

Humanity: Image of God, IV

We further amplified the substantive component of the image. It not only includes rationality, but now morality as well. Human beings are made with “the requirements of the law of God written on their hearts,” as stated in Romans 2. It is instructive to me to see that the Puritans understood these things in the Westminster Catechisms that go with the Westminster Confession of Faith. The answer to question 10 of the catechism, which is “How did God create man?” states, “God created man male and female after His own image in knowledge, righteousness and holiness”—which is exactly what we have said—“with dominion over the creatures.” The proof texts, which the Westminster assembly added to the Shorter Catechism, are Genesis 1:26-28, Colossians 3:10, and Ephesians 4:24. So I am explaining things others have already explained, but I make no apology for that. Our goal in theology is not novelty; it is faithfulness to the Bible, so I want us to go back again and again and demonstrate that these things are so.

We move on to another aspect of the image of God, the Pauline doctrine of Christ as the image of God. Paul, in his epistles, also teaches that Christ is the image of God. I am going to simply refer to some passages; I cannot do detailed study on every passage that we mention or we would never get any doctrine done. Consequently, I try to coordinate discussing your readings with studying some passages in detail. Here is a place where I am just going to refer to some passages for you to get the general idea of them in order to substantiate some broader principles. In 2 Corinthians 4:4 Paul deals with the fact that some believe and others reject the apostolic preaching. He speaks of the light of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God shining upon sinners in the proclamation of the Word. It is the glorious Christ who is the subject of the Gospel. God the Creator recreates sinners by illumining them through the saving message. Paul says God, who told the light to shine out of the darkness, has shone in our hearts with the light of His Son to bring us new life. Christ is the image of God in this context in that He reflects the glory of God when the Gospel is preached. In Colossians 1:15, a context of creation, Paul calls Christ “the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by Him all things were created.” Paul goes on to say, “Christ is the image of the invisible God.” Paul means that Christ is the visible representation of God who is invisible. Jesus is God incarnate; the invisible God has become visible in Jesus Christ. I went to school for many years, the last five of those I was married and my wife worked hard in various jobs. She was a waitress for Friendly Restaurants for a couple of years—a very friendly Friendly waitress, if you know my wife. In any case, she met a nominally Jewish young man there. He and I met and played tennis together; it had been my sport in high school and college, and he was really an enthusiast at tennis. That is what drew him, but along with that I made an agreement that we do a little Bible study. He was not eager to do that, but Randy put up with it in order to get to the tennis. We read Mark together. I could not get him to do any reading outside of our time together, but that was acceptable because we had a few minutes and we read and the Lord began to work in his life. I wish I could tell you he was gloriously saved or even ingloriously saved, but he was not; however, one day he had an insight that I was convinced was from the Lord, and I saw the Lord begin to work in his life. As we were reading through Mark, suddenly he said, “I think I understand now that if I wanted to know what God would say if God spoke, I should read what Jesus said.” I said, “Randy, you are definitely beginning to understand.” He continued, “And if I want to see what God would do if God acted in the world, then I should read and see what Jesus did.” I said, “Exactly.” I wish I could tell you he went on from there to better things; he did not in our time with him, but he was just getting a glimpse from the Gospels of this truth that Christ is the image of the invisible God—that God became a human being.

In two other passages Paul does not expressly call Christ the image of God with those words, but he regards the savior as the image to which we will conform. In Romans 8:28-29, Paul presents the goal of salvation as believers' conformity to Christ's image: "God works all things together for good to those who love God, those who have been called according to God's purpose. For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers." This passage presents the goal of salvation as our conformity to Christ's image. Christ is the preeminent Son of God to whom the children of God eschatologically, which means finally, will conform. He is our older brother and by virtue of family resemblance, we will be like him some day in glory. It is hard for us to even fathom these truths. In the context of recreation in 1 Corinthians 15:49, Paul teaches that believers will bear the image of Christ, the second Adam, in immortality even as they have borne the image of Adam in mortality. First Corinthians 15:48-49 says, "As was the earthly man, so are those who are of the earth; and as is the man from heaven, so also are those who are of heaven. And just as we have borne the likeness of the earthly man,"—a reference to Adam of course—"so shall we bear the likeness of the man from heaven"—the Lord Jesus Christ.

If that brief reference to a few passages is enough to get the idea in your minds, see if you can follow me. What do these passages contribute to our study of the image of God in human beings? Second Corinthians 4:4 and Colossians 1:15 teach that the Lord Jesus is the image of God. Substantively, He is the image of God—here is the ultimate substantive image of God. It is artificial to separate that from His roles and relationships, I admit, but He is the very image of God. He images, to use the verb form of the word, God's glory in the preaching of the Gospel. The preaching of the Gospel is all about the glorious Christ who saves sinners. In His incarnation, He reveals the invisible God because in Him the invisible God has become the visible God. Adam and Eve were created in the image of God. As a man, Jesus Christ is the image of God. The incarnate Christ, the God-man, is a visible example of what human beings are to be. So to learn what human beings are really like, we do not look in the mirror or read the news, but rather we look at Adam and Eve before the Fall or the great exemplar of mankind—the Lord Jesus Christ. His model is complicated in that He is also God, but He is the God of humanity and He is held up to us as an example by the Scriptures themselves. Christ perfectly mirrors God in human flesh. This implies that we ought to read the Gospels in several ways. One way we ought to read the Gospels is to learn about the life of Christ in order to learn more about the image of God in human beings and how we ought to reflect His image. Or we read the Gospels, first of all, to learn about the Savior and to worship Him. But we also read the Gospels to learn about God because Christ is the revealer of the Father. In a third way, we read the Gospels to learn about human beings because Christ images God. He is the image of God. His is the perfect human life.

Second Corinthians 4 and Colossians 1 teach that Christ is the image of God as a model. Romans 8:29 and 1 Corinthians 15:49 make an additional contribution to our study. Here Christ is not so much a model that we are supposed to follow, but He is the eschatological, or final, goal to which redeemed human beings will conform. Not model, as in follow Jesus' example, now it is the goal, as in forerunner or older brother to whom we will conform. The children of God will share the glory of the firstborn Son, as shown in Romans 8. The image-bearers of Adam will be the image-bearers of the second Adam when they are clothed with immortality in the resurrection of the dead. Thus Christ Jesus is both the model and the final goal of the image of God in human beings. I have applications that we will get to later concerning those two points.

There is a beautiful tension that is set out between those two things, and I will make more of that in a minute. Let us bring Newman's work into play. Of these three different historical emphases—substantive, relational and functional views—which one is not emphasized by Newman? Newman does not emphasize the substantive. He does not deny the substantive and, at the end of his pamphlet, he

indicates a way we can put things together. Is his basic thrust relational or functional? It certainly is not substantive. He says an awful lot about function, but the correct answer is relational. The relational forms the very framework. Within that relational framework notice the headings: man in relationship to the inanimate and man in relationship to the plants. So it is relational in its very framework or ordering principal. Within that, it says an awful lot about roles. Let me summarize.

Robert Newman has made an important contribution to the study of the image of God in humanity. His essay, “Some Perspectives on the Image of God in Man from Biblical Theology” helps us somewhat understand the teaching of the Bible on this subject. Here is Dr. Newman’s thesis in his own words: “A very fruitful way of viewing humanity as being made in God’s image, we shall suggest, is to consider those pictures God gives of Himself, which are analogies featuring man in his relationship to other people or other parts of the created environment.” I might illustrate what he is doing by comparing it to what John Sanderson does in his book, *Mirrors of His Glory: Images of God from Scripture*. That is a book I used in the course, *God and His Word*, when teaching the doctrine of God. He takes different pictures of God from the Bible itself. God is pictured as water, a bird, a wild beast, a father, a mother, a friend, and a brother. God is pictured in all those ways in the Scripture. Sanderson uses these analogies that God gives in His Word; he looks at these things from the top down. He is teaching us about God as a rock because the Bible says that God is a rock. So we learn something about rocks that are like God and we learn about God. It is top down. Newman uses some of the same images, and also some different ones, but he is looking from the bottom up. There are certain human relationships—and very many of them that can be categorized in these different ways—that are means that God uses to tell us about Himself. So when we engage in those same relationship and roles that God uses to speak of Himself, we are imaging God. I believe this is true. So understand Newman’s method is bottom up; the other one is top down because we are learning, not so much about God, but about the way we reflect the image of God. Of course, they are related. They are two different ways of talking about the same thing. The image of God teaches us about God, but our concern is with human beings.

In summary, some illustrations are humans in relation to the inanimate—like potter and clay; humans in relation to plants—like a gardener or farmer and his plants; humans in relation to animals—like the shepherd and his sheep; humans in relation to human society—like king and subject; and humans in relation to the family—parent-child or husband-wife.

The comment is made that this is edifying because we can relate to it since we are in these relationships every day of our lives. What do we call this approach that Newman takes in terms of different types of theology? It would be biblical theology as opposed to systematic theology. I am using a combination approach, but traditional systematic theology works with categories that come from philosophy or from the history of theology. The data that Newman is working with are categories from the Bible itself. In that sense, biblical theology’s categories come from holy Scripture, which is one reason you find this so practical. Do you find it edifying that you in your garden tending your flowers or your vegetables—in the right way, of course, to understand this—are actually experiencing a little bit of what it is like to be God? There is no New Age teaching here. That our children are learning about God from the way we deal with them is a very convicting thought for parenting. If we lose our control and discipline, for example, we are not being fathers or mothers to our children the way God deals with us. So this ought to ennoble any legitimate human activity and it has great ramifications. So teach it in Sunday school—use it. I only have a couple of qualifications, which I will make when I tie things together in a moment.

One student shared how the parent-child metaphor is so meaningful to her and helps her understand the way God relates to us from our own successes and failures as parents and as children. The Bible is full of this metaphor in many places: Israel being a rebellious nation, God putting up with the long-suffering,

and God disciplining His children whom He loves—Hebrews 12. This opens up a whole vista of new ways of looking at the Bible to help us learn about the image of God. Should we throw out Colossians 3 and Ephesians 4 and traditional exegesis? Oh no, that is the framework, but this can augment that and help us apply it. That is, biblical theology is important, I would even say necessary, but it does not make systematic theology illegitimate. It can be a really helpful addition to systematic, even a foundation for it.

The concept that human significance or dignity is because we are made in the image of God is important, especially in light of our culture today, which tells us whether we are significant or not based on being beautiful, famous, wealthy, a great athlete or something similar. Let us say a couple of things about Newman's conclusions.

He points to the fact that the pictures are dynamic and concrete; they live because they are relationships. They are suggested rather than precise. We need to be careful not to draw every parallel from our parenting to God. We need to be careful and keep within the biblical parameters of the doctrine of God, but there is much there indeed. Lastly he says on page 18, "It appears that these dynamic analogies function in two directions. By means of them we learn to understand God better through the common relationships of human life, as we experience the joys and frustration of raising children, for instance." (Newman is a life-long bachelor, and women sometimes have criticized him for seeming not to have a very good perspective on the feminine side of life. He would admit it in a minute. He does not know a woman by virtue of marriage so he has limitations that way. So you need to apply a little bit of grace, ladies.) "We come to have a better idea of what God deals with in redeeming His people and guiding them on to maturity. On the other hand, the nature of God as revealed in Scripture helps us to see how our human relationships should be transformed to reflect the image of God more accurately."

The comment was made how, whether it was by design or not, Dr. Newman helped one of our students tie together the substantive, functional, and relational aspects of the image. I will do that very thing for us right now, a systematic synthesis. I find at least five perspectives helpful for summarizing the Bible's teaching on the image of God in humanity. So now is my time to pull things together. First, there are substantive, functional, and relational aspects of the image and these must be held together. I agree with Millard Erickson's statement on page 513 of his *Christian Theology*, a book I often interact with in these notes. "The image should be thought of," he said, "as primarily substantive or structural. The image is something in the very nature of man in the way he was made." I agree with this conclusion on the basis of our exegesis of the Pauline texts. However, Erickson overemphasizes the substantive aspect. In part, this is due to Erickson's failure to incorporate the fruits of biblical theology into his systematic formulations. His handling of the image of God would be strengthened by the inclusion of the redemptive-historical stages of the image given by Hoekema and of the type of material given by Dr. Newman. Hoekema is correct in stating that the functional and relational aspects are predominant in Scripture if you count references, especially if you use Newman's perspective. However, he plays down the substantive a little too much for my liking. Let me synthesize: Adam and Eve were made like God in their being endowed with cognition to do His will. They were created in the image of their maker in righteousness and true holiness. Thus man qua man—man as a human being—apart from any other detail about that human being is a being able to think God's thoughts after Him and able to do His will. Man qua man is a holy being created for fellowship with his maker. This is the substantive aspect of the image, at least in part.

The Bible speaks more often of the functional and relational aspects of the image. Adam and Eve were given dominion—and I would include dominion as part of the image—over the rest of God's creation. They were to model their Lord by being little lords under Him, but over the rest of the creation. They

were to relate to God, their fellow human being, and the creation in ways pleasing to God. Dr. Newman's contribution is to show biblical pictures that describe the functional and relational aspects. I follow his lead and relate his conclusions on the image of God to the traditional substantive concept along the lines of attribute and manifestation. The attribute would be substantive, a quality somebody has. Manifestation is functional and relational ways of showing that quality. Perhaps we could think of Christ. He is faithful and He demonstrates faithfulness in His relationships and in His sanctions. I might add the concepts of noun and verb. Noun is substantive; verb is image of God in function and relationship. The biblical pictures of the image in humanity through relationships and roles are results of his or her being created in God's likeness. Humanity as potter, gardener, and so forth reflect something of God.

Second, Jesus Christ is the perfect image of God. He is both ultimate model and eschatological goal for the redeemed. Jesus substantively is the image of God; and in His incarnation, He perfectly manifests that image. Erikson steers us in the right direction when he summarizes, "Jesus had perfect fellowship with the Father. He obeyed the Father's will perfectly and always displayed a strong love for humans." May God help us to live like Jesus. He is a model. If I really take that seriously, I am going to be unhappy someday. But what is God doing giving me the model of Christ and His perfection? That squashes me like an insect. It is the same as when the Son of God says in Matthew 5, "Be perfect as your Father in Heaven is perfect." Or when Peter quotes Leviticus in 1 Peter 1: "Be holy as I am holy." What is God doing by setting up absolute sinless perfection as a standard for the Christian life? Now that is not very kind. Why does He do that? He does it to first show us that we never have arrived. We have in terms of being justified, but in our own performance we fall far short. We say, "That would drive me to His grace every day." Exactly; that is the purpose of it. God sets up an impossible standard to show us that we need Him, to foster a day-by-day dependency relationship. We are the creatures; He is the Creator. That is exactly what God does. So Christ is a model. There is some encouragement there; if I looked at what I was and what I am now, I will see that I am not what I was. I am certainly not like Jesus yet; I am in process. You may have heard people say, "Be patient; God is not finished with me yet." That is really true and partially describes the biblical view of the Christian life. But if I look at what I was, I should see lots of growth. Here students sometimes get frustrated by comparing themselves with their fellows or, after going to seminary a year, they see all these books and they say, "I know nothing. This is impossible." They graduate and say, "I know less than when I started." But in comparing themselves now with when they began, they see lots of growth. Second, you will then compare yourself to what you now know. You have "learned ignorance" now, that is, you see that although you have learned a lot, you do not know that much. There are only two kinds of people in the world: those who realize that is the case and those who do not. So it is realism. Christ as our model humbles us and drives us to the grace of God. Christ as our goal encourages us; believers will one day be conformed to Jesus' image when they put on immortality and glory. Hold your head up high, fellow believer, you will make it. You are going to be conformed to your Older Brother, the Lord Jesus Christ, because His work on the cross and His resurrection were perfect. The Holy Spirit does His work and, although we imperfectly do ours, God will perfectly do His. One day He will perfectly confirm us in holiness. The teaching of perfectionism is true according to 1 Thessalonians 5; it is just the timing that some of our friends have wrong. It is when Jesus comes again that we will be completely sanctified in body, soul, and spirit.

You may wonder if there are moments when we do things perfectly. We certainly do God's will. We must be careful to avoid defeatism and triumphalism, and what I said could lead toward defeatism. When the Bible says, "Walk in the spirit and you will not fulfill the lust of the flesh," does it mean what it says? Yes. Does it mean we can be perfect for a second in this life? I would still say, "No, not on our own," because it would involve doing things out of a perfect motive of the glory of God. After a while, Paul himself says he does not even evaluate his own motives ultimately. That is, if you really start to

scrutinize your motives in the extreme, though we want to have healthy motives and go on for God, you could become so introspective that you would be paralyzed and do absolutely nothing. My guess is, even when we are at our best in serving God and doing His will and seemingly not taking glory for ourselves, there is probably a little bit of vanity in there. But do not let that stop you; go on and say the Lord's Prayer every day and confess your sins and go on for God and give Him the glory. We can do significantly better than we have done and we can do the will of God in large measure indeed. Third, Hoekema teaches us to include the redemptive-historical perspectives in our presentation of the doctrine of the image of God, though it is important in every doctrine. In order to understand the image, we have to view it in these different stages. At creation, the image was original, also called perfect, intact, and whole. We must distinguish between that status and after the Fall in which the image is tarnished, ruined, perverted—not effaced—but it is not what it was. There is still a substratum there; we are still human, but look at our first parents, hiding from God and blaming each other. This is not the way God made them. Right away, one of the children kills another one. This is perverted. This is not God's will. And then, in Christ the image is being renewed. There is substantial renewal but it is in the progressive sense and slow—as if one is taking two steps forward and one step back and one step forward and two steps back—but praise the Lord; we keep going and He is patient with us. We do make significant progress in holiness, but the perfect image awaits the eternal state and the resurrection of the dead. This is a valuable perspective on the image of God. Teach these things to your youth group, to your ladies' Bible study, to all—that is what theology is for. Teach it and give a more well-rounded presentation of the image and have them read Newman's little pamphlet.

How is Jude able to speak of God as the one who is able to present us faultless? It points to the eschatonic, the "in His presence." It does not mean the present life. It does point to the life to come as in 1 Thessalonians 5; the Bible is pretty consistent on that. It sets the goal up now, but it presents it as a currently unrealizable goal. It does present the goal as realized, but in each context it is future, it is resurrection, it is being in God's final presence, it is when we see and we are known as we are.