

Epistle: Genesis 1:26–27, 2:1–8 and 2 Corinthians 5:17–21
Gospel: John 14:15–26

Introduction

There are many key themes in the Bible that run throughout.

- Blood
- The tree of life
- The lamb
- The covenant

Another is the image of God in humans, as we heard read from Gen 1.

- Here's another example of that theme. Read Gen 9:6.
- Today is pro-life Sunday, that day closest to the *Roe v. Wade* decision of 1973.
- What is so special about this image of God, that this kind of response is demanded?

Image of God Defined

Why It's Necessary

- He's not like us, albeit bigger and better. Nor are we like him, albeit smaller and weaker. Wholly other. "No one has seen God at any time." (John 1:18) Examples:
 - Exodus 33:18–23: no one can see my face and live
 - Isaiah 6:1–5: much about the surroundings, nothing about God's own appearance
 - Revelation 4–5: quite an extended passage and God's exact appearance is ...? The 2nd person appears as a lion and a lamb, but the Father?

In all of these cases, the effect of God's presence is described, but not God the Father himself. Therefore, strictly speaking, God is unknowable. He cannot be experientially understood. And yet, we know him. How?

What The *Imago Dei* Is

God valued his human creation so much that he built into humanity aspects of himself so that we can understand Him.

- "God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him;

- male and female He created them.” (Genesis 1:27)
- Analogies are needed to understand God. “For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood **through what has been made**, so that they are without excuse.” (Romans 1:20)
 - Omnipresence: we understand immensity, largeness
 - Omniscience and knowledge: “and have put on the new self who is being renewed to a true knowledge according to the image of the One who created him” (Colossians 3:10)
 - Righteousness: conformity to a standard, God never ceases being what he is
 - Faithfulness and truth: he always keeps his word
 - Eternity: a long time
 - Mercy & Justice: not necessarily both together, though!
 - Anger: yet without arbitrariness.
 - Pleasure: God’s response after the 6th day of creation, it was very good!
 - Sexuality and gender, the one and the many, the unity and diversity of the Trinity, indivisible and yet distinct persons, in the image of God, *male and female he created us*.
 - Unity of the church with Christ: Eph 5 regarding marriage.
 - Unity within the Trinity: “I and father are one” (John 10:30), or the gospel text: “I am in My Father, and you in Me, and I in you.” (John 14:20)
 - Differentiation in the body of Christ: 1Co 12:21 etc. (hand has no need of the eye)
 - Trinity invoked as call to Christian unity: “I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call— one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.” (Ephesians 4:1–6)
 - -We are, ourselves, images of God. Peter wrote that in Christ, we

“become partakers of the divine nature” (2 Peter 1:3–4).¹ We are not little gods. We are not pantheists; this is not Star Wars, with the force. “Creature-creator distinction.” Rather:

- The Father cannot be known as he is, and yet builds into us analogies of himself.
- Who is the preeminent analogy of the Father, the perfect representation of his character and nature? The Son is the image of the Father, “the image of the invisible God.” (Colossians 1:15, also Hebrews 1:1–3)
- And believers in Christ are images of the Son: “For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, (Rom 8.29).

When someone says of a child, “oh, you can see the mother / father in them”, that’s usually intended to be a compliment about appearance or intelligence. In a sense, God has built into us the capacity to look like Christ, who looks like the Father—using “looks like” in a very loose sense.

Image Of God Applied

We are in the image of the Father, most especially when we reflect the Son. Like someone looking at a picture of children and saying, “Oh, they look like the mother / father”. These analogies are necessary, because otherwise God is unknowable.

What does this mean practically? Rejecting the the idea of being image bearers destroys the personhood of humans. Evolution has had this very effect, turning us into nothing more than sophisticated termites.

In This Life: Respect for Life

- Racism: those who are “other” are image bearers as we are. Reminded of Dred-Scott decision determining that a black person doesn’t have the value of a white person. The Justice who penned the Court’s opinion reminded his readers that black men have always been considered “beings of an inferior order, and altogether unfit to associate with the white race ... and so far inferior that they had no rights which the white man was bound to respect”.
- Sexual harrasment storm of late, very little discussion about ethics, right and wrong. If men/women were to see women/men as image bearers, would we be able to objectify / dehumanize the other as means to our own

¹ It could be argued that 2 Peter 1:5–7 is a list of God’s attributes which we are to

- pleasures and power? Startling lack of discussion about ethics!
- What about plain old good manners? “For every kind of beast and bird, of reptile and sea creature, can be tamed and has been tamed by mankind, but no human being can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison. With it we bless our Lord and Father, and with it we curse people who are made in the likeness of God.” (James 3:7–9)
 - Being image bearers drives our love for and care about others: foster care, adoption, justice (CLCP), and mercy (FRC).
 - Obviously, murder is included in this discussion.
 - And clearly, this has to do with what we call pro-life issues, from conception to natural death.
 - Euthenasia and abortion “unperson” the being. I understand that discussions about quality of life can be subtle and nuanced. But often those discussions are about the value of human life relative to other human lives.
 - No doctor who does abortions questions the humanness of an unborn child. The question is whether they are persons. How can we dare risk unhumaning a child at whatever stage?
 - Same with euthanasia: strange to me that many who strongly support what is called “pro-choice” policies that kill children are against capital punishment!

“Unpersoning” someone, whether via racism, sexual harassment, abortion, euthenasia, murder is the usurpation of God’s prerogatives as sovereign. We pretend to be preeminent in deciding which life is valuable, which race, and at what time.

Another example is the flurry of deciding who can identify as what gender. This has created an atmosphere of confusion and anger that is almost impossible to navigate; with terms like “gender fluid”, “cisgender”, “non-binary”, and over a dozen new pronouns.² And let’s be clear, these ideas aren’t even related to the idea of gender orientation, so we are told.³ And again, there are subtleties here as well which Christians need to take into account: so-called “intersex” phenomena, in which a child is born without a clear presenting gender.

I’m saddened that we have a culture that cannot help those who are confused! We usurp the prerogative of God to **design** his creation, including us!

Insulting of God’s highest creation, too! If someone stole my car, I would be upset. But if someone stole my family crest, that would be a much deeper hurt, because of its uniqueness and connections to my grandfather and great-

cultivate in ourselves.

² See <https://lgbtqia.ucdavis.edu/educated/pronouns.html>

³ <https://www.genderspectrum.org/quick-links/understanding-gender/>

grandfather. Thus Gen 6.

In The Life To Come

There's another aspect of life in view here: eternal life.

Been giving a lot of thought to death lately. Christians of previous generations are no less grieved, frightened, challenged by death; but they do seem less surprised by it. The fall necessitates that which is *not* natural: the cessation of our lives.

Every human intuitively appreciates the preciousness of their own lives, at least, and the power of death. I mean no disrespect, but go to the funeral of the child of a materialist or evolutionist and express your sorrow that it's only right that the unfit shouldn't survive and see how that goes! It's often the materialist who likes to opine that whomever it is that just died is in a better place. What does that even mean?

If *this* life is meaningful, precious in God's sight, then how much more eternal life?

God valued life so much that the eternal and immortal—that which cannot die—died in order to give life those who will follow him. It is a riddle, wrapped in a mystery, inside an enigma (to abuse Churchill's comment about Russia), then I don't know what is!

In Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*, Christian ran from the City of Destruction, stopping his ears against all who decried his strange obsession with eternity, crying, "Life, life, eternal life!" If we care about the physical well-being of ourselves, friends, children, parents, etc.; how much more the eternal well-being? Physical death is certain. That penalty was set. It's eternal death that isn't necessary!

Conclusion

"But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit." (2 Corinthians 3:18)

Glory—the goal and end of the Christian.

The Horrors

The antonym of "glory": insignificance, ugliness.

- Hollywood has been struck with a plague, an epidemic of sexual harassment claims and wonders why. Could it be that actresses aren't seen as the image bearers of God and instead are cattle, to be bought and sold on the market of directors' couches?

- A British news site just reported a 5th porn actress has died from suicide or under other abnormal circumstances since Nov 9th, one leaving behind a message that “in this life, one can’t be an angel forever” and another writing that she just wanted to reach out to somebody for company.
- Iceland has virtually wiped out Down Syndrome, not because of some medical secret, but because of a nearly 100% abortion rate. The termination rate in the US is 67%. Even CBS is bothered by these facts, stating, “Many people born with Down syndrome can live full, healthy lives, with an average lifespan of around 60 years.”⁴ This in spite of the fact that amniocentesis is only about 85% accurate.
- In the Netherlands, euthanasia is available upon request from 12 years old! About 4% of all deaths in the Netherlands are due to euthanasia of some sort, including one case in which the rules were bent and a patient with dementia, a patient with tinnitus, and a person who was an acute alcoholic died.⁵
- I recognize that there are differences between allowing a person to die a natural death and what I’m mentioning here and that there are incredibly complex and difficult cases that could be mentioned. But those who think that there is no slippery slope about which we should be concerned, there is present legislation being considered in the Netherlands called the “Completed Life Bill” which proposes to legalize suicide for adults over 75 years of age for any reason.⁶ A politician said, “It’s my personal opinion that in our civilization dying is an individual consideration. You didn’t ask to be brought into the world.”⁷
- Assisted suicide—self-administered drugs that cause death—is legal in 6 states and DC.⁸
- Consider the horrendous and massive crimes against humans committed by Japan during WW II, German medical “experimentation”, US imprisonment of ethnically Japanese people during that same war, the “killing fields” of Cambodia, animalistic cruelties and murders based on race in the American south, the sniping of non-combatants in Syria ... one could go on and on.

These are all examples of the unpersoning of human beings, no longer seeing them as image bearers, but objects without a clear design from the sovereign who

⁴ www.cbsnews.com/news/down-syndrome-iceland

⁵ www.dutchnews.nl/news/archives/2017/04/number-of-official-cases-of-euthanasia-rise-10-in-the-netherlands/ and thelede.blogs.nytimes.com/2012/02/22/dutch-puzzled-by-santorums-false-claim-they-practise-forced-euthanasia.

⁶ thefederalist.com/2017/06/30/netherlands-considers-euthanasia-healthy/

⁷ thefederalist.com/2017/06/30/netherlands-considers-euthanasia-healthy/

⁸ en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Assisted_suicide_in_the_United_States

made them.

Does this disgust you? Have you forgotten that you are a broken image of God yourself?

The Pleasures

CS Lewis wrote.

“When human souls have become as perfect in voluntary obedience as the inanimate creation is in its lifeless obedience, then they will put on its glory, or rather that greater glory of which Nature is only the first sketch. For you must not think that I am putting forward any heathen fancy of being absorbed into Nature. Nature is mortal; we shall outlive her. When all the suns and nebulae have passed away, each one of you will still be alive. Nature is only the image, the symbol; but it is the symbol Scripture invites me to use. We are summoned to pass in through Nature, beyond her, into that splendour which she fitfully reflects.”⁹

“There are no ordinary people. You have never talked to a mere mortal. Nations, cultures, arts, civilization—these are mortal, and their life is to ours as the life of a gnat. But it is immortals whom we joke with, work with, marry, snub, and exploit—immortal horrors or everlasting splendours. This does not mean that we are to be perpetually solemn. We must play. But our merriment must be of that kind (and it is, in fact, the merriest kind) which exists between people who have, from the outset, taken each other seriously—no flippancy, no superiority, no presumption. And our charity must be a real and costly love, with deep feeling for the sins in spite of which we love the sinner—no mere tolerance or indulgence which parodies love as flippancy parodies merriment. Next to the Blessed Sacrament itself, your neighbour is the holiest object presented to your senses. If he is your Christian neighbour he is holy in almost the same way, for in him also Christ ... the glorifier and the glorified, Glory Himself, is truly hidden.”¹⁰

⁹ C.S. Lewis, “Weight of Glory”.

¹⁰ C.S. Lewis, “Weight of Glory”.