

## **Examining Christian Doctrine**

### **Lesson 24: The Doctrine of Salvation Part 1 – The Image of God**

In this lesson we will begin a new doctrine of the Christian faith, and that is the doctrine of Salvation. This doctrine is at the heart of Christianity and one of the grandest themes in scripture. The first topic we will begin to look at is 'the need for salvation', which will cover the Image of God: 'Doctrine of Humanity', and the Fall: 'Doctrine of Sin'.

#### **The Doctrine of Humanity**

When looking at the doctrine of salvation, and to see what we can gain from it, we must look at what we, as humanity originally lost. To do this we will explore the Doctrine of Humanity as it relates to mankind's original relationship with God.

Here is a doctrinal statement on the Doctrine of Humanity: *We believe that in the beginning God created man in His own image and placed him in a state of glory without the least mixture of misery, from which he voluntarily by transgression fell, and by that means, brought on himself a miserable and mortal state subject to death.*

#### **I. Created in the Image of God**

Definition of Imago Dei: The Latin term "Imago Dei" means "Image of God." In Christian theology, this concept expresses the belief that human beings are created with a unique likeness to God that sets them apart from all other creatures.

Central to the Bible's teaching about mankind are the statements Genesis 1:26-27: *"Then God said, 'Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.'" 27 So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.*

The phrases both "image" and "likeness" speak of humanity's resemblance of their creator. The same language is used in Genesis 5:3 when Adam has a son: "he fathered a son in his own likeness, after his image." Just as Seth bore resemblance to his father, so Adam (and all humanity) bears resemblance to God.

There are several perspectives we can consider when it comes to views as to what it means to be created in the image of God:

##### **1. Substantive View:**

- **Sharing God's Attributes:** This view focuses on the idea that certain attributes of humanity mirror those of God. These include:
  - **Rationality:** Humans possess the capacity for reason, reflective thought, and abstract thinking, paralleling God's infinite wisdom and knowledge.
  - **Moral Agency:** The ability to discern right from wrong and to make moral choices reflects God's holiness and righteousness.
  - **Creativity:** Human creativity in art, culture, and innovation reflects God's creative power demonstrated in creation.

##### **2. Functional View:**

- **Dominion and Stewardship:** This view emphasizes the function or role that humanity plays in relation to the rest of creation.
  - **Genesis 1:26:** "Let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens..." Humanity's creation in God's image is connected with the mandate to rule and steward creation as God's representatives.
  - **The Role of Vice-Regents:** Humanity is seen as God's appointed stewards, responsible for cultivating, preserving, and ruling over creation in a way that reflects God's sovereignty, justice, and care.

### 3. Relational View:

- Emphasis on Relationships: This perspective sees the Imago Dei primarily in terms of humanity's relational capacity.
  - Relationship with God: Humanity's unique ability to know, love, and worship God reflects the relational nature of God, who is love (1 John 4:8).
  - Relationship with Others: The relational aspect of the Imago Dei is also evident in human community, family, and social structures. The creation of male and female in God's image emphasizes the importance of relationships and community (Genesis 1:27; 2:18-25).

### 4. Ontological (Being) View:

- Meaning 'Our Being Itself': This perspective sees the image of God as not something we *do*, but something we *are*.
  - Sacredness of Human Life: A human life is sacred because we are by extension the image of God in our very being, Genesis 9:6 states: "Whoever sheds human blood, by humans shall their blood be shed; for in the image of God has God made mankind.
  - Worthy of Dignity: · James 3:9 "*With it (the tongue) we bless our Lord and Father, and with it we curse people who are made in the likeness of God.*" James emphasizes that all people are made in the likeness of God, which serves as a basis for ethical treatment and respect for others.
  - Distinct from All Other Creations: The image is not a trait; it is us. We are the only living being made in God's image; thus, what this is what separates us from other created beings like angels and the animals, thus worthy of salvation.
  - Humans reflect God: humanity is to reflect the character of God in all of the world. In the ancient world, a pagan temple would contain an 'image' of the deity in order to draw worshipers toward the real god behind the image. God told the Israelites not to make any 'graven images', why? Because we are the images of God, not to be worshipped, but to point to the one who is.

## II. The Original State of Righteousness

In Christian theology, the concept of humanity's original state of righteousness refers to the condition in which Adam and Eve were created before the Fall. This state of righteousness is characterized by a state of innocence, moral purity, unbroken fellowship with God, harmony with creation, and freedom from death and suffering. Understanding this original state is crucial for grasping the full impact of the Fall and the significance of the redemption offered through Christ, which aims to restore humanity to this state of righteousness with God.

### The Nature of the Original Righteousness

Ecclesiastes 7:29 "*This only have I found: God created mankind upright, but they have gone in search of many schemes.*"

#### 1. Innocence and Purity

- Moral Innocence: Before the Fall, Adam and Eve were morally innocent. They had no experience or knowledge of sin, and their actions were free from guilt or shame. This innocence is symbolized in Genesis 2:25, where it is noted that Adam and Eve were naked and "not ashamed." This lack of shame indicates the purity of their hearts and minds.
- Purity of Intent: Their thoughts, desires, and actions were in complete alignment with God's will. There was no internal conflict or inclination towards evil, which is a stark contrast to the post-Fall condition where human desires often conflict with God's commands.

#### 2. Unbroken Fellowship with God

- Direct Communication: Adam and Eve enjoyed direct and intimate communication with God. They lived in the Garden of Eden, where God would "walk" with them (Genesis 3:8). This signifies a personal and unmediated relationship, where they could freely commune with their Creator.
- Free from Spiritual Death: Adam and Eve did not experience the effect of spiritual death such as sin, separation from God, condemnation, and judgment, along with their effects such as guilt and shame.

### **3. Dominion and Stewardship**

- **Authority Over Creation:** In Genesis 1:28, God gives humanity the mandate to "fill the earth and subdue it" and to "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." This dominion signified a stewardship where humanity was to care for and manage creation responsibly. There was also no conflict or hostility between humans and the rest of creation. The earth produced food abundantly, and there was a peaceful coexistence with all living creatures.

### **4. Immortality and Eternal Life**

- **Freedom from Physical Death:** Before the Fall, many Christians believe that Adam and Eve were created to live forever. There was no death, decay, or suffering in their experience until the fall. Proponents of this view argue that since death entered the world only as a consequence of sin (Romans 5:12), Adam and Eve must have been created immortal. Their immortality was a natural part of their being, and they would not have experienced death had they not sinned.
- However, there is an alternative view that suggests that Adam and Eve's immortality was not innate but conditional upon their access to the Tree of Life. As long as they had access to the Tree of Life, they could continue to live forever. When they were expelled from the Garden and lost access to the Tree, they became subject to physical death (Gen. 3:22-23).
- **Health and Well-being:** Along with freedom from death, Adam and Eve seemed to have experienced perfect health and well-being. Their bodies were not subject to sickness, aging, or physical decay. This state of wholeness reflected the perfection of God's creation.
- We could also point out that before the fall, there seems to be no suffering, turmoil, guilt, shame, fear, or anxiety. Adam and Eve experienced inner peace and psychological and emotional wholeness. These would also be results of the fall.

### **5. Relational Harmony**

- **Perfect Relationship:** The relationship between Adam and Eve was one of perfect harmony and mutual support. Genesis 2:18-24 describes Eve as a "helper fit for him," indicating a partnership designed for mutual fulfillment.

### **6. Freedom and Responsibility**

- **Moral Freedom:** Adam and Eve were endowed with free will, meaning they had the ability to choose obedience to God. This moral freedom was essential for true righteousness and love, as it allowed them to choose to follow God out of their own volition rather than compulsion.
- **Responsibility and Command:** The command not to eat from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil (Genesis 2:16-17) indicates that their freedom was coupled with responsibility. They were accountable to God for their actions, and their obedience was a test of their trust and loyalty.

### **7. Theological Significance of Pre-Fallen Humanity**

- **God's Perfect Creation:** The state of humanity before the Fall reflects the perfection of God's creation. Everything was "very good" (Genesis 1:31), and humanity, as the crown of creation, existed in a state that fully reflected God's intention for human life.
- **The Basis for Eschatological Hope:** The original state of righteousness and harmony serves as the basis for Christian eschatological hope. The promise of redemption through Christ includes the restoration of this original state, where believers will once again experience perfect fellowship with God, immortality, and harmony with creation in the new heavens and new earth (Revelation 21-22).

### **The Doctrine of Sin**

The problem of humanity, however, is that the image of God has been shattered by sin. Because of the fall in Genesis 3, sin enters the world. The fall of humanity raises the question whether the image of God has been lost. The answer is both No and Yes. First, the Bible indicates that fallen man retains the image of God with respect to our value and dignity. On the other hand, man has lost the vital core of the image of God in the form of righteousness and holiness in relating to him.

The result of sin, therefore, has been not the complete loss of the divine image but rather its thorough corruption. The Fall resulted in a distortion of the Imago Dei, but it did not erase it. Humanity still bears God's image, but it is marred by sin (Genesis 9:6; James 3:9).

The marred image points to the need for restoration, which is accomplished through Christ. The New Testament speaks of believers being renewed in the image of God (Colossians 3:10; Ephesians 4:24), reflecting the process of sanctification and ultimate glorification in Christ.