

Genesis 1:1-2:3

“The Image”

February 22, 2009

Psalms 8, 21

Colossians 1:3-23

2 Cor 3:18-4:4 (in declaration of pardon)

What does it mean to be created in the image of God?

In its most basic sense,

to be made in the image and likeness of God
means to look like God.

God created us to be finite pictures of himself.

He knows all things,

so he created us with knowledge.

Our abilities to think and know and love and communicate
are part of what it means to be in the image of God.

But our bodies also reflect something about God.

God does not have a physical body,

but he gave us eyes as physical pictures of his infinite sight.

He gave us hands and arms to remind us of his power.

He gave us ears that we might hear –

even as he hears the cries of all who call upon him.

But even if you put all the abilities of body and soul together,

you have not even begun to answer what it means to be in the image of God.

After all, chimpanzees have hands and arms and eyes.

They think and know and love and communicate – at least to some degree.

So what does it mean to be created in the image of God?

Review:

We have seen how God ordered creation in two triads.

In the first three days God separated the three realms,
the heavens, the earth, and the seas.

On Day One he created Light and separated light from darkness.

On a second day, he separated the waters below from the waters above
by means of a firmament – the vault of heaven.

On a third day, he separated the dry land from the waters
and caused the earth to bring forth plants.

Thus in three days God turned the *tohu vbohu*

into three ordered realms prepared for habitation.

And then in the second three days God filled the three realms.

On a fourth day he created the sun, moon, and stars to rule the day and the night.

On a fifth day he created the living creatures of the waters and air.
And on *the* sixth day he caused the earth to bring forth living creatures on the land.

Also on *the* sixth day, he created man.

We noted last time that days 2-5 are denoted as
“a second day...a third day...a fourth day...a fifth day.”
Only here does the definite article make its appearance:
in verse 31 we are told that this was *the* sixth day.

The account of the sixth day of creation takes up a full third of the creation narrative.
Also, the account of the creation of man breaks the fast-paced rhythm of chapter 1,
as the narrative slows down to focus our attention on this final act.

In honor of this, we also will slow down and devote a whole sermon to these five verses.

1. Image and Likeness (v26)

Then 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 birds of the heavens
and over the livestock
and over all the earth
and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.” (v26)*

Why does God say “let *us* make man in our image”?

We know that God is triune – Father, Son and Holy Spirit –
but Moses does not seem to have been aware of this.

In English we could use the plural of majesty:
“Bring us our royal slippers!”

But Hebrew does not use pronouns in this way.
So it would appear that God is speaking to the heavenly court –
except for the fact that he says “our image.”

If God is speaking to the angels,
then this would imply that man is made
in the image of God and the angels.

So we are forced back to the idea that God is revealing something about himself –
that unity and plurality both have their source in him.

Here, at the creation, as the Spirit of God hovers over the face of the deep,
and as the Word of God brings all things into existence,
God says, “let us make man in our image, after our likeness.”

In the ancient world, to be in the image of God meant to be divine –
or, to say the same thing, to be king!

Someone wrote to the 7th century Assyrian king Esarhaddon,
“a freeman is as the shadow of god,
the slave is as the shadow of a freeman;
but the king, he is like unto the image of God.” (Waltke, 66)

To be the image of God means to be the King.
But as we’ll see all throughout Genesis,
the Word of God speaks in the language of its day,
and yet subverts the theologies of the nations!

Because here in Genesis 1, God says that all of humanity (Adam)
was created in his image.
And all those descended from Adam share in his image and likeness.

The word translated “image” is normally used for idols!
The “image” of a god is the focal point for the worship of the deity.

When God called Moses to build the tabernacle,
what image was placed in the Holy of Holies?

None.

God says explicitly that since Israel saw no image at the mountain,
therefore they are not to use images in their worship.

When God called Solomon to build the temple,
what image was there?

None.

Why?

Why was there no image at the mountain?

Why was there no image in God’s temple?

Because the earthly sanctuary is supposed to be a picture of God’s creation.

God created his temple when he stretched out the heavens as a tent

(and by the way, in Psalm 104,

when it says that God stretched out the heavens like a tent,

the word there is the word translated “tabernacle”

all through the books of Moses!),

so when God pitched his tabernacle,

when he spread out the firmament – the *raqia* – that blue dome up there –

what image did God place in his tabernacle?

Man.

Man was created in the image of God.

Therefore to be in the image and likeness of God
means that man is to be on earth what God is in heaven.
This is what makes us different from the animals.

Man is God's vicegerent who is to rule over the world on his behalf.

That is why the idea of image and the idea of dominion are connected.
Because man is in the image of God,
he is to have dominion – or lordship – over the creatures.

In Genesis 5:1-3 we hear that Adam had a son in his likeness and according to his image.

There is a resemblance between father and son
which is expressed in terms of image and likeness.
Adam was the son of God who was created to reflect his Father's glory.

And as the son of God he was to rule over the earth.

Think about how this theme continues throughout the scriptures:

When God calls Israel out of Egypt he says to Pharaoh,
Israel is my son, my firstborn,
Israel is called to do and to be what Adam failed to do and to be.

When Israel fails, God calls David and his sons to rule over the creation.

The Psalms speak of the Davidic king as the Son of God:

Think of Psalm 8, which we sang earlier:

Psalm 8 reflects on this.

What is man that you are mindful of him?
The son of man (literally "ben-adam," Son of Adam) that you care for him?
Yet you have made him a little lower than the heavenly beings
(literally than "elohim" – God)
You have crowned him with glory and honor.
You have given him dominion over the works of your hands;
you have put all things under his feet,
all sheep and oxen, and also the beasts of the field,
the birds of the heavens, and the fish of the sea.

Psalm 8 reflects on the language of Genesis 1.

Who is the son of man in Psalm 8?

Is it all humanity?

No, because not all humanity is presently crowned with glory and honor!

The son of man, the ben-Adam of Psalm 8 is the Davidic king.
The son of David has been crowned with glory and honor
and given a share in the rule of God's kingdom.

This is the point of Psalm 2, which says
*The LORD said to me, 'You are my Son; today I have begotten you.
Ask of me, and I will make the nations your heritage,
and the ends of the earth your possession.*

The son of David is the firstborn of God –
he is the one who inherits the nations.

The son of David is the one who exercises dominion over the earth.
The kingdom of God comes when the son of David rules.

Psalm 2 says that the enthronement of the Son of David
is like the first day of the new creation.
And Acts 2 says that this is exactly what happens in Jesus!

This is why we read Colossians 1 earlier.

Paul says that
*He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation.
For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible,
whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities –
all things were created through him and for him.
And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together.*

Jesus Christ is the image of the invisible God.
He is the eikon – the image that reveals the Father.

I don't want to press the prepositions too far,
but Adam was created *in* the image of God,
while Jesus *is* the image of God.

So for Paul, the fact that Jesus *is* the image of God
shows that he is the firstborn of all creation
(which means that he inherits all creation),
and in verses 18-20 Paul says that he is also the firstborn from the dead.

Image and dominion go together.
Jesus is the image of God
and thus he is the one that exercises dominion over creation.

This is why Paul says in Colossians 3:10 that those who are in Christ
have put off the old self with its practices and have put on the new self,

which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator.

Because Jesus Christ is the image of God,
those who are in him begin once again to reflect God.

2. Image and Gender (v27)

*So God created man in his own image,
in the image of God he created him;
male and female he created them. (v27)*

Verse 27 helps us understand the relationship between man and woman.
In verse 26 God says let us make man – *adam*.

And while *adam* is singular,
God says, “let *them* have dominion,”
plainly indicating that *adam* means “man” or “humanity.”

Now in verse 27 God created *ha-adam* “the Adam” in his own image.
This is not just a reference to generic humanity,
but an actual man, “the Adam.”

In the image of God he created him.
The Adam was created in the image of God.
Male and female he created them.
The Adam was created male and female.

Here we begin to understand why God said, “let us make man in *our* image.”
Even as God is not a “monad” – he is one and many in his own nature,
so also humanity is not a monad.
God created us male and female in order to reflect something about himself.

Humanity is one (“in the image of God he created him”),
but humanity is also many (“male and female he created them”).

How is it that “male and female” reflect something about God?
Well, from all eternity God has lived as Father, Son and Holy Spirit.
The Father has eternally begotten the Son.

And he made man in his image, male and female,
so that we might reflect that “begetting.”
Obviously our “begetting” is finite and only a dim picture of God’s eternal begetting –
but then again, our seeing is a finite and dim reflection of God’s vision!

But the point is that *even our reproductive process* is a reflection of who God is.

We’ll look more at this when we come to Genesis 2 and the creation of Eve.
But you can see how important this is when you get to verse 28

3. Image and Blessing (v28-30)

And God blessed them.

And God said to them,

*“Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth
and subdue it and have dominion
over the fish of the sea
and over the birds of the heavens
and over every living thing that moves on the earth.” (v28)*

Having children is a fundamental part of human existence –
but it is only the first half of the blessing that God gave them.

Some have called this the cultural mandate, or the dominion mandate,
whereby God calls humanity to rule over the world.

But this is not a mandate.

It is not command – although it is in the imperative mood!

It is a blessing.

There are two parts to this blessing.

The first part has to do with having lots of children:

“Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth.”

In other words,

even as I have reversed the tohu (barrenness) and the bohu (emptiness),
so now I bless you with power to imitate me.

The second part of God’s blessing has to do with ruling the earth.

God’s blessing brings life and order to that which was desolate.

God has blessed man with the ability to bring life and order to the earth.

If you think about it, what will the rest of Genesis be about?

Land and Seed.

The promises to Abraham are all about restoring the blessing of creation.

(That’s why the third part of the blessing of Abraham is new:

when the nations consisted of one man,

the blessing of the one man *was* the blessing of the nations!)

And in one sense, human history is a history of the spread of life and order.

Certainly we have managed to multiply rather effectively!

And we have tamed the earth and its creatures to our will.

But because of sin, we have twisted this blessing to our own undoing:

we are fruitful and we multiply,

but we also divide and kill and decimate the earth.

We subdue the earth – but selfishly, raping and pillaging the earth for our pleasure,
with little thought for future generations,

and even less for how we are using the creation for the glory of God!

God blessed us and gave us authority over his creation
so that we might be faithful stewards.

The tragedy of the environmental movement is that Christians aren't leading it.

Sure there were some Christians in the 19th century

who warned against the course of big business,

but most Christians were so busy making money

that they didn't stop to think about how to be stewards.

And so now we have to figure out how to think about creation wisely again.

And God said,

“Behold, I have given you every plant yielding seed

that is on the face of all the earth,

and every tree with seed in its fruit.

You shall have them for food.

And to every beast of the earth and to every bird of the heavens

and to everything that creeps on the earth,

everything that has the breath of life,

I have given every green plant for food.” (v29-30)

This does not mean that all creatures were vegetarian.

It is connecting the third day with the sixth day.

On the third day God created the plants.

Now on the sixth day God says that his third day activity

was for man, beast, and bird.

If you try to take it as an exhaustive list of dietary regulations,

then what are the fish supposed to eat?

After all, God gave man dominion over the fish of the sea

as well as the beasts of the earth and the birds of the heaven.

What it says is that God gave grains and fruits as the foundation of our diet.

If you think about the language of blessing throughout the scriptures,

the blessed land is one that overflows with grain, wine and oil –

grain and fruit.

Indeed, one of the recurring themes in Genesis is the theme of famine:

think especially of Pharaoh's dream of the fat ears and the lean ears,

the fat cows and the lean cows.

If there is no grain, then soon there will be no meat!

Some have argued that Genesis 9 introduces animal flesh into man's diet,

but this simply cannot be.

After all, in Genesis 4:4, Abel brought of the firstborn of his flock

and of their fat portions.

Every Israelite knew what that meant.
What did Abel offer to God?
The fat, the liver, and the kidneys.
What did he do with the rest of the sacrifice?
He ate it.

Furthermore God tells Noah in Genesis 7:2
to bring seven pairs of clean animals into the ark.
Again, every Israelite would understand what this means:
a clean animal is one that you can eat!

So when God gives Adam fruits and grains to eat
this does not mean that Adam could not eat meat.

Conclusion:

*And it was so.
And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good.
And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.
Thus the heavens and the earth were finished,
and all the host of them.
And on the seventh day God finished his work that he had done,
and he rested on the seventh day from all his work that he had done.
So God blessed the seventh day and made it holy,
because on it God rested from all his work that he had done in creation.*

Even here you can learn what it means to be made in the image of God.
God blessed the seventh day and made it holy.
And he called his people – whom he made in his own image and likeness –
to rest on the seventh day.
Our Sabbath rest is a participation in his rest.

You may have noticed that for the seventh day there is no end.
All the other days end with “there was evening and there was morning,”
but the seventh day does not end in that way.
On it God rested from all his work that he had done in creation –
and that rest continues forever,
and God now calls us to enter that rest.

For God, who said, “Let light shine out of darkness,”
has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God
in the face of Jesus Christ. (2 Cor 4:6)