

# What Is Man?

Lesson 2

The Image of God

Forum



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# What Is Man?

## Lesson Two: The Image of God

### Forum

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### Question 1:

**What does the Bible mean when it uses the words the “image and likeness of God” to describe humanity?**

#### **Dr. Michael D. Williams**

Now, the language of image bearing is actually quite rare — only three texts in the Old Testament. And there’s really not a definition that comes with it. And because of that, we’ve kind of felt free throughout two thousand years of history to simply read our cultural expectations into the text. Hendrikus Berkhof famously made the comment that you could tell the whole history, the Western intellectual history through how we have read this text. And we have taken image bearing, being an image bearer, as possessing a soul, being rational creatures, just on and on and on. Without getting into all the complexities here, I think that the suggestions have kind of fallen into two categories: either image bearing is something we are, a kind of static endowment, say, the possession of a soul, or that I’m a rational creature, or it’s a task; it’s something we do. It’s a noun or a verb. It’s a thing or an activity... The verbal idea is more appealing in some ways because of what follows right after that: “Let us make man in our image and let them rule.” And I realize that the habit or the tradition of the last one hundred years has been to move away from ontological answers and move towards dynamic answers. We shouldn’t be too quick to say, well, we’ve swung the pendulum completely in the other way — it’s not a thing, it’s simply a verb. It’s simply either ruling or relationship or that kind of thing. One of my professors, Tony Hoekema, years ago in his book, *Created in God’s Image*, made this very point. He said that God has made the eagle as a flying creature, but the eagle must possess the abilities to fly, so there’s something both nominal and verbal. And it

may be that the image of God is both telling us our constitution, telling us *what* we are, but also telling us what we are to do.

### **Rev. Ian Benson**

The Bible says that we are made in God's image and likeness, and what does this mean? The Hebrew uses two words: the word *tselem* for the word "image," and *demuth* for the word "likeness." And the word *demuth* comes from the word *damah*, which is "to be like" or "to resemble," and the word *tselem* is used sometimes of maybe an image, a graven image, or something like that. These words show that we are made in the image of God, that is, that we represent, we are physical representation of God... The Lord Jesus Christ became man, and he is, according to Colossians 1:15, he is the Image of God. And I think it's very interesting ... that Christ is the Image of God, and we are made in his image.

### **Rev. Bill Burns**

Genesis explains that God creates humanity in the image of God according to his likeness, that unlike the rest of the created order, there's something unique about Adam and Eve that they are actually created in the image of God according to his likeness. That's such a rich idea that there are many different things that can be said about that... The first is that this idea of being created in the image of God, as we see clarified also in Genesis 5, when Adam has a son in his own likeness and image, is that part of the implication of what's bound up in the idea that humanity is created in God's image is that humanity is created to be God's children, that Adam and Eve are created to be God's son and daughter in that they share a family likeness. There's a resemblance in some fashion; even though God is God and humanity is not, there are some things that we have in common. We share in some of God's qualities and characteristics. We are able to share in his goodness, to share in his holiness, to share in his righteousness. We are able to know him and live in relationship with him. And so, this first dimension of what it means that humanity is created in God's image is that we're created to be like God and to share in some of his qualities, to bear a family resemblance, if you will, because we were actually created for God to live in relationship with God as his children. Well, to add one more dimension to that picture, Adam and Eve, as God's children, because God is King of the universe, are essentially royal children, that Adam and Eve have the extraordinary privileges as being a son and daughter of the King of sharing in his work of governing the world. God explicitly says there in Genesis that Adam and Eve are to have dominion over the world and to bring the order and the government of God, the benevolent good government of God, to the rest of the world on God's behalf. So it's this extraordinary privilege that humanity has of being in relationship with God, of resembling God, of having qualities in common with God, and actually getting to share in God's work, to participate in the family business, as it were, in extending God's goodness and his work of creation and his bringing beauty and order and justice and righteousness and all good things to the world. It's almost as if the Garden of Eden is a blueprint from which Adam and Eve are to use to extend the glory of God to the ends of the earth.

## Question 2:

### **Why do many theologians teach that being made in the image and likeness of God means that we are God's kingly representatives on earth?**

#### **Andrew Abernethy, Ph.D.**

In Genesis 1 where it talks about God creating humanity, he says that he created male and female in the image of God, and then it says, "and in the likeness of God"... There's been a lot of debate amongst theologians about what this actually means, but scholars in the Old Testament are aware of a find at Tell Fakhariyeh in Syria where they found a statue of a ruler in that region, and it calls the statue the "image and likeness" of that particular ruler. So what this shines light upon Genesis 1 is that how humans, as God's image bearers, are those who are to be, if you will, like statues for God, or representatives for God being the real King of this world. So, when I think "image bearers," I think those who are called to represent or to reflect God in this world as they care for creation. Now, a scholar recently, Catherine McDowell, has importantly noted how also image is linked to kinship. That's why you could say that Adam had children and they were born in Adam's image in Genesis 5. So there's also a sense that we, being created in God's image are, in a sense, part of God's family. We are "kins," we are God's children. So, I would call to mind this view of us that to be created in the image of God means we're called to represent and reflect God and to do so mindful that we are God's children.

#### **Dr. Mare Cortez**

So when Moses uses the language of "image and likeness" in Genesis 1 to describe the human person, we've been wrestling for years, centuries, trying to figure out exactly what Moses meant by that. And probably among the most common answers for that is to identify the image with some capacity or set of capacities that human persons have. So, we image God because we're rational. We image God because we're moral; we're spiritual. Whatever it is, there's some capacity that we have... So the other most common way of understanding what Moses is doing there is to look at the broader cultural context and the way that language is being used when Moses was writing that particular text. And actually, it was fairly common to use that language, particularly in Egypt and Mesopotamia, to describe particular human persons, usually kings or pharaohs who are standing in as god's representatives in the world, ruling over the world that god has created, so that to refer to the pharaoh as "god's image" is to say that Pharaoh is god's designated ruler and that Pharaoh is ruling as god's representative in that particular place. And so, in that sense, then, the image isn't necessarily defining something about our capacities, our bodies, our intellect, anything like that, it's really talking about something that we were placed in creation to do. It's a much more functional, active understanding of the image, so that we are created to represent God, to represent his presence, to represent his rulership in creation... But if he drops this language in the text without actually defining it, it's

probably because he thought that we already knew what the words meant, and if we look at what the words meant in his context, it seems likely that it refers to this idea that we are functioning as God's representatives.

**Rev. Dr. Michael Walker**

The church has not had a *single* understanding of what it means to be created in the image of God, but in recent years some new scholarship on the ancient Near Eastern context in which the Genesis account was written has helped us to understand what it meant to be an image in that environment and how the first audience, the first readers or hearers of the creation story, may likely have understood it at that time. And ancient Near Eastern rulers would erect images or representations of themselves throughout their territories, the areas in which they were sovereign, and these images were reminders of who's king here, who's the ruler, whose land is this. Who needs to be obeyed here? So, they were representations of the reign of the king, and I think that is a significant part of what it means for Adam and Eve to be created in the image of God. I think that's what we're being told when we read that in Genesis, that they were created, and really all of us were created, to be representations, *re-presentations*, of the reign of God who reflect his character and who, in effect, announce to the world who's king here, who does all this belong to, who reigns in this place. And we can see this reflected as well in the explicit commands that are given to Adam and Eve after they are created, you know, to fill the earth and subdue it is essentially a command to fill the whole earth, all of which was God's kingdom, with representations, reminders of the king.

### Question 3:

**As God's images, how are we similar to him and different from him?**

**Dr. Ramesh Richard**

The greatest compliment that God has given us as human beings is that he has made us in his image. This is not something that he extends to the rest of his creation. The image of God can sometimes be seen only as rationality or creativity, the "soft intellectual" sides of human ability and accomplishment. But as I have studied the image of God in Scripture, not only do we have the soft, nonmaterial side of God being reflected in us... We are the image of God where he's not otherwise seen, just like creation reflects God's eternity, his power, we are there to represent him in a way that cannot be captured by creation, meaning personhood, that we are persons who came from a Person. This is an amazing concept, which is not clear in other religions and other philosophies. One of the reasons we hold to the dignity of the human race is the fact that all our ethics come from the dignity of the human race; lots of others would like to borrow human dignity without the foundation of a God who is a person. We cannot philosophically get personality from impersonality. It's like getting a dime when there are only quarters inside your pocket. Now, how are we different from God? One, we are temporal and God is eternal. Second, we are limited in our

abilities, unlike the God who is unlimited. Throughout the ages, philosophers have attempted to address, where are we like God and where are we not? In fact, how can we speak about a God that we cannot see? Some think we are univocally able to capture what God is in our expressions, and that's impossible because God is beyond our thoughts, beyond our comprehension... And so, we talk about God in analogies or in similarities, so we are persons and God has to be a person; we have spirit and God is spirit; we have body *and* God came in a human body. Some of the most amazing parts of Christian anthropology and Christian theology come from it.

**Rev. Ric Rodeheaver**

So, in talking about the image of God, one of the necessary questions is, if we are image bearers of God, and we are in his image and likeness — which means we're not an exact copy but we're like him — in what way are we like him, and then in what way are we not like him? And basically, theologians would call that, that there are “communicable attributes” of God, in that they are communicated, they are given to us. And there are those things called the “incommunicable attributes” of God. So, an example of incommunicable attributes, attributes that cannot be communicated or given to us, are things like God's independence. The technical term for that is his “aseity.” There is nothing in the universe that has self-existence within itself. Everything in the universe is dependent on something else for its life. Even the sun itself, we know, is slowly dying. God is the only being that has self-existence; there's nothing like him that way... But then there are the communicable attributes. So, we have communicable attributes that are mental, so, wisdom, truth, knowledge. We share that in very limited form. There are communicable attributes that are moral, God's goodness, God's kindness, God's mercy, God's jealousy, God's wrath. We share those as well with him, in different ways, but we do share them. And then we have communicable attributes of will, purpose, and freedom. So, these are ways that we are like him, and then there are ways we are absolutely not like him, again because humanity is an image and likeness. We're not an exact copy but enough of a representation to where his sovereignty and authority can be extended through the universe, through the creation, through his image bearers.

**Prof. Jeffrey A. Volkmer**

So, in Genesis 2:7 we've got this very striking verse that we are formed “from the dust of the ground.” This is a sort of built-in governor on our pride, because in Genesis 1 the creation of mankind is so lofty, so grand, it's at the end of the creation account right before God rests and has all this unique language that expresses how important and how lofty the creation of mankind is; we go to Genesis 2, and we are nevertheless dust. So, we have within us, imprinted in who we are by God, this small bit of his authority so that we can go represent him well in human space-time, to rule and to govern and subdue. But nevertheless, we are a piece of creation. We are corporeal. We get to rule only that which God has created before and under us. So, we are like God in the sense that we can rule, we can subdue; we are creative beings. We are very much unlike God because we are nevertheless creation. So, even though we share some of those aspects and qualities of God, there's a huge chasm between us and him by the very nature of the fact that we are a piece of creation. So, we are



rulers, yet dust, and we have to live in that tension.

**Dr. Dinorah B. Méndez, translation**

I think the image of God is also sometimes misunderstood as that we are equal to God. In fact, there have been religious groups who believe that to have the image of God is to be an equal to God, when in the Hebrew it says we were made to the “image and likeness of God,” the language is using a parallelism that speaks of two synonymous terms, not of two different things, but to say “likeness” helps us understand the term a little bit because it is *similarity*, not equality. Therefore, being or having the image of God in human beings does not make us equal to God. We have similarities like I mentioned, like we are intelligent, rational. We are personal and relational beings, moral beings, and we have free will. In the end, we have these characteristics, but we are neither gods nor are we divine. We are not equal to God, so one thing is that God has given us the privilege of having his image and likeness, and another is making us equal to God. Therefore, if we are similar but also different, there are many things that I have found in theology that are fascinating precisely because they are “yes” and “no” at the same time. We cannot give a categorical answer that *this* is the image of God, and it is not *this*, but rather both things are true.

**Question 4:**

**What does being made in the image of God teach us about our need for relationships, both with others and with God?**

**Dr. Mark Gignilliat**

When you read the text itself in Genesis it says that he made them in his image, “male and female created he them.” So, there’s something about the male and female relationship itself, or being made as a humans in need of another, a complementing other, for the fullness of our own humanity, that we’ve been made for relationship with other, that whatever the “image of God” theology is, it certainly is not less than an understanding that we’ve been made for relationship with others, as that reflects the very character of God’s own triune being.

**Dr. Riad Kassis, translation**

According to the Bible, God created man in the Garden of Eden. He created him in his image. God put in him some of his characteristics. He made man to love, think, and to desire to have fellowship with other human beings. All these characteristics show us that some of God’s characteristics are in us. And he calls us to improve and grow these in us so we can be human. The more we show God’s image in us through our behaviors and lives, the closer we become to him and in relationship with him. The more our relationship with him improves, the more we love him genuinely, the more these blessed characteristics show in our lives and in our behaviors.

**Dr. John Hammett**

In Genesis 1:5, 9 all those were affirmations that we're made in God's image. And all humans are made in God's image, and only humans are created in God's image... So, I think the image is primarily centered on our capacity for relationship with God. I think that's a distinctive only true of human beings, true of all us human beings, male and female, young and old... God can establish a relationship with them. I think that image is centered primarily in our spirit, so on that level that God establishes relationship with us and that was damaged at the Fall; it's being renewed in the Christian life... And most of all, Christ is the perfect image of God, that we're in a perfect relationship with God.

### **Question 5:**

#### **Why is the doctrine of the image of God often associated with human beings' rational abilities?**

##### **Dr. David VanDrunen**

The doctrine of the image of God has been often associated with the rational capabilities of human beings. I think there are a couple of main reasons why that's been the case. One is a kind of common sense reason, and that's that as we look at the opening of Genesis and see man described as being the image bearer of God, it's obvious that Scripture is there in some way setting us apart from the other creatures; there's something unique about us as we were created. And as we look at ourselves, there's a lot of things we share in common with the other creatures, but one thing that certainly seems to distinguish us is the fact that we have rational capabilities. And I think it was very natural to read a text like that and to see that, to think that rational capabilities must be a very important part of the image of God. I think there's also a more, you might say, a more *exegetical* reason for that. If you go to the New Testament and consider a text like Colossians 3:10, which speaks about our being renewed in the image of God, it refers to that in terms of being renewed in knowledge. And so, that seems to indicate that the image of God has something to do with our knowledge, with our rational capabilities. Now, I would also add that I think it's probably best to understand the image of God as presupposing and involving rational capabilities, but I think we want to avoid the idea that that exhausts what the image of God is. Certainly we could not be the image of God if we were not rational. We couldn't fulfill the things that Scripture says about the image if we were not rational creatures. But I think it's really important as we consider a text like Genesis 1 that we understand that the image of God does not just lie in one particular capability or ability that we have as human beings but is ultimately a kind of a moral vocation. It's a call to be rulers under God, to exercise dominion in this world. And rationality is important for that, but it certainly doesn't exhaust everything that the image of God involves.

##### **Dr. James K. Dew, Jr.**

When we talk about the image of God we almost always, as a default, come back to

rational capabilities as an explanation of what the image of God is. And I think that there's good reason to start there. So, for example, we think about nature and we think about God and we think about human beings, and we could recognize things like this: We would say that, you know, as per John 1, God is the *Logos*, the ultimate source of thought, rationality, intelligence, personality, all of those types of things... So, you find in God this rationality. You find in this world, rational structure, order, organization, things like that, and then you find in human beings, *unlike* the other animals, rational capabilities... It's almost like you have this little tripodal notion of rationality. It starts in the Divine Being, comes into the created world, and also is reflected in image bearers like us. And so, for those reasons I think that we're right to say that whatever this thing called "the image of God" is, it at least starts with and includes these rational capabilities that we have.

**Dr. Ken Keathley**

When we think about the image of God in man, often it's associated with the rational components of the human person, and it's easy to see why because that seems to be that which is distinct and different from the rest of creation. So, that distinguishes humanity from other created beings. And also, understanding God as spirit and immaterial mind, above all else, what we see is that God is rational. So, that seems to be one way, one place that we would locate the image of God. Interesting thing, this text doesn't explicitly say that, and so this is an inference rather than something that's derived from the text... So, generally, the church has located the image of God in the spiritual or immaterial part, and during the Enlightenment there was a great emphasis upon the *rational* part of the human person. So, that's why we generally associate the image of God with the rational components.

**Question 6:**

**How is the fact that we are made in God's image connected to our need to submit to God's reign?**

**Dr. Mark Saucy**

The doctrine of the image of God and our need to submit to the reign of God are intimately connected because of the language that we see in Genesis 1:28, which directly comes from the language of the image, where God gives a commission to both Adam and Eve, and that is to be fruitful, multiply and fill the earth, rule and subdue it... And that tells us something about the one who has made his image. He is a king. And Psalm 95 says such a thing in its commentary of the creation act, that God is the King. And so, he demonstrates that by making an image that is a king, and this whole kingdom story starts here, and I would say that the kingdom story is one that consumes all of Scripture and takes us all the way to the book of Revelation. Revelation 22:5 says that that's going to be the occupation of human beings forever, is to reign with him forever. And so, it's a kingdom story started by a king and

commissioned to us. So, we're supposed to be his stewards, and we are supposed to be his vice-regents who actually submit to him and procure and carry out his will as the King.

**Prof. Mumo Kisau**

The image of God in us is we are created in the image of God. What that means is that then we can relate with God, we can understand God, and, therefore, God is able to have his reign upon us because we are created in his image because he decided to make man and woman in his image.

**Dr. Alan Hultberg**

In Genesis 1, man is created in the image of God, and he's created for a purpose. God says, "Fill the earth and subdue it, rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, everything that creeps on the ground." And so, God is the Creator, he's the King of creation. His kingdom extends over the entire universe — Psalm 47, for instance. And mankind is created as a vice-regent, as someone to rule under the authority of God, but to rule creation as God's image. When we talk about the image of God, we're not just talking about that man looks like God or has features that are similar to God, although that's true, but also that man represents God in creation. When a king in the ancient Near East conquered a territory, he would set up statues of himself that indicated his sovereignty over that territory. And so, when man is placed in creation as God's image, mankind is to represent the sovereignty of God in creation and to rule creation under the authority of God. The problem was, we chose to rule under our own authority and that threw creation into chaos.

**Dr. Douglas Moo**

As people, human beings created in the image of God, we have a responsibility to oversee the created world on behalf of God, but it's that vertical idea, "on behalf of God," that we have to emphasize as well. We are doing this on *behalf* of him. We are not doing it on our own, we are not doing it for our own selfish ends, we are doing it to bring glory to God and to please him in terms of the way we steward the world he has given us. So, implied in the image of God is that ultimate accountability to God and a recognition that it is *he* who rules both us and the world he has made.

**Question 7:**

**What is the significance of the biblical teaching that Jesus is the perfect image of God?**

**Rev. Bill Burns**

The New Testament describes Jesus as being "the image of the invisible God," the exact representation of his likeness. Jesus — both as the Son of God in the divine sense and as a human being — Jesus perfectly lives out what it means to be the Son of God, what it means to be the image of God, to represent and show God, that God is

the Father, and to carry out the Father's work. And the beauty of our redemption is that, in Christ, we are being restored in that image, "in Christ," as Colossians and Ephesians tell us that we are being restored in righteousness and holiness and full knowledge of who God is and who God has created us to be. And so, one of the great beauties of redemption is that that wonderful status and privilege that humanity was created for, and is forfeited by the Fall, is fully restored in the redemption that we have in Jesus Christ, the perfect image of God.

**Dr. Riad Kassis, translation**

Moses wanted to see God, and God answered him that no one can see God and live. Man can't see God in his glory and power with his natural eyes. But because God loves us so much, he sent his Son, so that through him we can see the Father. Jesus was without sin, incarnate love, forgiveness in the flesh, full of mercy, gentleness, and care. Jesus Christ reflected the image of the Father through himself. John reported that Jesus said, "Whoever has seen me has seen the Father."

**Dr. Daniel O. Aleshire**

The most important thing to know about God is that you can't know God. God's mystery, God's beyond us. And so, we're always looking for ways to understand God, and God is always looking for ways to make God's self understandable to us. And Christian theologians have thought that there are ways in which God has revealed God's self in terms of nature, in terms of the created order, that God has revealed part of God's self in Scripture, in revelation. But God's best piece of work in trying to explain to us who God is is in the character of Jesus Christ. Here, all that God is gets brought together with all that we are as human beings, and for the first time we get to see the true heart of God, the true longing of God, the most central characteristics of God as they would be lived out if they were in human form among us, which we find in Jesus Christ.

**Question 8:**

**What does the doctrine of the image of God teach us about the dignity of human beings?**

**Rev. Vuyani Sindo**

The great thing about being created in the image of God means that we, as human beings, have a unique role in creation. It is that we have a unique dignity... You can see it in Genesis; there's almost a pause, a zooming in on the day when God creates man. For the first time in creation, he has this divine meeting when he says, "Let us make man in our image." And there's a significance of that, and you see it later in Genesis where actually killing a human being is prohibited, and that killing is linked to one thing: because man was made in the image of God. Therefore, what gives human beings dignity is not necessarily your wealth or your education, but rather the fact that God created you in his image. And it also interesting, if you link it with the

incarnation, that God chose to come into this world in a form of a man, in a form of a human being, meaning again that humans have this intrinsic dignity, and that value of it comes from God himself.

**Rev. Xiaojun Fang, translation**

Since human beings are [part of] God's creation, is their worth determined by the things of the world, such as wealth, beauty, knowledge, or social standing? We must go back to the Bible to see what it has revealed to us about man's worth. [As it turns out,] man's dignity is not directly from these things, but from his Creator. [Furthermore,] people were given a mission from God at their creation to live in obedience to their Creator. If anyone could live this out — that is, live out true righteousness, integrity, love, and humility — then that person has expressed his dignity and worth to the utmost.

**Dr. Matt Friedeman**

Because we're created in the image of God, we all have great dignity, wonderful dignity, holy dignity. But that has ramification for the way we live. I think that means that anybody who considers themselves a Christian needs to be out there in the world treating people with dignity and with love; every Christian is loved and can be known by God and can know and love God. Having said that, we need to make sure that the whole world feels that, and that's part of what evangelism becomes. We ought to be out in front of a place like an abortion clinic and saying these babies in the womb right now, made in the image of God, have dignity and worth. We ought to be at the prisons and we ought to be able to say to a prisoner, no matter what they have done, you have been made in the image of God. That image is marred but we can regain that by putting our trust in the Savior... People do have dignity because of God. We need to treat them as such.

### **Question 9:**

#### **How did humanity's fall into sin affect our moral ability?**

**Dr. David W. Jones**

I think describing man's sinful estate, it is more than just that we're a little bit off. I would say that man's fall, man's sin, the curse upon human beings that God meted out, it really was a complete, total fall. We fell into total depravity. As it says in Genesis 6 and then again in Genesis 8: "Every thought of man's heart was only evil continually" — our entire constitution being corrupted. Now, of course, that doesn't mean in a practical way that every person is as evil as they could possibly be. There's all kinds of things that restrain us from evil. There is that latent work of God's law upon all men, even lost men, in society. There's the fear of getting caught. There is the lack of opportunity. And so, various things curb that fallenness, that complete corruption. And even beyond that, I mean, somebody may say, "Well, you know, I'm

a nice person. I don't rob banks. I mean, I'm not really that bad." I personally like to use the illustration of my older brother. I often joke and say that God gave me an older brother to illustrate sin, and what I mean by that is that God gave me an older brother who is the first one to go before me to have a heart that would lead him astray. And thus, with that example, so I kind of made an effort, as a lost person, as a lost boy, to be the good son, and so I was the one who got good grades in school, I was the one who didn't get involved in use of all sorts of illegal drugs and all kinds of evil in our context. But looking back on that, I can say that there wasn't a single thing I did as a lost boy that was actually meritorious. It was all completely evil; it was all complete idolatry; it was all total corruption, because the reason why I was a good boy was not because I had a heart that actually wanted to be good. It was because I liked hearing, you know, "Gee, you're not your brother. What a good boy you are. How smart you must be; you get good grades in school." And so, it was all idolatry; it was all corruption; it was all evil. And so, we have to be careful when we look at the question of how corrupt are we, how bad did sin actually make us, and we need to be careful and not measure it in a utilitarian practical way, what we see, because the heart was ultimately what was corrupted. And so, I think that sin's effect upon us is one of complete and total corruption.

#### **Dr. Ken Keathley**

Adam and Eve's fall into sin had a profound effect on our moral ability, and what it has done to humanity, it has rendered us incapable of doing that which is pleasing to God, and even more so, I would say that it has rendered us incapable in our natural state to even desire to do so. So, what we have now, as part of the human condition, is we are capable of that which is relatively good, but not good in the sense of being able to satisfy the demands of a holy God. This is one of the things that people misunderstand about the doctrine of total depravity. Total depravity means that the whole person is affected and even in our best state we fall short. It does not mean that we're always as bad as we absolutely can be. And I think sometimes Christians struggle with this; they say, okay, the Bible teaches that everybody's sinners, and yet my neighbor, who is not a Christian, he loves his wife and is faithful to her, he feeds his kids and loves them, and he pays his taxes, loves his country and is a good citizen, so how can I say he's totally depraved? Well, yes, he is in the sense that no matter how loving and good he is, it always falls short of the demands of a perfect and infinitely righteous and holy God. And this is true of all of us. Even in our best state, I still fall short, and everything that I am doing good, it is due to the grace of God and the work of Christ in my life.

#### **Dr. Riad Kassis, translation**

From the time of humanity's fall into sin, from the time Adam and Eve sinned, we all have been following them in sin. This has affected the way we think and the way we live our lives... The values changed as a result of sin. That's why we need God to regenerate our thinking and realign our consciousness so that we can differentiate between what is right and what is wrong, what is true and what is not true, what is according to God's law, and what is against his laws... So, due to the fall into sin,

whether Adam and Eve in the past or us today, we have all lost the ability to judge correctly.

**Question 10:**  
**Why has God forbidden us to worship him through images like other ancient Near-Eastern religions used?**

**Prof. Jeffrey A. Volkmer**

So, God doesn't want us to worship images, I think for a variety of reasons. I think the most important one is that God is Creator, so any aspect of creation cannot adequately represent God... So, part of that commandment in the Ten Commandments is rooted in the fact that it would be wholly inappropriate to worship the *Creator* by means of *creation*. So, our eyes should be constantly focused on the Creator, not the creation. I think the other thing is — and I don't know that this is a motivating factor, but it's something to note — is that in other ancient Near Eastern cultures the image of the god was seen or meant to contain the essence or the divine essence of the deity. So, you could truly worship an image and there, by extension, worship the god. But God is wholly apart from creation in the Judeo-Christian view. He's not a piece of creation or inside of creation. Not to say that he's a deist — he's involved in creation — but he's not a piece of creation as you might see in Hinduism or New Age or even some aspects of Gnosticism.

**Dr. Ramesh Richard**

Why has God prohibited us from worshiping him through images? It is a very profound question because the human heart would like to somehow capture God and give him some concretion so that we can picture him; we can have him feel what we feel; we can address him in a way that is an equal. Images allow that kind of a reflection, especially if they are idolatrous, made of metal or wood or stone. The Old Testament is rather harsh against all idolatry, whether it is made up of materials or conceptual, simply because God cannot be captured. God cannot be localized. He is the transcendent one. And so, images, since they are inanimate, since they cannot in any way portray a person, is highly forbidden by God... We do not want to forget the God who is transcendent. And some religions need to know that God is great, and yet the religions who know that God is great should not forget that God can become close. So, at different times when we think we can capture God in an image, we've got to keep God as great, and that's why the monotheistic religions are insistent that you cannot capture God in an image. But when we feel that God is so distant and far, we've got to hold that God is close, that while he cannot be captured in an image, he chose to come in a person... I know that all of us take a bunch of pictures with our cameras and phones now. The photos are not the person, so we do not want to ever use an image as the person, and yet they bring a million memories. There are layers of meaning in how we see these photos as capturing the reality. There's two sides to the



question then. Do we worship images? We cannot because God cannot be captured. But the God who cannot be captured decides to be victimized as incarnate so he can prove to us that the God who cannot be captured can also be the God who can be our companion.

### **Question 11:**

## **How should the fact that all human beings are created in God's image impact our treatment of those who are different from us?**

### **Rev. Xiaojun Fang, translation**

In life, we will meet people who have different personalities, cultures, or backgrounds. How are we to interact with them? First, we are to know that the differences exist because of God's sovereignty. He has created people, [placed them in] different cultures and given them different personalities and backgrounds. Second, we have something in common with everyone, [even] those who are different from us. They are also God's creation and bear God's image, so we are to respect them out of a reverence for God's sovereignty and God's image. Because of sin, we will feel uncomfortable over our differences, so we must learn to be tolerant of them.

### **Dr. Craig Ott**

Anybody who likes to travel, anybody who enjoys international food, learning foreign languages, they celebrate and enjoy human diversity. We see that in different cultures and different languages and ethnicities, and so on, and that's a beautiful thing. And at the same time we know that that human diversity is the root of very much human suffering: war, racial prejudice, ethnic cleansing, genocide, and so on and so forth. And so, it is an important question for us as Christians how we view this nature of human diversity. And again, we come back to the doctrine, first of all, of creation, that all humans are created in the image of God, and that gives all humans inherent worth. All humans reflect the person of God in various ways. But the doctrine of the Fall also tells us that that image of God has been marred and that even though it's been marred, we still bear that image. The doctrine of redemption in Colossians tells us that that image is being renewed through Christ. And so, the image of God in humanity is marred and yet can be renewed through the redemptive work of Christ. Now, how do we relate, then, or understand this human diversity? Well, the book of Genesis tells that not only are we uniquely created, but part of human diversity was the result of the tower of Babel and the scattering of peoples and the confusion of their languages. And yet, even that, God will use in the end to his greater glory. When we see the vision of the book of Revelation, we see people from every nation, tribe and tongue worshipping God. And we have the gospel being preached in Acts 2, sort of reversing the curse of Babel with the gospel being preached in these various languages. And so, I believe that God even takes this human diversity, which can be a source of conflict, and turn it into a source of his glory by renewing that image in us, which gives us a unity in the new creation in Christ, which transcends all these other

differences. And that's where we have to go when we talk about navigating human diversity, is to focus on the redemptive work that Christ can do, to realize that we're all sinners; every culture is fallen. We look at others, and we will naturally tend to think, well, our way's better than the other way, and realizing that even in the family of God there's much diversity. Even Paul said there's issues that Christians will disagree on, and that's okay, and we should respect one another's conscience. And yet, we also anticipate that day when human unity will find its ultimate fulfillment in Christ, and we want to celebrate the unity that we can have in Christ as brothers and sisters through him. But even those who've not joined the community of the redeemed, they are still bearers of that image, and we must respect and honor that with dignity and not with condescension, knowing that they are bearers of the image of God.

**Dr. Kenneth V. Botton**

Treating people that are different from us as, at least, as a natural individual, just as a human being... We like our own; that's just the truth of it. We like people who talk like us. We distrust people who either look differently or speak a different language or have different customs. It's not necessarily a wicked or an evil thing, it's just that we have our comfort zone, and the comfort zone is with people who, in fact, think like us... But, in fact, every human being, from an Aborigine in the Western Australia to the Wall Street executive in Manhattan, all created in the image of God, all God's image. And I think there's a lesson there in terms of how we treat these people, and I think this is where we need to back up and, again, get a God's eye view of what is happening... I mean, for goodness sake, it couldn't get any more basic than this: "For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son." And we're not talking about loving the world's system — that's from 1 John. We're talking about loving the world as in the people whom God made, and we are to love them as God loves them. And we love them by wanting God's best for them. And sometimes God's best for them, sometimes we do need to feed them, and sometimes we do need to make sure that they're warm, and sometimes we need to do it just because they're made in the image of God, and that's exactly what we ought to do... And sometimes we need to be good just simply because doing good is the right thing, and God loves them. And knowing also, according to the book of Romans, it is the goodness of God that leads us to repentance.

**Dr. Philip Ryken**

One of the first things that we learn about human beings in the Bible is that each person is made in the image and likeness of God. And that's certainly true of Adam and Eve as our first parents, but this is true of every human being who has ever been made, and this has huge implications for how we treat one another. We notice lots of differences between people; there are physical attributes that are quite different, people that come from different ethnic backgrounds and have different skin color. People have very different abilities, and in fact, some people are really hindered in life by very limited mental capacities, or they may have physical disabilities that cause real challenges for them in life. And left to ourselves we would, I think, often be tempted to look down on somebody else as being something less than we are

because they are of a different racial background, or they don't have an ability that we have, and we like to try to feel good about ourselves, and one of the ways that we do that is by looking down on other people. And the doctrine of the image of God in people is a constant correction for us because it says that every person has this very high status and dignity and this gift from God, that each of us is made in his very image. And that tells us that we need to treat every person with absolute respect and with care and compassion.

**Dr. Daniel Treier**

Biblical texts concerning the image of God have important implications for how we treat each other. The first implication is sort of a negative one, that we should not commit any violence against those who are God's image bearers. Genesis 9 establishes the prohibition of physical violence. James 3 is an example establishing the prohibition of verbal violence against those who are God's image bearers. It's inconsistent for us to be praising God and at the same time cursing or doing violence against those who bear the divine image. But we can say more positively, secondly, that the image of God calls upon us to love those who bear the divine image. Already there is difference in the first "image of God" text in Genesis 1: "male and female he created them." And in many of the New Testament passages that are connected to image bearing, we have some kind of focus on Jesus Christ, both on the reconciliation that he accomplished for us with God and the reconciliation, then, that he accomplishes in us with each other, ways that we live in conformity to Christ by loving, not only God, but our neighbor. So, when we think about cultural difference, we realize that it's both a way in which we can image God in all of our diversity. Part of the reason for the prohibition of the golden calf is that it was choosing a merely human or creaturely way to image God in place of the way that God has chosen to reveal himself, which is partly through human beings as his image bearers. So, our cultural differences are not to be occasions for our idolatries to replace the revelation of who God is, but instead an opportunity for us by loving each other and embracing legitimate cultural difference to bear witness to the fullness of who the triune God is.

**Question 12:**

**What responsibilities to creation does God give human beings in Genesis chapters 1 & 2?**

**Dr. Tim Foster**

We see in chapter 1 some of the key responsibilities that humanity are given as God's image bearers. They are to fill the earth, to subdue the earth, and to rule the earth. That is, they are like God's co-creators, continuing his creating work, filling, subduing, bringing order to the creation, and ruling, exercising the authority that God has given them over the created order. Well, what's really interesting is the second creation account in Genesis 2 focuses down and unpacks that for us. So, you see in Genesis 2:15:

**The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it (Genesis 2:15).**

So, even in this paradox, even before the Fall, man had a job to do, and that was to work. He was to take care of the Garden, like I said before, continuing God's creating work. But implicit in all of this is the key thing that humans were created to do, and that is to live in obedience to God, to recognize that he is God, and they are not. And that obedience is to be marked in Genesis 2, of course, by enjoying the Garden, doing the work, but not eating the fruit of the tree.

**Dr. Mike Fabarez**

In Genesis 1 and 2 we certainly see God giving a commission to mankind to oversee — the word to “exercise dominion” — over creation. And while that can be taken way out of context ... we have to realize the sense is to care for and cultivate. Creation care can be taken too far, there's no doubt about that, but we're clearly given a responsibility in the dominion of this world, as difficult as it is after the Fall, to care for it, to make it usable, to be able to show that we, creatively, in the image of God, can do things that are useful, create useful things with our planet ... in a way that is reasonable, without allowing our hearts, like so many non-Christians, to worship and serve the created things rather than the Creator. So, we care for the world, we exercise dominion in making things within the world useful, and so in that sense, we're all for the scientific work, of creating new things and inventing things and discovering things scientifically. These are all very important to be able to marshal the elements of this world into things that are useful for the common good of mankind.

**Dr. Dana M. Harris**

In Genesis 1 and 2 we see how God has made the culmination, or the apex of his creation, the creation of humanity. And if we look carefully at the context of Genesis 1 and 2, God intends for the role of humanity to be one of co-ruling with him, so human beings are depicted in royal and priestly terms. So, the fact that God spends so much time and care and energy in preparing creation and then entrusting that to humanity reveals one of the very key things that God intends for humanity to do, namely, to take good care of his creation. If we look carefully also at the very end of Genesis 1 and 2, and particularly in Genesis 2:2, it says that on the seventh day God rested. Now, sometimes we think about this in terms of physical rest as if God needed to take a nap. But actually, the better way to understand that is God rests by ceasing one activity so that another activity can take place. And the biblical account makes it very clear that God ceases his activity of creation so that humanity can continue that work, not as the creator, but as created beings... So God's original intention for humanity was to extend his godly rule over the rest of creation. Now, I think this has very clear implications for how we treat creation. On the one hand, when we interact with creation as stewards, or those who have been entrusted with management of creation... We grow in our appreciation of God's good creation. In fact, many scientists often become believers and followers of Jesus Christ as they work in their own fields and see the marvelous aspects of creation. Unfortunately, we also live in a

world where many times people look at creation as simply something to be exploited. Creation is the place where we get natural resources, or we can use animals or do things simply for our own benefit. I think this is partly what Paul has in mind when he talks about, in Romans 8:19-21, that creation itself was subjected to futility and eagerly awaits the revelation of those who are following Jesus. Another very important aspect about how we treat creation now is that, in some respects, this is a preparation for how we will appreciate God in the new creation. There's a lot of discussion about whether there's continuity or discontinuity between the present creation and the new creation, but I think one thing that remains the same is that the more that we learn to appreciate God as he's revealed in creation is directly proportional to how we will be able to worship God in the new creation.

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