

Made in the Image of God

By Al Felder

“²⁶And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth. ²⁷So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them.” (Genesis 1:26, 27)

On the sixth day of creation, God made man. Prior to this event God simply spoke and the rest of creation came into being. With man, however, a Divine Council took place. God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit discussed what was to be the crown jewel of their creation. Man was to be different from the rest of creation. God made man to be different, wonderful, the most excellent of all His creation. God made man in His image, after His likeness. For just a little while we would like to discuss the implications of this passage of scripture as we discuss the subject “Made in the Image of God.”

There are many people today who would have us believe that man evolved from some lower life form over the course of billions of years. Yet, when we read the Bible we find something very different. *“And God made the beast of the earth after his kind, and cattle after their kind, and everything that creepeth upon the earth after his kind: and God saw that it was good.”* (Genesis 1:25) When God created, He formed the various animals after their kind. This means that dogs give birth to dogs, cats give birth to cats, and so forth. Man did not originate from any of these creatures because he is not of their kind. Man is different.

Man is made in the image of God. This can be clearly seen in the genealogy of Christ. *“Which was the son of Enos, which was the son of Seth, which was the son of Adam, which was the son of God.”* (Luke 3:38) As the lineage of Christ is traced all the way back to the beginning, we don’t read of a monkey swinging in the family tree. No, the Bible makes it clear that the first man came from God.

The Bible has stated this fact with clarity, but many have speculated about its exact meaning. Many people have tried to equate man made in the image of God with some kind of spiritual perfection. By doing so, they make the claim that this image was lost when Adam and Eve sinned. The scripture referring to the birth of Seth is often used to support this claim. *“And Adam lived a hundred and thirty years, and begat a son in his own likeness, after his image; and called his name Seth.”* (Genesis 5:3) Based upon this text, the argument is made that Adam was created in the image of God, but sin changed that image into something else. Now, Adam’s son, and the rest of man, are no longer in God’s image.

There are several passages of scripture that show this thinking to be false. After the flood, God gave Noah a command forbidding murder. *“Whoso sheddeth man’s blood, by man*

shall his blood be shed: for in the image of God made he man." (Genesis 9:6) The life of man is valuable because his is made in the image of God. A similar passage is found in the New Testament. *"⁸But the tongue can no man tame; it is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison. ⁹Therewith bless we God, even the Father; and therewith curse we men, which are made after the similitude of God."* (James 3:8, 9) Slander against one's fellow man is also considered a sin because man bears the image of God. The scriptures make it clear that there is a definite sacredness that belongs to human life. That sacredness exists in the fact that man is made in the image of God, and to do harm to man is to do harm to God.

Just as the image of God does not refer to some type of spiritual perfection that once existed in man, it does not refer to a physical likeness either. This is easily seen in Christ's discussion with the woman at the well. *"God is a Spirit; and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth."* (John 4:24) God is a Spirit, and a spirit does not have a physical likeness. Christ pointed this out to His disciples after His resurrection. *"Behold my hands and my feet, that it is I myself: handle me, and see; for a spirit hath not flesh and bones, as ye see me have."* (Luke 24:39) God has no physical body whereas man's body was formed from the dust of the ground.

In this instance, man is similar to the rest of the creatures God created. *"And out of the ground the Lord God formed every beast of the field, and every fowl of the air."* (Genesis 2:19) God formed both man and beast out of the ground, but this does not mean that man and beast are kin. *"All flesh is not the same flesh: but there is one kind of flesh of men, another flesh of beasts, another of fishes, and another of birds."* (1 Corinthians 15:39) God made different kinds of flesh. He made man, beasts, fish, and birds. There is no mixing or combination of these types of flesh. One did not originate from the other. God made them and gave them the ability to reproduce after their kind.

Another point to be made is that both man and beast have the breath of life. *"²¹And all flesh died that moved upon the earth, both of fowl, and of cattle, and of beast, and of every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth, and every man: ²²All in whose nostrils was the breath of life, of all that was in the dry land died."* (Genesis 7:21, 22) The Hebrew words often translated as soul and spirit are used at times with reference to both man and beasts. When this occurs these words are simply referring to life in general, that which breathes air.¹ That is as far as the similarity between man and beasts go.

Within the creation account, something unique and peculiar to the creation of man is stated. *"And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul."* (Genesis 2:7) Yes man and animals breathe,

¹ Vine, W. E. 1996. *Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*. Nashville, TN : Thomas Nelson, Inc., 1996. pp. 237-241.

but it was only into man that God breathed the breath of life. This is not something that God did for the rest of the creatures he created, only man.

While the same words are used at times to describe both man and beast, words often do have more than one meaning and context determines which meaning is used. This is the case with the Hebrew words soul and spirit. They can simply have reference to life, or they can refer to that which distinguishes man from the rest of God's creation - an immortal soul. This similarity and difference between man and beast is pointed out by Solomon in Ecclesiastes.

"¹⁸I said in mine heart concerning the estate of the sons of men, that God might manifest them, and that they might see that they themselves are beasts. ¹⁹For that which befalleth the sons of men befalleth beasts; even one thing befalleth them: as the one dieth, so dieth the other; yea, they have all one breath; so that a man hath no preeminence above the beast: for all is vanity. ²⁰All go unto one place; all are of the dust, and all turn to dust again. ²¹Who knoweth the spirit of man that goeth upward, and the spirit of the beast that goeth downward to the earth?" (Ecclesiastes 3:18-21)

Both man and beast are made of the dust of the ground and breathe the breath of life. Likewise, both man and beast will ultimately suffer the same fate. They will both die. At this point the similarities end, and the distinction between man and beast begins. The spirit or life of man goes upward while the spirit or life of the beast goes downward. Solomon makes this point a little clearer later on. *"Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was: and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it."* (Ecclesiastes 12:7) The reason why the spirit of man goes upward is because he has an immortal soul that returns to God. This is not true for the other air breathing creatures that God created. Once they die that is the end of their existence.

The fact that man has a soul or spirit that lives on is a chief distinction between man and the rest of creation. It is part of what constitutes man being made in the image of God. Just as God is a spirit, man too is a spiritual being.

The terms image and likeness are used interchangeably in describing man. Man being made in the image of God, after His likeness, means that he bears a resemblance to God. As we have already pointed out this includes man's spiritual aspect, but it includes other features of man as well. Man made in the image of God means that he reflects his Creator in those capacities and capabilities which separate him from the rest of creation.

Man's ability to communicate is a likeness to God that sets him apart from all other creation. The Bible presents God as a communicator. In the beginning He spoke to the man and the woman that He created. *"And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth."* (Genesis 1:28) God created man with the ability to speak, and his vocabulary is shown by his ability to name the animals. *"And Adam gave names to all cattle, and to the fowl of the air, and to every beast of the field; but for*

Adam there was not found a help meet for him.” (Genesis 2:20) This ability likens man to God, and sets him apart from the rest of creation.

Not only can man speak, he can write in order to communicate as well. This is a likeness of God too. *“And he gave unto Moses when he had made an end of communicating with him upon Mount Sinai, two tables of testimony, tables of stone, written with the finger of God.”* (Exodus 31:18) God has communicated unto man through His written word. Man having the likeness of God gives him the ability to understand this word. It is through God’s written word that man can learn of the plan of salvation.

Man, like God, is creative. *“In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth.”* (Genesis 1:1) The very first verse of the Bible informs us of God’s creativity. All that we see before us has been created by God. God endowed man with the ability to be able to create.

“²⁰And Adah bare Jabal: he was the father of such as dwell in tents, and of such as have cattle. ²¹And his brother’s name was Jubal: he was the father of all such as handle the harp and organ. ²²And Zilah, she also bare Tubal-cain, an instructor of every artificer in brass and iron.” (Genesis 4:20-22)

Not long after the expulsion of Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden, their descendants began using their creative abilities. Man began to develop dwelling places, instruments of music, and metallurgy.

Man’s ability to reason is also a likeness of God. God, prior to His creation of man, discussed this action before it was taken. The three members of the Godhead reasoned amongst themselves. Man possesses this ability as well.

“¹⁸For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness; ¹⁹Because that which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God hath shewed it unto them. ²⁰For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse.” (Romans 1:18-20)

Only man possesses the reasoning abilities to look around at the rest of creation and know that there is a God. Man is self-aware, and as a result; he ponders the meaning of his existence, the significance of his actions, and the purpose of his destiny. Man has the ability to not only know that there is a creator, but to worship and serve Him as well.

Finally, man is a moral being. True morality is based on the unchanging nature of Almighty God. *“And one cried unto another, and said, Holy, holy, is the Lord of hosts: the whole earth is full of his glory.”* (Isaiah 6:3) All that is just, right, and good comes from Him. God Himself is the unchanging standard. Whatever He does, commands, and approves is good.

Within each person is a sense of moral responsibility which derives from the fact that God is our creator. *“Know ye that the Lord he is God: it is he that hath made us, and not we*

ourselves; we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture.” (Psalm 100:3) God has given man his word that we may know what is good and acceptable unto Him. He expects man to act in a moral manner according to the laws set forth in His word.

In closing, at the basic thrust of this issue is the relationship between man and God.

“¹⁴And when they were come, they say unto him, Master, we know that thou art true, and carest for no man: for thou regardest not the person of men, but teachest the way of God in truth: Is it lawful to give tribute to Caesar, or not? ¹⁵Shall we give, or shall we not give? But he, knowing their hypocrisy, said unto them, Why tempt ye me? Bring me a penny, that I may see it. ¹⁶And they brought it. And he saith unto them, Whose is this image and superscription? And they said unto him Caesar’s. ¹⁷And Jesus answering said unto them, Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s. And they marveled at him.” (Mark 12:14-17)

As the Pharisees asked Christ about paying taxes, He looked at the image of the coin and told them to give unto Caesar what was his. The image implied that the coin belonged unto Caesar. Then Christ told the Pharisees to give unto God what was His. The implication is that man belongs unto God because he bears the image of God.

The Bible paints the picture of man as a being who stands above all other creatures on the earth. He towers above the rest of creation having the attributes of God. He is able to obey, serve, worship, and adore God. This is man’s responsibility. Man is to give himself to the one whose image he bears.