

In His Image Part 2

In fashion, movies, and marketing, image is everything. But would it come as a surprise to you that image is everything in the Bible, too?

I want to look briefly at six moments in the storyline of the Bible that will help us to see that we want churches that increasingly reflect God's character as it has been revealed in His word. The Bible does tell a story, you know. Our goal here is to see if we can discern what God wants for the church in this storyline.

In the *Book of Genesis*, God created the plants and the animals "**each according to its kind**" (ESV). About humankind, Scripture reads, "**Let us make man in Our image, in Our likeness**" (Genesis 1:26). Man is not patterned after every other man. He is patterned after God. He uniquely mirrors, or resembles, God.

Today, it can no longer be taken for granted that everybody accepts the "uniqueness" of human life. One scientist was quoted as saying that the human species has no more inherent worth than the bacteria that inhabit our intestinal tracts. But ideas, just as actions, have consequences, and the idea that the human beings are nothing more than another form of biological life has consequences. Many of the more troubling aspects of modern life ultimately stem from a lessening of the priority of human life. On the other hand, a proper view of humans as unique creatures of God ought to have a very positive effect on our conduct, and especially in our treatment of others.

Given that we've been uniquely created in the image of God, humans must uniquely image God and God's glory before the rest of creation. Like a son who acts like his father and follows in his father's professional footsteps (Genesis 5:1 and following; Luke 3:38), man is designed to represent God's character and rule over creation (Genesis 1:26).

However, man decided not to represent God's rule. He revolted against God and went to work representing his own rule. God, therefore, gave man what he asked for and banished him from His holy presence.

As creatures who are made in God's image, we are each on our way to eternal *glory* or *eternal corruption* – *there is no middle ground* (2 Corinthians 3:18; see also Galatians 6:8; 2 Peter 1:4)!

Speaking of the glory of man and the choices of where we will spend eternity before us, C. S. Lewis wrote in *The Weight of Glory*, saying, "The dullest and most uninteresting person you talk to may one day be a creature which, if you saw it now, you would be strongly tempted to worship, or else a horror and a corruption such as you now meet, if at all, only in a nightmare. All day long we are, in some degree, helping each other to one or other of these destinations. It

is in the light of these overwhelming possibilities, it is with the awe and circumspection proper to them, that we should conduct all our dealings with one another, all friendships, all loves, all play, all politics. There are no ordinary people," (C. S. Lewis, *The Weight of Glory*) In the end, we convey our sense of the uniqueness of human life *not by our words, but by our deeds.*

What you and I are in this life is not the product of random chance and hapless genetics. What we are in this life is the product of Divine sovereignty. We are what we are because God determined it to be the way that it is. This was the conviction of David in Psalm 139:13-16 [RSV], who said, **13. For Thou didst form my inward parts, Thou didst knit me together in my mother's womb. 14. I praise Thee, for Thou art fearful and wonderful. Wonderful are Thy works! Thou knowest me right well; 15. my frame was not hidden from Thee, when I was being made in secret, intricately wrought in the depths of the Earth. 16. Thy eyes beheld my unformed substance; in Thy book were written, every one of them, the days that were formed for me, when as yet there was none of them.** Job also held this view: **9. Remember that Thou hast made me of clay; and wilt Thou turn me to dust again? 10. Didst Thou not pour me out like milk and curdle me like cheese? 11. Thou didst clothe me with skin and flesh, and knit me together with bones and sinews. 12. Thou hast granted me life and steadfast love; and Thy care has preserved my spirit.** (Job 10:9-12 [RSV])

Did humans preserve the image of God in the fall? Yes, Genesis reaffirms the fact that man is still made in God's "**image**" in how God views and values human life, having Moses write in Genesis 5:1 [RSV] and Genesis 9:6 [RSV], **1. This is the book of the generations of Adam. When God created man, He made him in the likeness of God. 6. Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed; for God made man in His own image.** But both image and imaging are now distorted. The mirror is bent, you might say, and so a false image is portrayed, like a grotesque carnival mirror.

God, in His mercy, had a plan to both save and use a group of people for accomplishing His original purposes for creation. He called them a "**holy nation**" and a "**kingdom of priests**" (Exodus 19:5-7), meaning they had been specially set apart to mediate, or image, God's character and glory to the nations by obeying the law He gave them (as Adam was supposed to do). Show the world what I'm like, God was saying to Israel. "**Be holy, because I am holy**" (Leviticus 11:44).

He even called this nation His "**son,**" since sons were expected to follow in their father's footsteps (Exodus 4:22-23). And God promised to dwell together with this son in the land He was giving them, a platform on which the nation could display God's glory (1 Kings 8:41-43).

Yet God also warned this son that if he failed to be obedient, God would cast him out of the land. To make a long story short, the son did not obey, and God cast him out of His presence and the land.

One of the main lessons of ancient Israel is that fallen human beings, left to themselves, cannot image God. So God sent His one and only Divine Son to be **“born in the likeness of men”** (Philippians 2:7 ESV). This beloved Son, with Whom the Father was well pleased, submitted Himself fully to the rule, or Kingdom, of God. He did what Adam did not do. He resisted Satan’s temptation: **“Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God,”** Jesus told the tempter when fasting in the wilderness (Matthew 4:4).

And Jesus did what Israel did not do. He lived entirely according to the Father’s will and law (John 8:28; see also John 6:38). This Son Who perfectly imaged His Father could say to the disciple Philip, **“Anyone who has seen Me has seen the Father”** (John 14:9). Like Father, like Son.

Looking back, the writers of the New Testament epistles would refer to Him as the **“image of the invisible God”** (Colossians 1:15) and **“the radiance of God’s glory and the exact representation of His being”** (Hebrews 1:3). As the last Adam and the new Israel, Jesus Christ redeemed the image of God in man.

Yet not only did Christ image God’s glorious holiness through obedience to the law; He displayed God’s glorious mercy and love by dying on the cross for sinners, paying the penalty of guilt they deserved (John 17:1–3).

We who were dead in our sins were made alive when we were baptized into Christ’s death and resurrection. So Paul declares: **“You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ”** (Galatians 3:26–27). And **“Because you are sons, God sent the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, the Spirit Who calls out, ‘Abba, Father’”** (Galatians 4:6–7).

What are these many sons of God to do? We are to display the character and likeness and image and glory of the Son and the Father in Heaven!

Jesus tells us to be **“peacemakers,”** since the Father has made peace between Himself and us through the sacrifice of His Son (Matthew 5:9).

Jesus tells us to **“love [our] enemies,”** since our Father in Heaven loved us, who were once His enemies (Matthew 5:45; Romans 5:8).

Jesus tells us to **“love one another,”** since He gave His own life to love us and since it would show the world what He is like (John 13:34–35).

Jesus prayed that we would **“be one,”** even as He and the Father are one (John 17:20–23).

Jesus tells us to **“be perfect,”** as our heavenly Father is perfect (Matthew 5:48).

Jesus tells us to be **“fishers of men”** and disciple makers in all the nations (Matthew 4:19; Matthew 28:19). He sends us just as the Father has sent Him (John 20:21). Like Father, like Son, and like sons.

Cleansed of their sin by the work of Christ, and granted new-creation, born-again hearts by the work of the Spirit, His people have begun to recover the perfect image of God. Christ is our first fruits (1 Corinthians 15:23). He removed the veil and opened a way for the church to behold the Father’s image once more (2 Corinthians 3:14, 2 Corinthians 3:16). We behold His image by faith now, and **“are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another”** (2 Corinthians 3:18 ESV).

Do you want to see God’s purpose for the church summed up in just two verses? Paul declares, **“*[God’s] intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms, according to His eternal purpose which He accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord*”** (Ephesians 3:10–11).

How does the church display the manifold wisdom of God? Only an all-wise God could devise a way to reconcile His love and His justice while saving a sinful people who are estranged from Him and from one another. And only an all-wise God could devise a way to turn hearts of stone into hearts of flesh that love and praise Him. May the cosmic powers in the entire universe look on and marvel.

We will image God most perfectly when we see Him perfectly in glory: **“*But we know that when He appears we shall be like Him, because we shall see Him as He is*”** (1 John 3:2 ESV). We should be holy like Him, loving like Him, and united like Him.

Did you follow the story? Here is the recap. God created the world and humankind to display the glory of Who He is. Adam and Eve, who were supposed to image God’s character, did not do this, and they failed in their mission. Neither did the people of Israel accomplish God’s will, so God sent His Son to image His holy and loving character and to remove the wrath of God against the sins of the world. In Christ, God came to display God. And in Christ, God came to save.

Now the church, which has been granted the life of Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit, is called to display the character and glory of God to all the universe, testifying in word and action to His great wisdom and work of salvation.

God is sovereign in the conclusion of life. Just as surely as the Lord God Almighty is sovereign in the creation and the continuation of human life, He is also sovereign in the conclusion of life. Neither man nor Satan has the power to create life. Neither has the ability to continue life apart from the sovereign will of God. And neither has the right to make the decision to end life. Look at what the Bible says about this matter.

God alone appoints the time of man's death. This is the clear teaching of Scripture: "***And just as it is appointed for men to die once, and after that comes judgment***" (Hebrews 9:27 [RSV]). (See also Job 12:10; Job 14:5; Job 14:14; Job 7:1; and Psalm 39:4) There is the evidence from the Old Testament record found in Daniel 5:1-13. Belshazzar was told when he would die. Jesus told a parable in the New Testament that illustrates this truth for us in Luke 12:16-20 when a man made plans for everything except his impending death. **Luke 12:16-20.** Just as surely as the Lord has a plan regarding the beginning and the middle of your life; He also has a plan for the end of your life as well. He knows the day, the hour, the minute, even the very second when you will breathe your last and you will go out into the eternity you have chosen.

Not only does God decide when we die; He also determines where we will breathe our last as well. Regardless of how you leave this world, you will leave it exactly when, where and how the Lord has predetermined it will happen. It was the Lord's will that Moses die alone with God on a mountain (Deuteronomy 34:5-8). It was God's will that Jacob die surrounded by his children (Genesis 49:33). It was God's will that Paul die at the hands of Roman executioners, and it was God's will that Jesus be sacrificed on the cruel cross of Calvary to redeem mankind from our sins.

Sometimes people leave through tragedies. Sometimes people die because of disease. Sometimes they go out of here by way of old age. Sometimes they go suddenly with the bloom of youth still on their cheeks. But, however they leave this world, it is God's will that must determine the when, the where and the how, and not the will of men. The only possible exceptions I can think of to that statement would be suicide and capital punishment. The word of God is clear. When man murders his fellow man; he is to pay for that crime with his own life (Genesis 9:6; Romans 13:4).

Whether we are talking about murder, suicide, euthanasia or abortion, man has assumed the place of God when he reaches out to take another human being's life. Each of these horrible sins ends life prematurely, and each will be judged and punished harshly by God.

Now, please do not misunderstand me. There are times when it becomes necessary to withhold further medical treatment and just allow nature to take its course. If you have had to make those decisions, my heart goes out to you! You

have not committed murder, but you have simply placed the matter into God's hands if you have had to do that. However, to put a helpless, voiceless woman to death by withholding food and water is murder! The courts of our nation failed Terri Schaivo, but this matter will be taken up in a higher court one day!

We have before us a profound and awesome truth that everyone needs to understand: **God created the first man and woman in His own image!** Think of it! God made man to be like Him! Truly, man is the most important creature among all the creatures that God made. Only man was created in the image of **God**.

I hope you agree with me that human life is precious! It is so precious that God sent His Son Jesus into this world to save life through His death on the cross (John 3:16-17). We need to pray for our nation and for our world. We have taken the first steps down a slippery slope that will lead us farther and farther away from God. We have witnessed the dawn of a new day in our country where, in the long run, no one may be safe from the death merchants. We need to take our stand, cast our votes and lift our voices in favor of life. We can make a difference and we must!

We were created unique so that God could reveal to us the wonder of His glory. Understand and cherish the unique privilege and position we have been given. Gaze up at the sky and marvel that God can know you in the vastness of such a cosmos. You may not feel significant . . . but you are. The world may not notice you, but the Father does.

Let us live – and treat all others – like *persons* . . . who are made in the very image of God Himself!

We were made to uniquely reflect the nature and character of God. How well are you reflecting the Father? Because of sin we now have a God-sized hole in our being. We are complete only when we are reunited with Him. Everyone (even those who deny it most forcefully) has an emptiness in their being that they long to fill. Most try to fill it with things: power, money, stuff, amusements, relationships, experiences. Some look to alcohol, others to drugs, others to criminal thrill seeking. Some end up giving up on life. But they are all looking. They run faster in the hope that they can silence the cry of emptiness. But the only way to fill the emptiness is to rebuild our relationship with God. We need to find, trust, and follow Jesus.

The next time you look in a mirror ask yourself that question. Ask, “Do others see Jesus in me?”

God says that life is precious. I say “**Amen!**”