

WHAT ON EARTH IS GOD DOING?

Part I: IS HUMANKIND MADE IN GOD'S IMAGE?

In Genesis 1:26,27 we read, "Then God said, 'Let us make man in our image, according to our likeness'...So God created man in his own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them" (Gen. 5:1,2). The enormous importance of this truth stated by God cannot be overemphasized. I am reminded of my earliest training in public speaking where we were taught the four parts of any speech: introduction, specific purpose statement (SPS), body, conclusion. The SPS is always the most important part of any speech, since all else revolves around it. The above words of God are His SPS, around which revolves all He is doing on earth.

Unfortunately, many have interpreted these words to mean that people were made to look like God, literally, though no one would claim that Seth looked exactly like his father, Adam (Gen. 5:3). But that would mean, impossibly, that both men and women look like God. Jesus plainly stated, "God is spirit..." (Jn. 4:24). Spirit does not occupy space and time, meaning God is not confined to any one shape or place or time, because He is omni-present. It's true that the Bible makes reference to many of God's body parts, but that is only meant to be taken metaphorically, not literally.

As a left handed person, I have joked all my life how God must be left-handed. Since the ten commandments were written with the finger of God, and Hebrew is written right to left, then in order not to smear His writing, God must be left-handed. Sadly for all us left-handers, that is not true. God does not need hands or arms to grab and lift. He does not need feet and legs to ambulate, since He is already here, there and everywhere. So in the anthropomorphic sense, no, humankind is not made in God's image. So we must examine God's SPS and understand it in abstract non-literal terms.

Being made in God's image includes understanding the highest value God places on every human life, unlike the value He places on animals and plants. And so we read in Genesis 9:2-6,

"All the animals of the earth...I have given them to you for food, just as I have given you grain and vegetables....And I will require the blood of anyone who take's another person's life. If a wild animal kills a person, it must die. And anyone who murders a fellow human must die. If anyone takes a human life, that person's life will also be taken by human hands. For God made human beings in his own image" (*NLT*).

The apostle John wrote, "Whoever hates his brother is a murderer..." (I Jn. 3:15). Conversely, the scriptures teach us that we should love our brother as our self. God's instructions to Noah and his descendants, which includes all of us, was to value all people and treat them with dignity, respect, and love because God made all of us in His image.

Jesus said that if we consider our brother worthless it is the sin of murder and is worthy of eternal death (Mtt. 5:21,22). The apostle James wrote that it is a "deadly poison" when "we curse men, who have been made in the similitude of God" (Jas. 3:8-10). When we attack physically or verbally the image-bearer, we are attacking the image-maker. James was pointing out the hypocrisy of using the tongue to "bless our God and Father" (image-maker) while "we curse men" (image-bearer).

Another aspect of being made in God's image is man's "dominion...over every living thing that moves on the earth" (Gen. 1:26,28). King David wrote of man's creation, "You have made him to have

dominion over the works of your hands; You have put all things under his feet” (Psa. 8:6). Aside from humans, God has given mankind sovereignty, rule over everything on the earth, as He is sovereign over all of creation. This charge goes to the nature of man’s being, qualities such as rationality and cognitive capacity, which distinguish him from the rest of earth’s creation. Just as man should value every human life, so also should he treat all of creation with love and respect, which includes all the animals, the plants, and even the land.

Sadly, mankind as a whole has always been a broken, deformed, and marred image of God when it comes to the way he has treated his brothers and the earth. So the answer to the question: Is humankind made in God’s image? would seem to be no. But I prefer a better answer: not yet! God’s declared specific purpose for man has never been fully accomplished. The deformity of the image-bearer shows the glaring need for redemption, so that mankind can reach his ultimate value.

We are told that Jesus is “the express image of [God’s] person” (Heb. 1:3). Jesus only has ever been the full expression of the nature of God, possessing the likeness of His character. Only Jesus has ever fulfilled God’s SPS as the perfect image-bearer of God. And so we are told that in order to fulfill our full potential, we must “be conformed to the image of [God’s] Son” (Rom. 8:29).

How do we do that? The apostle Paul explained that through repentance and water baptism “our old man was crucified” (Rom. 6:3-7). He further wrote “that you put on the new man which was created according to God, in righteousness and true holiness” (Eph. 4:24). It is this “new man” which conforms to the example and teachings of Jesus, “who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him” (Col 3:9,10).

Through the “ministry of the Spirit...of righteousness” the new man is being “transformed into the same image” as the Lord (II Cor. 3:7-18). The work of the Holy Spirit dwelling in the Christian produces the “fruit of the Spirit” (Gal. 5:22-26), which is righteousness and true holiness.

There have been relatively few throughout the history of mankind who have been born again as new men, and who have been conformed to the image of God’s Son. Only they have ever fulfilled God’s purpose for man—to be made in His image.