

IN RESPONSE - "IN GOD'S IMAGE"

by Dennis Prutow

Volume VI, Number 3, March, 1997

Part of the package in discussing evangelism is having a proper view of fallen human nature. We need a *biblical* anthropology. I want to review this biblical understanding of man. First, we look at the image of God in the human creature coming from the hand of God. What is God's image in Adam and Eve?

Second, we assess the damage wrought upon the image of God by the fall. How extensive is this damage? Third, our understanding of the pre-fall condition coupled with our view of fallen human nature affects our understanding of how we interface with other image-bearers. What, if anything, do believers have in common with unbelievers? Finally, this helps us have a proper view of regeneration. Our exploration is not an academic exercise. It is important for the evangelism, health and growth of the visible church.

The classic Reformed view of the image of God has two sides.

The Reformed distinguish between the natural and the moral image of God. The former is the broader of the two, and is generally said to consist in man's spiritual, rational, moral and immortal being.¹

God is a spiritual being. Men and women are also spiritual beings. They were created living souls (Genesis 2:7). Human beings therefore have a spiritual side. Scripture often uses the words soul and spirit interchangeably. Compare Matthew 10:38 and 27:50. Angels are spirits without bodies. Animals are bodies without souls. Human beings are body and spirit; they are spiritual beings.

As God is a rational being, human beings are also rational beings. God created us with minds. God gave us the capability of rational discourse. Thus we are able to communicate. Proverbs 1:14 says, "The mind of the intelligent seeks knowledge." Proverbs 16:9 reminds us, "The mind of man plans his way."

Calvin gives us some insight at this point. John 1:9 speaks of "the true light,

which enlightens every man coming into the world" (NASV, Margin). Calvin says that beams from this light are shed on the whole human race, as I said before. For we know that men have this unique quality above the animals, that they are endowed with reason and intelligence and that they bear the distinction between right and wrong engraven on their conscience.²

God gives human beings minds, the special gift of rationality.

God is a moral being; human beings are also moral beings. When we say we are moral beings, this means, as Calvin says, humans "bear the distinction between right and wrong on their conscience." That we are moral beings does not mean we are correct and proper in our conduct. Moral beings are often immoral in their behavior.

However, the reality of conscience betrays our moral nature. Compare Romans 2:14-15. We cannot escape our longing for justice. We want to see right, as we understand it, prevail. Injustice, as we perceive it, enrages us. We cannot escape this. We are moral beings.

Finally, just as God is immortal, humans being are also immortal. As spiritual, we will abide forever in one of two different states. Human beings will either spend eternity in the torments of hell or in the felicity of heaven. Although physical life as we know it ends, life itself does not end. Paul reminds us as Christians, "We are of good courage, I say, and prefer rather to be absent from the body and to be at home with the Lord" (2 Corinthians 5:8). Jesus warns,

Do not fear those who kill the body but are unable to kill the soul; but rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell (Matthew 10:28).

In the broad sense, human beings are spiritual, rational, moral and immortal beings. They bear God's likeness. Our first parents were also God's image-bearers in the narrow sense. Berkhof speaks of this

moral image. "The latter is the image of God in the more restricted sense, and consists in true knowledge, righteousness and holiness."³

Westminster Shorter Catechism 10 speaks of God creating man in "knowledge, righteousness, and holiness." A proof text is Colosians 3:9-10.

Do not lie to one another, since you laid aside the old self with its evil practices, and have put on the new self who is being renewed to a true knowledge according to the image of the One who created him.

Renewal to God's image involves restoration of true knowledge. Adam and Eve had true knowledge. They properly knew God. They rightly knew themselves.

Ephesians 4:24 adds to the picture. "Put on the new self, which in the likeness of God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth." The image and likeness of God includes righteousness, the ability to be righteous and to judge justly. The image of God in the narrow sense also includes holiness. Holiness refers to being and character. God is pure, without sin. There is no dark side to God or darkness in God. He is ineffable Light. God created Adam and Eve holy. God calls His creatures to this same holiness. "For I am the Lord who brought you up from the land of Egypt to be your God; thus you shall be holy, for I am holy" (Leviticus 11:45).

The image of God in the narrow sense is the moral image because it has to do with the *proper* or *improper*, right and wrong, use of other faculties. Speaking of right and wrong puts us in the moral realm. Adam and Eve had a true and *right* knowledge of God, his creation, and themselves. Their knowledge was not perverted with impure thoughts or impure motives. Able to judge justly, Adam and Eve were equipped to joyously guide the affairs of the Garden according to God's will without prejudice or bias.

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¹ Louis Berkhof, *Summary of Christian Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1969), p. 69.

² John Calvin, *The Gospel According to John*, 1-10, T. H. L. Parker, trans. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1959), p. 15.

³ Berkhof, p. 69.

IN RESPONSE - GOD'S IMAGE DEFACED AND EFFACED

by Dennis Prutow

We took a brief look at the image of God in human beings before the fall. We examined the image of God from two perspectives, the natural image, the image of God in the broad sense, and the moral image, the image of God in the narrow sense. We now assess the damage wrought upon the image of God by sin. We are like inspectors examining the scene of a great disaster.

First, we must acknowledge, there is a very vital sense in which the image of God remains after the fall. In Genesis 9:6, well after the fall, and after the great flood, God tells Noah and his sons, "Whoever sheds man's blood, by man his blood shall be shed, for in the image of God He made man." Murder is wrong. It will not go unpunished. Why? Because human beings bear God's image. An assault upon a human being is an assault upon God. Calvin puts it this way commenting on Genesis 9:6,

Men are indeed unworthy of God's care, if respect be had only to themselves; but since they bear the image of God engraven on them, He deems himself violated in their person.¹

With regard to the natural image, the image in the broad sense, Berkhof says, "This was obscured but not lost by sin."²

In other words, the natural image of God was defaced, meaning: spoiled; disfigured; marred.³ Men and women remain spiritual beings. Human beings do not remain spiritual in the sense of being properly attuned to God. This is not the case as we shall see. It does mean, however, that human beings still have souls or spirits. Fallen souls continue to exist but they are tainted and polluted with sin.

Human beings also remain rational beings. Fallen human beings still have their thinking apparatus. The mind remains in tact *as a mind* as the soul remains in tact *as a soul*. Yet the mind too

is marred and spoiled by sin. Human beings remain moral beings. Fallen human beings are not moral in the sense they do right before God. Not at all. In fact, fallen human beings continually misbehave. Although sin affects the conscience, the conscience remains a moral organ within fallen creatures. Bad behavior can still evoke bad feelings. In this sense fallen humans remain moral creatures.

Finally, fallen human beings remain immortal. They once faced eternal bliss in heaven with joy and expectation. They now ought to face the prospect of hell with fear and trepidation. On the natural level, fallen human beings are *defaced* spiritual, rational, moral and immortal beings. "Since man retained the image of God in the broader sense, he can still be called the image-bearer of God."⁴

Then there is the image of God in the narrow sense, the moral image. Regarding the moral image of God, Berkhof teaches, "This was lost by sin and is restored in Christ."⁵ The moral image of God is *effaced*, meaning: rubbed out; erased; blotted out; wiped out; obliterated.⁶ This means the obliterating of true knowledge, righteousness and holiness.

Fallen human beings therefore fail on three important counts. Fallen human beings do not have *true* knowledge. They do not have a true knowledge of God the Creator, of creation or of themselves as creatures. Not having a true knowledge of God, they descend to the idolatry of self-worship.

For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks, but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened... For they exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshipped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen. (Romans 1:21 and 25).

Further, with the loss of righteousness, fallen human beings lose their moral

bearings. They are unable to make proper righteous judgments in any area.

Finally, a fallen human being's loss of holiness means a loss of light and purity. The fallen human being is neither set aside to serve God nor is he of such a character to properly, rightly, serve God.

Because the fallen human being is devoid of true knowledge, righteousness and holiness, the sinner finds himself opposed to and hostile toward God. With regard to knowledge, he rejects God. Regarding righteousness, he rejects the way of God. Concerning holiness, he rejects the light and glory of God.

This in turn means the fallen human being misuses the life manifested in the broad image of God. Fallen human beings remain spiritual beings. Yet without true knowledge, righteousness and holiness, fallen human beings reject their spiritual nature in favor of the lie of scientific materialism. Or those who accept their spiritual nature, reject their fallenness. That humans are immortal beings also takes a back seat. The realities of heaven and hell fade. Without true knowledge, righteousness and holiness, fallen human beings bury and override the voice of conscience. Wrong becomes right. Evil becomes good. Fallen human beings stand morality on its head.

Most importantly, fallen human beings remain rational beings, they still have minds. However, without true knowledge, righteousness and holiness, fallen human beings use their minds to oppose God and His righteousness and holiness.

Fallen human beings may have gigantic intellectual capacities. They often do. Genesis 11:6 makes this startling statement regarding the fallen. "Nothing which they purpose to do will be impossible for them." Fallen human beings design rockets which go to the moon and probe deep space. Fallen human beings build computers and microscopes which probe inner space. All the while, fallen human beings wholly reject God. Natural capacities, while defaced, still abound. Moral capacities are completely effaced.

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¹ John Calvin, *Commentaries on the First Book of Moses Called Genesis* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979), p. 395.

² Louis Berkhof, *Summary of Christian Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1969), p. 69.

³ *Webster's New World Dictionary of the American Language, College Edition* (New York: World Publishing Company, 1957), p. 383.

⁴ Berkhof, pp. 69-70.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 69.

⁶ *Webster's New World Dictionary of the American Language*, p. 461

IN RESPONSE - INTERFACING WITH FELLOW IMAGE-BEARERS

by Dennis Prutow

Our previous lessons toured the two-fold image of God in the human creature and made a partial assessment of the damage done by sin on the two facets of that image. The image of God in the broad sense reveals humans as spiritual, rational, moral and immortal beings. The image of God in the narrow sense involves true knowledge, righteousness and holiness. The former was defaced by the fall, marred but not destroyed. The latter was effaced by sin, obliterated not simply blemished. I want to add a word about the moral image and then move to a discussion of how we interface with fellow image-bearers of God.

As a result of the loss of the moral image of God, fallen human beings are hostile toward God. Genesis 6:5 says,

The LORD saw how great man's wickedness on the earth had become, and that every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time.

The New International Version brings out an important aspect of the text. God described the fallen human being by saying, "every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time."

When a novice points his skis down the incline of a snowy mountainside and leans forward, he is off. There is nothing to stop him. He is at the mercy of the incline. So it is with sin. Fallen humanity, devoid of true knowledge, righteous and holiness, is *inclined* toward sin. Every inclination of his thoughts is toward sin. This is the indictment of Scripture.

The *inclination* of the fallen human being is therefore to refuse light from Scripture and light from God's Spirit. As a result, the unbeliever's understanding becomes progressively darker. Ephesians 4:17-18 explains.

So this I say, and affirm together with the Lord, that you walk no longer just as the Gentiles also walk, in the futility of their mind, being darkened in their understanding, excluded from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the hardness of their heart.

Note Paul's words. Christians must not conduct their lives as unbelievers do. What is the problem? Unbelievers are

darkened in their understanding. Why? The answer is simple. They do not have the life and the light of God. Why this absence of light and life from God?

Again, note Paul's words carefully. The problem is ignorance, *because of the ignorance that is in them*. Why this ignorance? Answer: *Because of the hardness of their heart*. The root problem is a heart problem. Unbelievers are *disinclined* to seek light from God in Scripture. *Therefore* their ignorance leads to darkness which leads to futility.

The question then becomes: How do we interface with unbelievers who are always inclined to oppose God and His glorious gospel? Do we have anything in common with unbelievers? The standard answer is a resounding negative. Believers have absolutely nothing in common with unbelievers. There is no common ground. To the chagrin of many of my brothers in the ministry, for an obvious reason, I am not so absolute.

All human beings bear the image of God. The natural image is marred, defaced, by sin and the fall. The moral image is destroyed, effaced, by sin and the fall. The moral image of God is in the process of being restored in the believer. The job is by no means complete. It will not be complete until the process of sanctification is finished and believers have the eternal joy and bliss of heaven.

With regard to the moral image of God, the image of God in the narrow sense, believers have nothing in common with unbelievers. Unbelievers do not partake of true knowledge, righteousness and holiness; neither are they inclined to do so. As just said, believers are in the process of having true knowledge, righteousness and holiness restored by Christ.

What of the image of God in the broad sense, the natural image of God? Here we find believers and unbelievers have much in common. We are both spiritual beings. We are both rational beings. We are both moral beings. We are both immortal beings. We both partake of the same fallenness. This natural image of God is marred, disfigured, spoiled, defaced.

As far as the rational capacities of unbelievers are concerned, unbelievers often outstrip believers in many areas.

The great apostle Paul acknowledged this when he said,

Consider your calling, brethren, that there were not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble; but God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the things which are strong (1 Corinthians 1:26-27).

Because of the *moral lapse*, the fall, unbelievers use their rational and intellectual abilities to oppose God. They are so *inclined*. The result is spiritual darkness. Unbelievers can and do *read and embrace* highly technical manuals on biogenetics. At the same time, unbelievers *read and reject* the Scriptures.

In addition to rational capability, each and every unbeliever also possess a conscience. Unbelievers speak of justice and becomes angry at perceived injustice. Because of the *moral lapse*, the fall, believers and unbelievers may and do differ. Unbelievers agree with believers that murder is wrong. Most unbelievers disagree with believers that abortion is wrong. They do not consider the termination of the life of an unborn human to be murder. *Because of sin*, believers may also differ among themselves on the application of Sixth Commandment, the treatment or non-treatment of the terminally ill, for example.

Finally, we live in a post-modern world. While modern unbelievers, for the most part, rejected the supernatural and immortality, post-modern unbelievers often embraces various ideas about immortality. More on this at a later time.

This means, although believers and unbelievers have nothing in common in the narrow sense of God's image, in the broad sense we have much in common. We both bear God's image. For this reason, communication is possible. For this reason, rational discussions regarding spirituality, morality and immortality are possible. Believers and unbelievers do interface with each other as fellow image-bearers of God. We do so daily.

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IN RESPONSE - THAT UGLY DISPOSITION

by Dennis Prutow

I've been accused of having an ugly disposition. My daughters respond, "Go to bed, dad!" That ugly disposition is a holdover from my former days outside of Christ. That prevalent disposition, that inclination of the heart, had to *be changed* to enable me to embrace Christ. Paul describes human inability this way.

For those who are according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who are according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit. For the mind set on the flesh is death, but the mind set on the Spirit is life and peace, because the mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God; for it does not subject itself to the law of God, for it is not even able to do so and those who are in the flesh cannot please God (Romans 8:5-8).

The word translated *mind* is not the standard word for the thinking apparatus or the understanding.¹ It is the same word found in Philippians 2:5 and translated *attitude* in the New American Standard Version, "Have this *attitude* in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus."² The unbeliever has the opposite attitude or disposition. The job description of John the Baptist shows this.

It is he who will go as a forerunner before Him in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers back to the children, and the disobedient to the *attitude* of the righteous, so as to make ready a people prepared for the Lord (Luke 1:17).³

Remember these words of Jesus?

¹οἱ γὰρ κατὰ σάρκα ὄντες τὰ τῆς σαρκὸς φρονούσιν, οἱ δὲ κατὰ πνεῦμα τὰ τοῦ πνεύματος. τὸ γὰρ φρόνημα τῆς σαρκὸς θάνατος, τὸ δὲ φρόνημα τοῦ πνεύματος ζωὴ καὶ εἰρήμη· διότι τὸ φρόνημα τῆς σαρκὸς ἔχθρα εἰς θεόν, τῷ γὰρ νόμῳ τοῦ θεοῦ οὐχ ὑποτάσσεται, οὐδὲ γὰρ δύναται· οἱ δὲ ἐν σαρκὶ ὄντες θεῷ ἀρέσαι οὐ δύνανται. The mind is ὁ νοῦς. φρονέω refers to attitude, mindset, or disposition.

²τοῦτο φρονεῖτε ἐν ὑμῖν ὃ καὶ ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ,

³καὶ αὐτὸς προελεύσεται ἐνώπιον αὐτοῦ ἐν πνεύματι καὶ δυνάμει Ἡλίου, ἐπιστρέψαι καρδίας πατέρων ἐπὶ τέκνα καὶ ἀπειθεῖς ἐν φρονήσει δικαίων, ἑτοιμάσαι κυρίῳ λαὸν κατεσκευασμένον.

But He turned and said to Peter, "Get behind Me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to Me; for you are not setting your mind on God's interests, but man's" (Matthew 16:23).⁴

Peter, your *disposition* or *attitude* is not from God but from man.

To enable a person to receive, trust and wholly follow Christ, the Holy Spirit must change the *obstinate attitude* and *hostile disposition*. We may translate Romans 8:5-8 as follows:

For those who are according to the flesh *have the disposition* of the flesh, but those who are according to the Spirit, the *disposition* of the Spirit. For the *disposition* of the flesh is death, but the *disposition* of the Spirit is life and peace, because the *disposition* of the flesh is hostile toward God; for it does not subject itself to the law of God, for it is not even able to do so and those who are in the flesh cannot please God.

The *disposition* of the flesh is death because the *inclination* of the heart is away from God. The *disposition* of the Spirit is life and peace because the *inclination* of the heart is toward God and Christ.

The natural image of God involves the presence of rationality, the conscience, the soul, and immortality. All are marred by sin but not obliterated. Fallen men and women still have minds, consciences, souls, and immortality. Even though their immortal souls are polluted by sin, fallen human beings can still use their minds and still feel guilty.

The moral image of God is obliterated, eliminated, blotted out. The fallen human being is without true knowledge, without righteousness and without holiness. In this fallen condition, without the positive impetus of true knowledge, righteousness and holiness, men and women inevitable move away from God. They are disposed to do evil and ill disposed to do good. It is that ugly disposition of which we have spoken.

From the perspective of the natural image of God, we may say the following.

⁴ὁ δὲ στραφεὶς εἶπεν τῷ Πέτρῳ· ὕπαγε ὀπίσω μου, σατανᾶ· σκάνδαλον εἶ ἐμοῦ, ὅτι οὐ φρονεῖς τὰ τοῦ θεοῦ ἀλλὰ τὰ τῶν ἀνθρώπων.

When a person is born again, there is renewal of the mind, the individual does not receive a new mind (Romans 12:2). When a person is born again, his conscience is cleansed, he does not receive a different conscience (Hebrews 9:14). Regeneration does not produce a new soul. The Holy Spirit removes the pollution of sin from the soul (1 John 1:9, Titus 3:5). The born again person remains immortal. His destination is now heaven.

For there to be renewal of the mind, individuals must embrace the light of Word of God. For the conscience to be cleansed, persons must embrace the blood of Christ. For the soul to be purged, a person must confess his sin and receive continual cleansing. None of this will take place if the Spirit does not work faith in us. Our hostile dispositions must be broken.

The Westminster Shorter Catechism says, "Christ executeth the office of a king in subduing us to himself..." (Answer 26). The proof text is Psalm 110:3, "Your people will volunteer freely in the day of Your power." How does Christ subdue us? Answer 31 of the Shorter Catechism says it is by the Spirit "renewing our wills." Again there is a proof text, Ezekiel 36:26, "I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh." When Christ, by the power of His Spirit renews our wills, there is a shift in the inclination of our hearts, a radical change in our dispositions. We are no longer hostile to God. J. I. Packer puts it this way in the Introduction to *The Bondage of the Will*.

The man who has not yet practically and experimentally learned the bondage of his will in sin has not yet comprehended any part of the gospel; for this is the "hinge on which all turns," the ground on which the gospel rests, as Luther shows in detail in the final section of his book.⁵

God bends our wills to serve Him; He realigns our hostile dispositions.

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⁵ Martin Luther, *The Bondage of the Will* (Grand Rapids: Revell, 1997), p. 45.