

Imago Dei Week 1

Well, here we are, all assembled in the Garden of Eden, where humanity began, and where our trail begins. Let's have a look at where the very first mention of God's image is found in Scripture:

Then God said, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; and let them rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over the cattle and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth." God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.

Genesis 1:26-27 (NASB)

One thing is very clear from the start; Man was created in God's image, His likeness; there isn't anything hidden in this is there?

It doesn't appear so at first glance, the English of the New American Standard Bible is clear, concise and fairly literal in its translation. Even so, it is a translation from ancient Hebrew, and particularly when we are basing a study on a specific word, we need to check the original language to verify the translations.* When I checked, I found that the Hebrew word translated "image" in the English is *tsehlem*, and for good measure, the Hebrew word translated "likeness" is *demuth*. Here are the definitions:

tsehlem: from an unused root meaning to shade; a phantom, i.e. (figuratively) illusion, resemblance; hence, a representative figure, especially an idol:—image, vain shew. (Strong's H6754)

demuth: resemblance; concretely, model, shape; adverbially, like:—fashion, like (-ness, as), manner, similitude. (Strong's H1823)

When we look at these two definitions, we might be slightly confused with the first one, since there can be a connotation with an idol, and in fact this word is used multiple times in the Old Testament to mean just that; an image, an idol. Yet when you think about it, "image" is exactly the point, and not all images are images of false gods. A photograph is an image, which is why we go to Google and do an "image search" when we want a picture of something or someone, for the image looks just like the real thing. A photographic image of you bears your likeness, and so it would appear that Man bears the likeness or image of God; we look like Him, or at least, when humans were first created, we looked like Him.

There are some leads in these two verses that we will need to follow up on, but first, it seems to me that we need to ask ourselves a question:

Knowing what happens in Genesis 3 when the woman, and then the man chose to eat from that one tree they were forbidden to eat from, did the resulting fall, and its consequences cancel out this image thing? We need to look into this now, because if it cancelled out God's image within

us, then what's the point of going forward? Our questions would be answered; the fact that we were created in the image of God at the beginning really makes no difference now. However, if the image and likeness of God were neither cancelled nor revoked after the fall, then we have a great deal of exploring left to do.

So here's what I did to find out: I went to Bible Gateway and searched for "image of God" (with quotes) and I got three hits: First, I got Genesis 1:27 (above) and then I got Genesis 9:6, and finally 2 Corinthians 4:4. Here they are:

*Whoever sheds man's blood,
By man his blood shall be shed,
For in the image of God
He made man.*

Genesis 9:6 (NASB)

in whose case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving so that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.

2 Cor. 4:4 (NASB)

It would appear that we have something of value here, but without looking further, we only have a couple of "proof texts" which may or may not prove anything, so I'd better follow my own rules and check out the context...

Genesis 9:6

Holy heart attack! I looked this verse up, and I found that it falls within the context of Gen. 9:1 - 29, which falls within the overall context of Gen. 7-9; the Flood. Chapter 9 is God making His covenant with Noah, whereby God promises to never again destroy the earth by a flood, and gives Noah some terms to follow, one of which is found in vv. 5-6; that stipulation is that we are not to shed man's blood (murder), and if we do, our blood will be shed by man, and God gives His reason for this: We are made in His image. In Genesis 9:6, God Himself is speaking to Noah; it is an imperative command of God. Thus, this confirms that the image of God is still intact in us after the fall.

2 Corinthians 4:4

This verse falls within the larger context beginning in 2 Cor. 2:12 and running through chapter 5 about the ministry of reconciliation. Throughout this section in various ways, Paul makes the point that Jesus is the source of our message, of our resolve and of our calling as Christians, not ourselves, for Jesus is the exact representation of the Father, and we, as ministers of reconciliation, are vessels of clay through which He ministers in this world. God is seen in Jesus (image, likeness) and Jesus is seen in us (image, likeness).

Of course Paul didn't write this in Hebrew, for he wrote in Greek, and the word he was using was *eikon* (from which we get our English word "icon") and guess what it means? Yes sir, it means "image, likeness".

Therefore, not only is the image of God present in Man after the Fall, it is present all the more with us in Christ.

I don't know about you, but I would have to say that our exploring is just getting started, and we have some leads to follow up on in the next post. Certainly there are two that I can't wait to get into: First is, who is the "us" and "our" we found in our verses, and second is this: Are women created in the image of God, or is it just men?

Then God said, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; and let them rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over the cattle and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth." God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.

Genesis 1:26-27 (NASB)

If we decide that humanity is made in God's image, and we cite a text in which God speaks of Himself as "us" and "our", which is to say in the plural, then we need to consider what this plurality refers to so as to ensure that our understanding of this "likeness" is correct. One way to work this out would be to look at the other "In the beginning" passage in Scripture, which is found in John 1:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

John 1:1-5, 14

In John's account, which actually begins before the Creation, it is clear that at least 2 Persons of the Godhead are present, for the Word that became flesh and was with God, and was God from before the beginning of Creation, is quite clearly a reference to the Son, Jesus. So it would seem that Father and Son were very much involved in Creation; I wonder if we can find the Spirit as well...

Returning to the Genesis text, I found this:

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters. (1:1-2)

Thus, we find all three Persons of the Godhead present and at work in the Creation, and we humans are made in the fullness of the image of God; that appears to me to be the meaning of the "Us and the "our".

The next lead found in our text (Genesis 1:26-27) is that of male and female:

in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.

You can take this and interpret it in one of two ways: You can say that God made the man in His image, and God also created the woman, but only the man bears God's image because, although God also created the woman, she was taken from the man, and must be in the man's image. If you want to go this way, you can then cite 1 Corinthians 11 as your "proof text" and many have done this over the centuries, even today some still do this. To be honest with you, as a man myself, I'd like to do this whenever my wife hands me a "honey do" list. However, I hesitate to try, for one simple little reason:

Do you see that little semicolon in the phrase? Do you see those two clauses on either side of the semicolon? They are parallel; this phrase is a Hebrew parallelism, like those you find throughout the Proverbs. In a Hebrew parallelism, the clauses on either side of our semicolon are equal; they mean the same thing. Thus, sorry guys, both male and female bear the image of God. In fact, we might begin to suspect that they bear the image of God in its completeness when they come together as "one flesh".

Of course, at this point in our exploring, that is only a suspicion, a lead to follow before we are finished, but I don't quite think we have gotten that far yet. I think, and I would be interested to see if you agree, that before we do that, we should have a quick look at 1 Corinthians 11 to make sure I haven't missed something, and then look at what kind of an image God actually has.

1 Corinthians 11:2-16

Corinth is where we have come to check out a passage Paul wrote about men, women, hats and Imago Dei...

To begin with, Corinth in the first century was a moral cesspool even by the standards of the ancient world. By modern standards, even the wildest and most "progressive" thinkers would likely be grossed out by some of the things that went on there; it makes for an interesting study, if you have a strong stomach. Not surprisingly, the church in Corinth was a mess, and when news of what was going on there reached the Apostle Paul, he grabbed his pen and fired off a letter addressing the issues that had come to his attention.

The church there was dealing with rampant sexual immorality, chaos and disorder in worship and false teachers, heresies and false apostles, to name a few of their problems. Make no mistake, Paul's first letter to the Corinthian church is a letter of correction, containing quite a few rebukes; it is not just lovey-dovey chapter 13.

It would seem that one of the problems they had there was with people causing disruptions in the worship, disruptions of more than one variety. Paul addresses these in a section that includes chapters 11-14. Yes, that's the context into which the great "love chapter" falls, and isn't that interesting? Our exploration is concerned with a part of this larger discussion that is found in 11:2-16, and the particular verses that concern our study of the image of God are these:

A man ought not to cover his head, since he is the image and glory of God; but woman is the glory of man. For man did not come from woman, but woman from man; neither was man created for woman, but woman for man.

1 Corinthians 11:7-9

So, now that you have read the passage (11:2-16), and re-read these three verses, is Paul telling us that only males are made in God's image?

Many have taught that it does mean that over the centuries...

While you're considering your answer I'll share something with you: When I was a boy, both my mother and sister always wore hats to church on Sunday, but my father and I did not. Funny thing is... I haven't seen women wearing hats in church now, for 30 years or more; I wonder why that is...

OK, what did you decide, are women created in the image of God?

Well, if they are not created in the image of God, then we have a real problem, because Moses and Paul would be contradicting each other!

As I see it, here's the solution: Paul is writing to Corinth at a specific point in time when they were having very specific local problems to contend with, and they were losing their way. Paul's corrective measures were specific and local in nature, and only applied to Corinth and congregations with similar problems and circumstances. In Corinth both the problems and the solutions were local and cultural in nature; neither was either transcendent or universal.

Yet there is also another factor in play here, for within Scripture there is a certain metaphorical hierarchy that Paul has expressed here as part of his solution to the problems of Corinth. That hierarchy is this: The Father is over the Son, who does the Father's will. The Son is over the church that serves the Son. The husband is over the wife, as Christ is over the Church, and the parent is over the child, also as Christ is over the Church. This hierarchy is quite common in Paul's writings, see Eph. 5:21 ff. for one of them. None of this means that men are better than women, or that women are less than men; it means that Christ is over the church! (cf. Eph. 5:32)

Thus, Paul is not putting women beneath men as any kind of universal dictate or directive, but rather trying to bring order out of chaos for the sake of the Gospel. For me, this becomes very clear in these verses, and I'll give them the last word:

Nevertheless, in the Lord woman is not independent of man, nor is man independent of woman. For as woman came from man, so also man is born of woman. But everything comes from God. (11:11-12)