

# Made in the Image of God

## Week 1: Introduction

### Humanity's Purpose Statement

Then God said, "Let us make humankind in our image, according to 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." So God created humankind in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.

– Genesis 1:26–27

- John Kutsko (Old Testament Scholar): "There has never been so much made, with so little, by so many."
- But this is not inappropriate: Gen 1:26–27 is as close as we come to a purpose statement for humanity in Scripture.
- But it is a statement that also invites many questions.

### Starting Questions

1. What does it mean to be made in the *image* (and *likeness*) of God and how does this truth help us live our daily lives?
2. How does the reality of the Fall (sin) affect the image of God? (Do we *still* reflect the image of God?)
3. How is the image of God redeemed in Jesus Christ?

**In just a few words, what do you think Gen 1:26–27 means when it says we are made in the image of God?**



### Some Historical Interpretations

1. *Humans resemble God in their mental and/or spiritual capacity.*
  - So Philo, Augustine, Martin Luther, John Locke, and many others.
2. *Humans resemble God in their physical form.*
  - So the Jewish rabbis, and some modern scholars such as Hermann Gunkel, Bernhard Duhm, John Skinner, and Gerhard von Rad.
  - Luther also seems to have held that the image of God refers to our physical form on some level (as well as our mental and spiritual capacity).

3. *Humans resemble God in their relationality.*
    - So, especially, Karl Barth, who emphasized the fact that he God created them *male* and *female*, as well as the plurals in Gen 1:26 (“Let *us* make”).
    - Others have held similar views including the Genesis scholar, Claus Westermann.
  4. *Humans resemble God in their function as his royal representatives on earth.*
    - So Johannes Hehn, G. von Rad, and many others since.
    - This view emphasizes that the terms *image* and *likeness* are used in many ancient cultures (e.g., Mesopotamian, Babylonian, and Egyptian) to refer to the *king* as an image of the chief deity.
  5. Dietrich Bonhoeffer: *Humans resemble God in their freedom of will and thought, meaning that we are uniquely free for God.*
  6. Gregory of Nyssa (4<sup>th</sup> century): *Humans resemble God in their incomprehensibility.*
- All of these ideas have varying degrees of merit, but none of them really address what the words “image” (*tselem*) or “likeness” (*dāmut*) mean in the context of Genesis 1–3. This is what we will explore next week.

### A Few Immediate Insights & Practical Take-Aways

1. Richard Lints: Whatever else it means to be made in the image of God, it fundamentally means that we are meant to *reflect* God, like holding a mirror up to him within creation.<sup>1</sup>
2. This also means that our meaning comes from *somewhere else*, just as a painting or reflection derives its meaning from what it reflects.
  - a. **To be made in the image of God means that we derive our meaning, purpose, and identity from God.**
  - b. It is also means that we are *not* masters of our identity. When we attempt to create our own meaning, we inevitably lose it.
3. Being made in the image of God also means that you have a significance that you did not earn and that cannot be taken from you.
  - a. The image of God is not something *achieved* in Gen 1:26-27; human beings are *made* in the image of God.
  - b. Our value is an inherent fact of our creation; we do not create it for ourselves, we do not achieve it, nor is it assigned to us by others. It is inherent in what we *are*.

Finally, Gen 1:26–27 is only the beginning of the story. “Image” language continues throughout the Bible: see Gen 5:3; 9:6; Psalms 8; 106:20; Rom 1:24-25; 8:29; 1 Cor 15:49; 2 Cor 3:18; 4:4; Col 1:15; Col 3:10.

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<sup>1</sup> Richard Lints, *Identity and Idolatry: The Image of God and its Inversion* (IVP Academic, 2015), 30–32.