, that's because we're God's image bearers. We can reason, we can learn. We're immortal; we'll live forever. We have a soul and a spirit and we can connect with God spiritually. We have social ability, to be in relationships with one another, reflecting the Trinitarian character of God who is in continual perfect relationship.

Additionally, one of the ways that theologians describe what it means to be God's image bearers is by distinguishing what they will call the communicable and the incommunicable attributes. The communicable attributes we'll call God's shared attributes, that he shares them with us—to a lesser degree to be sure—but he shares them with us nonetheless. Now God's incommunicable attributes, we'll call those God's unshared attributes, these are aspects of God's person that we do not have.

Now God's incommunicable or unshared attributes: God is all-present, called omnipresence, we're not. We're limited to a time and a place. Furthermore God is omniscient, he's all-knowing, we're not. We don't know everything, even though some of us act like it, right? Additionally, God is omnipotent, meaning he's all-powerful, we're not. We can't do all the stuff that God does. God is immutable, that God is unchanging, we change. Additionally, God is eternal. He's without beginning or end. We are not eternal, we came into existence at a point and time. And God is sovereign, he rules and reigns over all, and we're not. Those are God's incommunicable attributes; we are distinct from God, lesser than God, lower than God in those particular ways, clearly.

There are also, however, God's communicable or shared attributes. Because we're his image bearers, men and women—you need to know that this means men and women are equal because they both bear the image and likeness of God. Both bear the image and likeness of God equally. They're different but equal.

God shares with us his shared attributes, including spirit. See, unlike an animal or a tree or a rock or a river, we have a spirit, an immaterial, non-physical aspect of our being by which

we can communicate with God and relate to God. And even when we die and our physical body goes in the ground—Paul says to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord—the soul, the spirit goes to be with the Lord. You have a soul. You're not just meat, you're a person who bears the image and likeness of God and you have a soul, so there's a spiritual aspect to your being. As you worship God in spirit and in truth, you are imaging him, reflecting him, mirroring him.

Also, God is holy. The number-one attribute of God that is listed most often in Scripture is the holiness of God. You and I image God when we live in holiness, when we say no to sin and yes to God, then we're reflecting, mirroring, imaging, showing forth to creation and the earth, the glory and goodness of God.

God is love. God is love. And when we are loving toward God and others, including our enemies and strangers—hospitality is included in this—we are mirroring, imaging, reflecting God. People might ask, "Why do you love me? You don't even know me. Why do you love me? You're my enemy, I've been really mean to you." Well, guess what? My God is a God of love, and I want to reflect his love to you.

God is truth. God is truth. He speaks the truth, he never lies. As we speak the truth and we don't lie and when we do lie, we repent and we tell the truth that we lied, we're imaging, reflecting, mirroring God. We should be honest people.

Justice and righteousness, our God is a just God and a righteous God. As we work for justice and righteousness and we oppose oppression and evil and the ill treatment of God's image bearers, guess what? We're imaging, reflecting, mirroring God. Why should we work for justice and righteousness for all people? Because all people bear the image and likeness of God. Say, "Well, what if they're in a vegetative state?" They're God's image bearers. "What if they're old and they're costing us money, shouldn't we kill them?" No, they're God's image bearers. "What if they're unborn and they can't vote?" Well, then we should vote for them that they might have life. We hold all human life in dignity because it bears the image and likeness of God.

So we believe in the rights of the unborn, the elderly, the sick, the infirmed. We believe it was absolutely right to oppose slavery, that people aren't part human and part animal if they're black. That's not biblical thinking, that's evolutionary thinking. That actually comes from Charles Darwin, right? "Survival of the fittest," and the rest of the title that they didn't tell you in school is "the preservation of favored races in the struggle for life." His title for natural selection was racist. It was that certain races are more fit than others. It helped to contribute to racism. If you believe in evolution, to some degree, you have to be, if you're consistent, a racist—that certain people are more evolved, more conscious, more developed than others, that some of us are more primitive.

You heard these words on this stage in my debate on NBC. "Well, I'm more advanced and you are primitive and I'm more evolved." This is the kind of thinking that leads to injustice. Because we're God's image bearers we say no, because you're poor or black or a woman or unborn or elderly or in a coma, you're not lesser than the rest of us, because you bear God's image and likeness, and we mirror and reflect and image God when we work for justice for all of God's image bearers. So yes, the poor and the marginalized and the needy and the widow and the orphan and the single mother, why? Well, because we image God.

Now if we believed in evolution we'd say, "Hey, might makes right, survival of the fittest, there's winners and losers we're trying to thin out the herd. Too bad for you." Christianity says no way. The image bearers of God are all equally imbued with God's dignity, value, and worth. And we work for justice and righteousness.

We work for love and compassion because that's who our God is, and we want the world to see something of his goodness. This includes mercy, that we're nice to those who don't deserve it. We give grace to those who don't deserve it.

And it includes beauty, that God made everything beautiful. It's another word for glorious. Our God is beautiful, and as we give mercy and as we enjoy beauty and as we participate in the creative arts, if some of you are musicians and poets and painters and filmmakers and photographers, it's because you're image bearers, because God is beautiful and he's a creator and he made us to create, not from nothing, but from that which he has given us: beauty.

See, this explains the human condition, we're image bearers of God. We're not plants and animals and beasts and fish and birds, we're image bearers of God. Now to be sure, we'll get into this in the fall lecture, in sin our proverbial mirror is cracked, that we don't image God well, but there is one who has imaged God perfectly. His name is Jesus. Jesus is without sin. He is, 1 Corinthians 15:45 says, the last Adam. As Adam was to reflect and mirror and image God and failed through sin, Jesus comes and perfectly mirrors, reflects, images God. This is where Jesus can say things like, "If you've seen me, you've seen—" what? Who? "The Father." "If you've seen me, you've seen the Father." Why? "I'm a perfect mirror, I reflect him perfectly."

It says it this way, Colossians 1:15, he, Jesus, is the image, there's our word from Genesis 1. "He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn or preeminent over all creation," that Jesus images God to us. We wouldn't know who God the Father is. He's invisible. He's Spirit. So Jesus, the second member of the Trinity, comes into human history, this would be the doctrine to the incarnation, he becomes a man, and he perfectly images, mirrors, reflects God the Father to us. So if we want to know what God's like, well, you say he's invisible. Some will say if he's invisible, you can't know anything about him. If he's invisible, all you can do is experience him, and Jesus says, "Not true. If you've seen me, you've seen the Father. You want to know who the Father is? Look at me." You want to know who the invisible God is? Well, look at the God who became a man to reflect the glory of God to all men.

Now, what this means is to become a Christian is to be one who by God's grace is continually made more and more and more to be like Jesus. Our proverbial mirror's put back together. Through sin, we threw the mirror on the ground and it broke, and Jesus, through salvation, starts to put the mirror back together. It says this in Romans 8:29, "For those whom he foreknew—" God knew you before you were born. Why? Because God knows all. "He also predestined." He had a destiny chosen for you—"to be conformed to the image of his Son." To be a Christian is to be one that God knew before he was born or she was born, to be predestined to salvation, to be conformed to the image of Jesus. To be a Christian is to be one who is to be made, by the Holy Spirit's power, to be more and more imaged after Jesus. So all of Christian life is becoming more like Jesus to reflect, image, mirror God to the earth better and better and better.

And this doesn't happen all at once. This is an ongoing process that the Bible calls sanctification. It says it this way in 2 Corinthians 3:18, "And we all—" speaking to the Christians, "with unveiled face—" He's echoing Moses here, going up to be with God. "Beholding the glory of the Lord," right? That God's radiant glory, his light is shining down on us. "Are being transformed into the same image—" there's our word—"from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit."

The Holy Spirit takes the broken pieces of our life and day by day, moment by moment, opportunity by opportunity, he humbly, graciously, kindly serves us through repentance and

faith and truth and mercy and patience and grace. The Holy Spirit takes the broken pieces of our lives, and he starts to put them together, so that more and more and more we look a little bit like Jesus and that we're transformed from one degree of glory to another, that we're able to image, reflect, mirror, show the love and the truth and the mercy and the justice and the compassion and the grace and the kindness and the beauty of God to our friends and our families and our co-workers, to our enemies, to the world, to our church, to non-Christians that they may be interested in this amazing God, and that's the joy of the Christian life. I promise you, it's the secret to your happiness.

Note: This transcript has been edited for readability.