

## **Humanity: Image of God, II**

Let us pray.

*Father, we thank You that Your Word gives us everything we need for eternal life and godliness. We thank You for sending Your Son to be our Savior and for sending the Holy Spirit into our hearts that we might know you as Father and call you Father. Thank You for your grace. Teach us, Lord, about the way You made us that we might better understand You and ourselves and that we might be better ministers of Your grace to other human beings made in Your image. We commit our lesson to You. Give us good attention, Lord. Perk us up we pray, through Jesus Christ, our Lord, Amen.*

Genesis 5:1-2 merely rehearses the information we have already studied, so we are going to keep moving along. Genesis 9:6 is important. God speaks to Noah after the flood and He says, “Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed; for in the image of God has God made man.” The implication here is that fallen human beings are still in some sense in the image of God. That fact is given as the grounds for capital punishment for murderers. Humanity’s being made in the image of God would not have much weight as the basis for capital punishment if it were only true of people as created and not true of people as fallen. I conclude that Genesis 9:6 presents fallen human beings as made in the image of God. I introduce a word here that I have not yet defined—a substantive aspect of the image is implied here. You could have a neater and tidier theology if you say, “We were made in the image of God, the image was totally lost in the Fall, and the image is restored in some measure, whether it be altogether instantaneously or progressively, in Christ.” It is easier to think we had the image: light was on; Fall: light was off; saved: light gets turned on again. That is what G.C. Berkouwer, the great Dutch theologian, said, as you will read in Hoekema, but that is false. It may be neater and tidier, but it does not fit with James 3:9 and it does not fit with Genesis 9:6. Moses is not saying merely that people used to be that way, and therefore, if you take a person’s life you are assaulting God because you are attacking His image. No, he is saying fallen sinners are image-bearers, so that if you attack one of them you are attacking God Himself in His image bearers. It is an important point. Substantive view of the image points us in a direction of historical views. Historically, there have been three main views of the image of God in the Christian church. I want to know what the church has thought. That does not tell me truth, necessarily. The church could be all wrong. It is the Bible that is the determining factor. However, I have generally found the church is not all wrong; there is at least some truth to it. Let us see how it works out in this case.

The meaning of “substantive views” is human beings in our very substance, our structure, our makeup, are made in the image of God apart from our functions, roles, and relationships. An incapacitated human being lying in a hospital bed is a human being according to this substantive view. This has been the dominant view in the history of the Christian faith. Our possessing reason above the animals has been especially singled out as the basis. Thomas Aquinas is a good representative of this viewpoint. This view has predominated the church. Some evangelical Christians espousing this view have made a serious mistake or two. This one godly fellow—I do not think he would say this today—but 25 years ago before abortion and euthanasia were practiced in the United States, he made a slip in defining the image this way and in denying the image to severely retarded persons. If one defines the image solely in terms of reason, I can see that as the outworking, but I would not solely define it in terms of reason. I do think this is a part of the image. I think our makeup, apart from our relationships or roles, constitutes the

image. You may say, “But is it not artificial to think of human beings apart from relationships and roles?” I admit that, but I do think the very way we are made makes us images of God.

Another main historical category is relational views of the image. This says the image is not found in who we are, but the image is found in our dealings with others, in our relating to God and fellow human beings. The prime component of the image is love, or a showing of love, that enables us to bear the image of God. Some have said the traditional notion is static and they want even to get away from the noun “image of God” and use the verb “we bear the image of God in our relationships.” The neo-orthodox theologians did this as exemplified in Emil Brunner. They strove to distance themselves from static notions of the image and instead talk about the image in relationship. Is there an element of truth to this? I would say there is. I would say the church’s instincts were very correct in seeing this as basic because we are made in the image of God; we bear the image of God in our relationships and in our functions, or roles.

The third major category is function. Functional views of the image, in its extreme form, say that we are not made in the image of God, but rather we bear the image of God in our roles and functions in life. The chief example is dominion—Leonard Verduin’s definition of image-bearers as dominion-havers was mentioned in the last lecture.

I think all three have their hands on different parts of the truth. I think we are made in God’s image and that there is a certain part about our whole makeup as human beings, especially morally and intellectually, that sets us apart from the animal creation, but it also is who we are in our relationships and in our roles. So I would argue for a combination. I need to explain some of these terms in order for you to better understand. There is no such thing as a totally inductive theology. All theology is a combination of induction and deduction. Induction means you go to particulars, in this case, the data of the Bible, and study them and from there you draw some conclusion. Deduction means from conclusions you reach other conclusions by the use of logic. Let nobody fool you—all theology is a combination of those two approaches. These definitions will open up Hoekema to you a little bit because he talks in those categories. He uses “structural” as a synonym for substantive, along with other synonyms as well.

If you are wondering how many perspectives there are, I end up with five altogether. The combination of the three is one perspective. So in the end I think it is most fruitful to view the image of God from at least four different perspectives. One is in terms of these historical categories. Another one is in terms of relationships, which is an expansion of one of these. Another one is in terms of redemptive-historical stages. So if you say, “What is the image of God?” I have to say, “When? At creation, after the Fall, restored in Christ, or in the new heavens and the new earth?” That is a part of the answer, so it gets complicated. Another one is since the Bible says Christ is the image of God, He has got to be one of my perspectives. What does that add? How does that integrate with this information and the other? So it is going to end up somewhat complicated. That is why I put that synthesis and spelled things out one point at a time. Lord willing, my goal is that the Bible study, the reading and the synthesis, all come together next week.

Now you understand what I mean when I say that in Genesis 9:6 a substantive view of the image is emphasized. Obviously, if you attack another human being, you are attacking God because the person “is made in His image” as a human being. If you attack a human being, you are striking the image of God. That is to say that part of our very makeup as humans reflects God. I am not saying God has a

body; I would regard our physical makeup as the instrument of the image of God. We are not told of cognitive (having to do with thinking) or moral (having to do with holiness) aspects of the image of God in Genesis. Genesis does not explain what the substantive aspects are. It simply implies it is part of our very makeup to be in the image. We are not told any further details about cognitive or moral aspects of the image in Genesis.

We shall proceed to study the restoration of the image in Christ. The fact that the image needs to be restored implies that the Fall affected it, making for a very untidy theology. I have got continuity between the image of God at the Fall, pre-Fall, and post-Fall. But I have got a difference, so I have to talk like this: human beings after the Fall retain the image of God in some sense, but the image is tarnished, marred, and even perverted. I saw an interview once with a murderer who was in prison. He was not even a smart prisoner because he could have at least lied. He said, “I killed before and when I get out of here, I will kill again if I feel like it.” He seemed to have no humanity about him. There could be lots of causes or things in his life that brought him to that situation, and I hope Prison Fellowship shares the Gospel with that man, but it is unnerving to hear him talk. You may ask, “Where is the image of God in him?” It is there, but it is hard to see. So we have some continuity of the image before and after the Fall, but obviously, the image has been distorted and it needs to be renewed in Christ. If Genesis 9:6 teaches that fallen man and woman retain the image, the New Testament informs us that the *imago dei*—Latin phrase for image of God, which you will see in the literature—has been tarnished by sin and stands in need of restoration. It is to the New Testament that we now turn. We will look at the Pauline doctrine of the restoration of the image of God in Jesus Christ.

We are going to turn to Colossians 3. But first, I will mention something from James 3. We note that James 3 agrees with the witness of Genesis 9:6—that fallen humanity still, in some sense, reflects the image of God. James speaks of the fickleness of human speech when he says, “With the tongue we praise our God, our Lord and Father, and with the tongue we curse men who have been made in God’s likeness.” It is hard to find anything good in James 3 about the tongue. Somebody will say, “Here is something good: with our tongue we praise God.” However, to finish the sentence, he is showing the fickleness of the tongue. In fact, he says it is unnatural and asks if fountains send fresh and bitter water out of the same source, or if figs grow from a banana tree and so forth. He says with our tongues we curse men and women who have been made in God’s likeness. By implication, the likeness was retained after the Fall, but likewise, by implication, if it needs to be restored, it has, in some sense, been lost.

Let me summarize the larger context for Colossians 3:9-10 and then read in the nearer context. The larger context emphasizes the believer’s union with Christ, in Colossians 2 and 3, in His death (since you died with Christ), in His resurrection (since then you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above), in His ascension (you died and your life is now hidden with God in Christ), and even in His second coming (when Christ, who is your life, appears then you also will appear with Him in glory). We have been spiritually joined to the Son of God so that His benefits become ours. Verses 5-9 say,

Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires, and greed, which is idolatry. Because of these, the wrath of God is coming. You used to walk in these ways, in the life you once lived. But now you must rid yourselves of all such things as these: anger, rage, slander, and filthy language from your lips. Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices and have put on the new self,

which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator. Here there is no Greek or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, Barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all.

Therefore, believers are to consider their bodily members as dead to sins since they have now been joined to Christ. God's wrath will come by implication upon unbelievers on account of such sins, as seen in verse 6. Before their salvation, the Colossian Christians committed these sins, as mentioned in verse 7. Besides putting away the sins of verse 5, the believers in Colossae are exhorted to also put aside sins of anger and evil speaking—more subtle Christian sins, if you will, than the coarser sins of verse 5. Specifically, they are not to lie to one another because they have taken off, as clothing, the old man with its sinful practices. A close translation of verse 9 would read: do not lie to each other because you have taken off—the language of taking off clothes—the old, the implication of sinful man, with its sinful practices. A further reason for not returning to their former ungodly lifestyle is given in verse 10: “And because you have put on—again as clothing—the new man, who is being renewed in knowledge according to the image of the one who created him.” In summary, the Colossian Christians have had a change of clothing, spiritually speaking, of course. They have taken off the old man and have put on the new. The two causal participles “taken off” and “put on” are to be understood together, with each influencing the meaning of the other. The Colossians have put away their old self with its sinful lifestyle and have begun to live a new life. The new man is being renewed. Hoekema makes much of this principle. The restoration of the image of God according to this passage and others is not once and for all. It is progressive. I do not mean to imply that God saved somebody and begins to renew the image and they are unsaved again. I think they are saved once they are saved, but it is not like justification in which the righteousness of Christ is imputed to our spiritual bank account when we trust in Christ once and for all. You cannot increase the perfect righteousness of Christ, but like progressive sanctification, under which I would put this concept, the restoration of the image is progressive. That is, using the categories we talked about, if you had known the Lord for 10 years, hopefully, in your walk with the Lord, you reveal Christ better—you reflect the image of God more in your relationships and functions than you did when you were first saved. Hopefully you love people more and do your job better and so forth because you have walked with the Lord those years. So I understand the “is being renewed” speaks of a progressive idea.

Now we move on to the Pauline theme of recreation. Paul delights to use the language of the first two chapters of the Bible to speak of Christ as the recreator who initiates the new creation of God. Christ is the second and last Adam who gives life to His people through His resurrection from the dead. Herman Ridderbos, in his book *Paul: An Outline of His Theology*, explains these things in a beautiful way. For our purposes in studying the image of God, here is the important thing: the renewal affects the way a person thinks. Paul says he is being renewed in knowledge. I understand this word “in” to mean “with respect or reference to.” This renewal of one's thinking is according to the image of the one who created him. A Christian is thus one who is being renewed according to the image of God, his Creator, in knowledge.

Now the next two paragraphs mess with different word orders and they are not so important for our purposes. But it is important to see verse 9 of Colossians 3, which says, “Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off the old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its creator.” Since this renewal accords with God's image in humanity, and since the renewal is a renovation in knowledge, knowledge must have been an aspect of the original image of God. We are extrapolating back. Paul speaks of believers being renewed in the image of God

in a particular aspect—in knowledge. If renewing the image involves renewal in knowledge, then presumably there was a knowledge component to the image in the first place. We are arguing backward. Now, it will not do to so argue if Genesis did not say it; what we conclude has to fit Genesis. If we conclude something and it is in discord with Genesis, then we are wrong. But here it does fit Genesis. I agree with two scholars, O'Brien and Losa, who regard knowledge here as “the ability to recognize God’s will and command.” Losa says, “The knowledge can neither be defined as morality, nor be identified with conformity to the image; rather, as a consequence of both, the knowledge mentioned in Colossians 3:10 is the knowledge of God’s will.” Losa does something wise. He appeals to an earlier passage in Colossians to help us understand knowledge here, this knowledge that is not pure cognition. What I am trying to convey is, the people who studied this passage in the history of the church and who concluded that there is a substantive aspect to the image of God were right. Those who pointed to human reason as part of that substantive or structural component were right, but I think they did not study the passage very carefully because, if they had, they would not have had a purely substantive view, that is, the relational and functional ideas are implied in the very so-called substantive Pauline passages. The knowledge here is not purely the ability to think, not purely cognition. It does not preclude that; it involves that, but it is the ability to think put to the service of God. And when you think about it, it is kind of artificial separating these views, at least in normal human life. We are made a certain way to relate to God and other people and to carry on certain roles. That was the way Adam and Eve were made; they were to relate to God, to one another, to their prodigy, and they were to carry on certain roles. They were gardeners, for example, they were also husband and wife respectively, and creatures who were to love God.

Let us check this out with Genesis 1. Humanity came from the hand of the Creator able to think. Adam and Eve were able to love God with their minds by obeying Him. This fits perfectly. Adam was able to understand and obey God’s propositional revelation, which was spoken, not written, when God said, “You may eat freely of every tree in the garden, except one.” Adam understood. God is able to make a creature like Himself. Adam was not God, but he was made in God’s image. There are certain things about God that Adam and Eve shared in common with God. In a creaturely way, He is the unlimited Creator, they are the limited creatures. He made them like Him in this respect at least—they were able to understand language and think. Adam was able to name the animals, use language, and respond intelligently. There is thus a cognitive aspect to the image of God in human beings. We would err by distortion if we made this everything. It is not all, but it is a part. I am thus saying the church was not wrong when it traditionally emphasized the substantive aspects of the image. When you read Newman’s little booklet, you will be amazed and you are going to see the image of God everywhere, in roles and in relationships, as you do your gardening and dishes, drive your car, and raise your kids. Newman is not overreacting. Although he emphasizes the functional and the relational aspects, he does not intend to deny the substantive. He gives us, in his conclusion, a little jumpstart relating those things. After the Fall, our reason darkened and human beings, creatures made in God’s image to mirror God in the world, used their good minds to engage in the sins described in Colossians 3:5. Compare Cain’s slaying of his brother—how that must have hurt Adam and Eve so badly—with the sinful condition of mankind before the flood—every thought of the intention of their hearts was evil continually. When one is savingly united to Jesus Christ, he or she begins a life-long process of sanctification or gradual growth in practical holiness. Part of sanctification is having our thinking conformed to the will of God. We need to have our minds renewed, putting away falsehood and the other sins mentioned in Romans 12:2. In this way, we are being renewed in knowledge according to the image of God.

If you were wondering if sinning intellectually is crucifying Christ again, I would have to disagree. It certainly is terrible to sin against God with our minds. However, the Bible happens to use the expression “to crucify Christ again” in only one place—Hebrew 6—and it has a specific meaning. In that context crucifying Christ again is to commit apostasy; it is to profess that one knows and loves Christ and, later, to go back on one’s profession. This line of thinking opens up the door toward some fruitful applications—what we do with our minds. The human mind is a wonderful creation of God. It is in our minds that the whole area of application of honoring Christ in our thoughts and “bringing every thought captive to Christ,” as Paul says, comes to us. We are responsible for what we take into our minds, for what comes out of our mouths—which is largely the overflow of the heart—and for what we have been letting our minds dwell on. We dishonor the Lord too often with our thoughts alone, let alone the rest of our responses that flow from that heart or from our thoughts. So it would call us to look at the Christian life as a life of ongoing repentance. It would also caution us as to what we take in with our minds, whether it be very inappropriate television or borderline pornography—or maybe not even borderline. Gentlemen, this a problem for many Christian men. You can think of many more applications as well. Is there not a time when we just need to relax and rest our minds? Yes, but sometimes when we are in that state of relaxation, we are most vulnerable to things we should not take in. Positively, there is a stewardship of the mind that we ought to think more about. We ought to feed our minds with God’s Word, with the great literature of the world, and so forth.

Let us close our time in prayer.

*Father, thank You for Your good Word that teaches us about the way You have made us. Lord, increase our understanding of the image of God in us. Lord, help us to image you better in the way we think and speak, purify our minds, we pray. Thank You that you have redeemed all of us, including our minds. Help us to reflect You better and to honor You rather than dishonor You in our thoughts. We pray these things with thanksgiving through our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.*