

The *Imago Dei* Revisited¹

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Introduction

It is axiomatic in theological studies that the less information in Scripture on a given subject, the more numerous and varied are the theories put forth to explain it. This is true concerning the *imago Dei*—the image of God in man.² The vigorous debate over the *imago Dei*, however, only serves to underscore its importance. In fact, for Lewis and Demarest, “The most important matter in Christian anthropology concerns the meaning of the proposition that God created the human person in his own image and likeness.”³

My purpose in this paper is to revisit the matter of the image of God in man. I will define the image largely on the basis of data gleaned from the opening chapters of Genesis. After defining it, I will explore the image of God in man after the fall, after conversion in Christ, and in future glory. I will argue for two aspects of the image of God in man. The first aspect remains in all men after the fall, although the fall has affected it. The second aspect likewise suffers damage though not complete destruction by the fall. It is particularly in relation to this second aspect that believers are presently experiencing renewal and will fully and perfectly reflect God’s image in future glory.

Theories Attempting to Define the Image of God in Man

Just a few passages of Scripture relate man to the image of God.⁴ Nevertheless, the Bible is clear enough on the fact itself: “God created man in His own image” (Gen 1:27a).⁵ While everyone

¹ This paper is a modified version of “Is Culture a Reflection of the *Imago Dei*?” which I presented at the ETS Eastern Region Annual Conference, April, 2004. In that paper I explored the nature of the *imago Dei* and then connected it to culture. I am limiting this paper to the nature of the *Imago Dei*.

² Throughout this paper I will use the word “man” to represent the human race. I agree with Grudem that not only does this usage have divine warrant, but a theological issue is also at stake. God’s naming the human race “man” in Gen 5:2 indicates that this is an appropriate choice that we shouldn’t avoid. Furthermore, His naming the race “man” and not “woman” “probably has some significance for understanding God’s original plan for men and women” (Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* [Leicester: IVP; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994], 440; cf. 454–68; see also Raymond C. Ortlund, Jr., “Male-Female Equality and Male Headship: Genesis 1–3,” in *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood: A Response to Evangelical Feminism*, ed. John Piper and Wayne Grudem [Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway, 1991], 98).

³ Gordon R. Lewis and Bruce A. Demarest, *Integrative Theology*, three volumes in one (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), vol. 2, 124.

⁴ Three OT passages use “image” terminology to describe man as the *imago Dei*. In Gen 1:26–27 God deliberates and creates man in His image (צֶלֶם) according to His likeness (דְמוּת). Similarly, Gen 5:1 relates that God made man in His likeness (דְמוּת). According to Gen 9:6 a murderer must forfeit his life because God made man in His image (צֶלֶם). The Apocrypha makes similar statements: God made man according to His image (Sir 17:3); and

might agree with Scripture's assertion that man is—or at least originally was—created in the image of God, many theories crowd the field in attempting to define just what that assertion *means*.

Theories that attempt to define the nature of the *imago Dei* fall into three general categories.⁶ The first are substantive theories. Such theories seek to identify some human *quality* or *characteristic* as that which defines the image of God in man. Some of the human qualities that theologians have suggested through the centuries are intellect, reason, morality, will, and spirituality. Early church fathers typically defined the *imago Dei* along these lines.⁷

The second set contains functional theories. These theories hold that the image of God has to do with the special *functions* that man performs. Functional theories usually focus on man's responsibility to exercise dominion over the earth. The Socinians of old as well as certain scholars of late have defined the image in terms of function.⁸

God made man an image of His own eternity (Wis 2:23). Two NT passages use "image" terminology in this way. 1 Cor 11:7 declares man to be God's image (εἰκὼν). Jas 3:9 states that men are made according to God's likeness (ὁμοίωσις). Three Pauline passages use the terminology differently in relation to believers: God predestined us to be conformed to the image of His Son (Rom 8:29); we are being transformed into the image of the Lord (2 Cor 3:18); and we are being renewed according to the image of God (Col 3:10; cf. also Eph 4:24). These two distinct sets of passages (man created in God's image; man renewed to God's image) help to clarify why theologians have offered a variety of explanations as to the precise nature of the image of God in man (James Leo Garrett, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 1 [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990], 394). Gerald Bray cautions us against thinking the *imago Dei* is unimportant because Scripture mentions it so rarely. He says, "The image of God in man does not occur often, but it comes at significant moments—the crowning of creation, the beginning of the genealogies and the prohibition of murder, which clearly distinguishes human from merely animal life. It also reappears in the New Testament, having been the object of considerable speculation during the intertestamental period. We might also add that the vast amount of attention paid to it both by Christian tradition and by modern scholarship (sometimes in the interests of demonstrating its insignificance!) shows that the concept cannot simply be dismissed as a matter of little or no real importance" (Gerald Bray, "The Significance of God's Image in Man," *TynBul* 42 [1991]: 201).

⁵ Scripture citations are from the NASB.

⁶ The categories are from Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999), 520–27.

⁷ According to Justin Martyr, God created humanity with the power to think, choose the truth, and do what is right (*First Apology of Justin*, 28, in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 1; available from <http://www.ccel.org/fathers2>; Internet; accessed 24 March, 2004). For Irenaeus, God gave reason to man, who "in this respect [is] like to God, having been made free in his will" (*Against Heresies*, IV.4.3, in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 1). Augustine insists that we locate the image of God in the rational/intellectual and immortal soul of man (*On the Holy Trinity*, 14.4, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 3).

⁸ The Racovian Catechism drawn up by Polish Socinians in 1609 declares the image of God to be "the authority of man, and his dominion over all inferior creatures, which result from the reason and judgement communicated to him" (Thomas Rees, trans., *The Racovian Catechism*, reprint ed. [Lexington, Ky.: American Theological Library Association, 1962], 21). Gerhard von Rad more recently asserts, "The divine likeness is not to be found either in the personality of man, in his free Ego, in his dignity or in his free use of moral capacity etc." Rather, "man in his sphere of rule as God's vice-gerent [*sic*] is summoned to represent the dominion and majesty of God" ("εἰκὼν," in *TDNT*, vol. 2, 391–92). Similarly, D. J. A. Clines holds that although "man's dominion over the animals cannot be definitive of the image ... since dominion is so immediate and necessary a consequence of the image, it loses the character of a mere derivative of the image and virtually becomes a constitutive part of the image itself" ("The Image of God in Man," *TynBul* 19 [1968]: 96). Clines later concludes, "The image is to be understood not so much ontologically as existentially: it comes to expression not in the nature of man so much as in his activity

The third set contains relational theories. These define the image of God as the unique interpersonal *relationships* that people enjoy. These relationships may be vertical (man to God) as well as horizontal (man to woman in marriage, or man to man in society). Karl Barth is perhaps the best-known representative of this sort of view.⁹

These theories are interesting and not without merit, but which if any is correct? Must we choose only one? How can we decide? We can debate the theories, but we must start with Scripture, particularly Genesis. As Barth says, it is one thing to discuss which of the many theories is the “finest or deepest or most serious.” But it is another matter to discuss the true explanation of the image of God in Gen 1:26.¹⁰ Since Gen 1:26 is where Scripture first and explicitly states that God created man in His image, I will focus on this text and its context.

The Image of God in Genesis 1:26

God declares in Gen 1:26, “Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness.” In the vast amount of literature generated by this statement, discussion has focused on three questions. First, why does God speak in the plural? Second, what is the force of the prepositions “in” (בְּ) and “according to” (כְּ)? Third, what do the words “image” (צֶלֶם) and “likeness” (דְּמוּת) mean?¹¹ I will examine these three questions in order.

The Plural

Concerning the first, Gordon Wenham lists six ways that interpreters through the centuries have understood the plural of Gen 1:26: (1) reference to the heavenly court (i.e. angels); (2) reference to Christ; (3) vestige of polytheism; (4) plural of majesty; (5) plural of self-deliberation; and (6) reference to the Spirit.¹² For various reasons the first, third, and fourth views appear least likely.¹³ The fifth view, plural of self-deliberation, seems possible in light of similar constructions (e.g. Gen 11:3–4, 11; Ps 2:3); however, it seems inadequate in the context of Gen

and function. This function is to represent God’s lordship to the lower orders of creation. The dominion of man over creation can hardly be excluded from the content of the image itself” (“Image of God,” 101).

⁹ For Barth, Gen 1:26–27 provides the key to understanding the nature of the *imago Dei*. First God reveals His own plurality—“the differentiation and relationship of I and Thou”—when He declares, “let us make man in Our image” (*Church Dogmatics* [Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1958], 3.1.192). Then God creates man as a plurality, showing that “the divine likeness of man [consists] in his existence as man and woman” (*Church Dogmatics*, 3.1.195).

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 3.1.193.

¹¹ Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, WBC (Waco: Word, 1987), 27.

¹² *Ibid.*, 27–28.

¹³ Concerning the first, angels, “any implication that others had a hand in our creation is quite foreign to the chapter as a whole and to the challenge in Isaiah 40:14: ‘With whom took he counsel?’” (Derek Kidner, *Genesis*, TOTC [Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP, 1967], 51). Furthermore, Gen 1:27 makes it clear that God alone created man (Clines, “Image of God,” 67), and that He created man “in His image” and “in the image of God,” not in the image of Himself and angels (John H. Sailhamer, “Genesis,” in *EBC*, vol. 2 [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990], 37). As for the third, polytheism, “Gen 1 is distinctively antimythological in its thrust, explicitly rejecting ancient Near Eastern views of creation” (Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 28). The fourth, plural of majesty, seems doubtful since the plural of majesty is not used with verbs (Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 28).

1–3. In Gen 3:22 God claims after the fall that sinful man “has become like one of Us, knowing good and evil.”¹⁴ The self-deliberation view for the plural in Gen 1:26 cannot account for the plural in Gen 3:22. Because of the similarity and literary proximity of Gen 1:26 and 3:22, there must be a view that can account for both of these intriguing plurals.

This leaves us with the second and sixth views, the plural as a reference either to the Spirit or to Christ.¹⁵ In light of Gen 1:2, the former seems more promising, but it may be that both options are too precise. I would rather take the plural more generally as that of the divine fullness, as Kidner does, realizing that “this fullness, glimpsed in the Old Testament, was to be unfolded as tri-unity” in the NT.¹⁶ I will have more to say on the significance of the plural forms in Gen 1:26 in the next section on the meaning of the image of God in man, particularly in connection with man created as male and female.

The Prepositions

The second issue in Gen 1:26 is the force of the prepositions כִּי and כְּ. While these prepositions differ in their basic senses, their semantic ranges overlap.¹⁷ This seems to be the case in Gen 1:26. The vast majority of translators and commentators take the כִּי as that of norm, translating כִּי בְצַלְמֵנוּ “in Our image,” and the כְּ as denoting agreement in norm, translating כְּדְמוּתֵנוּ “according to” or “after Our likeness,” making them virtually synonymous here. Clines rejects the majority view with its attending notion that God has an image and He created man in conformity with it, for God has no physical image or form after which to pattern man (Deut 4:15–18). Clines considers but rejects the possibility that God’s image is a spiritual

¹⁴ The serpent had earlier enticed Eve by promising that she would become “like God, knowing good and evil” (Gen 3:5). It seems clear that “like one of Us” means “like God.” Wenham argues that the “Us” here refers to God and the angels, based on his preferred view on Gen 1:26 (*Genesis 1–15*, 85). But that doesn’t align well with the deliberate connection between Gen 3:5 and 3:22, or with the most likely understanding of the knowledge of good and evil as the divine prerogative to decide for man what is good and what is evil (see Sailhamer, “Genesis,” 45). Sinful man became like God by deciding for himself what was good and what was evil. For more on the significance of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, see footnote 50.

¹⁵ Clines argues for the plural as including the Spirit, already introduced in Gen 1:2 as the Spirit of God at work in creation (“Image of God,” 68). The Epistle of Barnabas asserts that the Lord is speaking to the Son (*The Epistle of Barnabas*, VI, in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 1). Justin Martyr claims the same, adding the plural of Gen 3:22 as further support (*Dialogue with Trypho*, LXII, in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 1).

¹⁶ Kidner, *Genesis*, 52. Sailhamer sees v. 27 as the key contextual clue that divine plurality is in view in v. 26, which anticipates the human plurality of man and woman created in God’s image (“Genesis,” 38; see also Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, 3.1.195). Some claim that this view “imposes later trinitarian concepts on the ancient text” (The NET Bible, in loc.; available from <http://www.bible.org/netbible/index.htm>; Internet; accessed 20 February, 2004), but this is not the case. This view merely recognizes the implications of this verse and others like it (e.g. Gen 3:22) for understanding God: “God’s unity is not monolithic. . . . In the Old Testament nothing is made of this paradox, but it should not surprise us that the apparent absurdity disappears in the New Testament” (Kidner, *Genesis*, 33–34).

¹⁷ The basic senses of כִּי are spatial and temporal. However, כִּי also has a variety of circumstantial senses, one being norm—“in the manner of.” The basic sense of כְּ is comparison and correspondence. One type is agreement in manner or norm—“in the manner of” or “according to.” It is here that we see the semantic overlap between these two prepositions (Bruce K. Waltke and M. O’Connor, *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* [Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1990], 196–203).

quality, since צֶלֶם almost always refers to an actual physical object in the OT. In rare cases when it's metaphorical it still carries the idea of a shape or figure (Ps 39:6; 73:20).¹⁸

Clines takes the בְּ as denoting essence or identity, meaning “as” or “in the capacity of.”¹⁹ The proper translation would then be “let Us make man *as* our image,” or, “*to be* our image.” Clines concludes, “Thus we may say that according to Genesis 1 man does not have the image of God, nor is he made *in* the image of God, but is himself the image of God.”²⁰ This is possible if we take Gen 1:26 in isolation; however, the interchangeability of the prepositions between Gen 1:26, 5:1 and 5:3, especially in connection with the same words צֶלֶם and דְּמוּת, makes Clines’s view untenable.²¹ However we take the meaning of God’s image, God created man “in” it, or after its pattern.²²

The Words Image and Likeness

The third issue in Gen 1:26 is the meaning of “image” (צֶלֶם) and “likeness” (דְּמוּת). Beginning with צֶלֶם, the word occurs seventeen times in the OT, denoting either some physical object, mere semblance, or a likeness of some sort.²³ But what does it mean here in Gen 1:26? Based on the word’s literal sense as a physical object, and the ANE custom of using images to stand for the presence of a deity or king, Clines argues that man in his corporeal existence *is* the image of God.²⁴ As a psychosomatic unity man is “the flesh-and-blood image of the invisible God.”²⁵ As God’s image, man is the physical, visible representative of the invisible God on the earth, whom God placed here to rule the earth as His vizier.²⁶

¹⁸ Clines, “Image of God,” 74.

¹⁹ For support Clines turns to the classic example of this usage in Exod 6:3: “I appeared to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, *as* God Almighty” (בְּאֵל שַׁדַּי).

²⁰ Clines, “Image of God,” 80, emphasis original.

²¹ Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 29. Gen 1:26 speaks of God making man “in Our image” (בְּצֶלְמֵנוּ) “according to Our likeness” (כְּדְמוּתֵנוּ).” Gen 5:1 places the בְּ with the other noun from 1:26: God made man “in [His] likeness” (בְּדְמוּתוֹ). Gen 5:3 is a complete reversal of 1:26: Adam fathered a son “in his own likeness (בְּדְמוּתוֹ) according to his image” (כְּצֶלְמוֹ). The only way to explain this is to realize that בְּ and כְּ in these verses mean basically the same thing. Virtually the same is true for צֶלֶם and דְּמוּת, as we will shortly see.

²² We find a closely parallel usage of בְּ in Exod 25:40, where God tells Moses to build the articles of the tabernacle “after the pattern for them” (בְּתַבְּנִיתָם) shown to Moses on the mountain (Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 29; cf. The NET Bible, in loc.).

²³ *BDB*, 853–54. As a physical object צֶלֶם refers ten times to idols (Num 33:52; 2 Kgs 11:18; 2 Chron 23:17; Ezek 7:20; 16:17; Amos 5:26), pictures of men (Ezek 23:14), or models of tumors (1 Sam 6:5 [2x], 11). Two times it means the mere semblance or shadow of a man (Ps 39:7; 73:20). Five times it occurs in Genesis for man in God’s (1:26, 27 [2x]; 9:6) or another man’s image (5:3).

²⁴ In the ANE kings were the image or representation of a deity. Kings often placed images of themselves in the territories they ruled to represent their presence in those occupied territories (Clines, “Image of God,” 83). In the OT we read of pagan idols functioning as images or representations of a particular deity (e.g. Baal’s images in 2 Kgs 11:18).

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 86.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 89.

Without doubt Gen 1:26 links the *imago Dei* with man’s function as God’s royal representative on the earth. One only has to read the remainder of the verse to see that. However, Clines overstates the case when he insists that this is essentially all that the image is. Because Clines can only understand צֶלֶם literally as a physical object in Gen 1:26, he cannot envision a figurative sense for the word here.²⁷ But if the understanding of the preposition כִּי that I argued for earlier is accurate, then God did create man after the pattern of His own image. And since Clines is right that God has no physical form (Deut 4:15–18) after which He might pattern man,²⁸ the *imago Dei* must communicate something of the immaterial or spiritual reality of God’s nature.²⁹ This leads us to consider the word “likeness” (דְּמוּת) in Gen 1:26.

In contrast to צֶלֶם, the meaning of דְּמוּת is transparent. It is obviously related to the verb דָּמָה, “be like, resemble.”³⁰ The OT uses the noun to describe a thing’s being similar to something else.³¹ For example, Ps 58:4 declares that the venom of the wicked is “according to the likeness of” (כְּדְמוּת), or “similar to,” the venom of a serpent. Thus it seems that the second descriptor of man in Gen 1:26, דְּמוּת, helps clarify somewhat the meaning of the first, צֶלֶם. What does it mean that God created man in His image? It means that He created man after His own likeness.³²

The Meaning of the Image of God

I have concluded from Gen 1:26 that God created man in or after the pattern of His own image and according to His own likeness. But what is the image and likeness of God? It cannot be

²⁷ According to Lewis and Demarest, because Clines “begins with the common non-evangelical judgment that the person is not a composite of various parts, but is a psychosomatic unity,” Clines invariably concludes that “the whole person, not merely some higher reality, is the image of God” (*Integrative Theology*, vol. 2, 128).

²⁸ Clines, “Image of God,” 72–73.

²⁹ Besides insisting on only the literal understanding of צֶלֶם as a physical object, Clines also places too much weight on this one word in Gen 1:26. He argues that it must be the key term, since דְּמוּת follows it merely as further explanation, and דְּמוּת doesn’t have to be repeated in the summary statement of v. 27 or later in Gen 9:6 (“Image of God,” 70). However, as with Clines’s interpretation of כִּי, the interchangeability of the terms צֶלֶם and דְּמוּת in Gen 1:26, 5:1 and 5:3 casts doubt on Clines’s view that צֶלֶם is *the* key word in the debate over the meaning of the *imago Dei*.

³⁰ Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*; cf. *BDB*, 197–98. The verb and noun appear together in Isa 40:18, “To whom then will you liken (תִּדְמֶינֶיךָ) God? Or what likeness (דְּמוּת) will you compare with Him?” Cf. also v. 25. It is interesting that this passage argues for the uniqueness of the Lord, that no one is like Him (cf. Isa 46:9). In one sense this is certainly true. But in another sense man is like God. God reserves some characteristics of His nature for Himself (His incommunicable attributes) and shares others with His intelligent creatures (His communicable attributes).

³¹ Out of twenty-five usages, sixteen occur in Ezekiel, where the prophet sees visions of things having the “appearance” or “likeness” of things familiar to him—things like humans (Ezek 1:5, 2x), burning coals of fire (v. 13), wheels (v. 16), a throne (v. 26, 3x), and a rainbow (v. 28; cf. 1:10, 22; 8:2; 10:1, 10, 21, 22; 23:15). Likewise, Daniel sees a being who has the appearance of a man (Dan 10:16) and Isaiah hears a sound similar to that of many people (Isa 13:4). In 2 Kgs 16:10 the word refers to a pattern of an altar, and in 2 Chron 4:3 to figures like oxen. The last three occurrences are in Genesis, where God creates man according to (1:26) and in (5:1) His likeness, and Adam bears a son in his likeness (5:3).

³² While דְּמוּת seems somewhat to clarify צֶלֶם in Gen 1:26, their meanings overlap to the extent that one can still stand in the place of the other (cf. Gen 1:27; 5:1).

physical, for God has no physical form after which to pattern man (Deut 4:15–18). What, then, is it? Commentators exhort us to keep reading in Genesis 1, and rightly so, for Gen 1:26b–27 provides vital information for understanding what the *imago Dei* actually is.

Man as Ruler

In Gen 1:26 God deliberated not only to make man in His image, but likewise to “let them rule” over His creation. After creating man in His own image as male and female (v. 27), God blessed them to be fruitful, multiply, and fill the earth (v. 28a)—the same blessing He had bestowed upon the animals (v. 22). But God commanded mankind further to subdue the earth and rule over the animals (v. 28b).³³ Psalm 8:3–8, which many take as a poetic commentary on Gen 1:26, declares the majesty and dignity of man as God’s appointed ruler over creation. God crowns man with glory and majesty (Ps 8:5). He causes man to rule over the works of His hands; He has put all things under man’s feet (v. 6). Gen 1:26–28 makes a clear connection between man’s creation in the image of God and man’s responsibility to rule over creation.

But what is the connection between the image of God and man’s dominion? Is man’s dominion *definitive* of the image itself, or rather a *consequence* of the image? Clines argues that although “man’s dominion over the animals cannot be definitive of the image ... since dominion is so immediate and necessary a consequence of the image, it loses the character of a mere derivative of the image and virtually becomes a constitutive part of the image itself.”³⁴ Thus for Clines it is not a matter of dominion being *either* definitive *or* a consequence of the image, but rather both.³⁵

It is better, however, not to blur the line between man’s constitution and his function. Who man is and what man does are two distinct things, as the grammar of Gen 1:26–28 bears out. Verse 26 contains two separate clauses containing distinct volitional forms, the first a cohortative (“let us make”) and the second a jussive (“let them rule”), joined by the conjunctive *wāw*.³⁶ God deliberated to create man in His image and *then* assigned man his role over creation. The two are related, but separate.³⁷ Likewise, it is *after* God created man in His image (v. 27) that He blessed them and commanded them to subdue and rule creation (v. 28). God created man in His image and commanded them to rule, but the rule “merely describes the function or the consequences of

³³ Genesis 2 follows up with specific examples of man’s carrying out his God-given task to subdue the earth and rule the animals. God planted a garden in Eden (v. 8) and placed Adam into it to cultivate it and keep it (v. 15). Then God brought to Adam all of the animals He had created so that Adam would name them (vv. 19–20). To rule and subdue the rest of creation are obviously royal tasks (cf. e.g. 1 Kgs 4:21, 24) (Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*).

³⁴ Clines, “Image of God,” 96.

³⁵ While Clines argues here that dominion is a consequence and a constitutive part of the image, he later leans more toward an essentially functional definition of the image. “The image is to be understood *not so much ontologically as existentially*: it comes to expression *not in the nature of man so much as in his activity and function*” (“Image of God,” 101, emphasis added). For all practical purposes this amounts to a functional definition of the image.

³⁶ Waltke and O’Connor, *Biblical Hebrew Syntax*, 653–54.

³⁷ Lewis and Demarest observe that “the existence of a simple *wāw* (‘and’) between the statement of the person’s creation as image and the command to exercise dominion suggests that the latter is a consequence of the former ... by virtue of his ontological status as God’s image, the person is divinely entrusted with the special function of dominion-having” (*Integrative Theology*, vol. 2, 135).

the divine image; it does not pinpoint what the image is in itself.”³⁸ Thus a more fundamental question presents itself: what is it about man that *qualifies* or *enables* him to rule over creation? It is this question of man’s *capacity* to rule that gets us closer to the definition of the image of God in man.

Man as Male and Female

The second contextual element that commentators point out to us from Gen 1:26–28 appears in v. 27: God created man in His image *as male and female*. Here I return to the matter of the plural forms in Gen 1:26. I agree with Sailhamer that this verse contains expressions of God’s plurality as He sets out to make man in “Our image,” which anticipates His creation of man as a plurality of male and female in v. 27.³⁹ The link between man in God’s image and man as male and female seems clear in light of the structure of v. 27:

- A so God created man (וַיִּבְרָא אֱלֹהִים אֶת־הָאָדָם)
- B in His image (בְּצִלְמוֹ)
- B’ in the image of God (בְּצֶלֶם אֱלֹהִים)
- A’ He created him (בָּרָא אֹתוֹ)
- B” male and female (זָכָר וּנְקֵבָה)
- A” He created them (בָּרָא אֹתָם)

We see that B” parallels B’ and B—i.e., the phrase “male and female” parallels the phrases “in the image of God” and “in His image.” Therefore, this verse seems to forge an intentional link between God’s creation of man in His image and God’s creation of man as male and female. This pattern holds true in the parallel summary statement of Gen 5:1b–2a:

- A when God created man (בָּרָא אֱלֹהִים אָדָם)
- B in the likeness of God (בְּדְמוּת אֱלֹהִים)
- A’ He made him (עָשָׂה אֹתוֹ)
- B’ male and female (זָכָר וּנְקֵבָה)
- A” He created them (בָּרָאָם)

While differing from Gen 1:27 in some incidentals (image vs. likeness, create vs. make), this passage contains the same structure: the phrase “male and female” parallels the phrase “in the likeness of God.”

Now we must address the same matter that arose in the case of man’s dominion: what is the connection between God’s creation of man in His image and His creation of man as male and

³⁸ Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 32. Bray concurs, observing that “the concept of dominion, however important in itself, is merely an attribute of the *tselem* and does not constitute part of its essence” (“Significance of God’s Image,” 197).

³⁹ Sailhamer, “Genesis,” 38.

female? Is man as male and female *definitive* of the image, or merely a *consequence* of it? For Karl Barth it is definitive. After pointing out the connection in Gen 1:27 and 5:1–2 between man in the image of God and man as male and female, Barth asks,

Could anything be more obvious than to conclude from this clear indication that the image and likeness of the being created by God signifies existence in confrontation, i.e., in this confrontation, in the juxtaposition and conjunction of man and man which is that of male and female, and then to go on to ask against this background in what the original and prototype of the divine existence of the Creator consists?⁴⁰

There are several problems with Barth's relational view of the *imago Dei*, chiefly the existential philosophy behind it. Existentialism deemphasizes essences or substances. The important question to ask of anything is not "What is it?" but simply "Is it?" It is not the substance but the experience of a thing that defines it. This is why for Barth the image "is not an entity that a human possesses so much as the experience that is present when a relationship is active."⁴¹ A related problem, then, is that Barth's view fails to address a more fundamental question: what is it about man that *enables* him to have relationships with God and his fellows that no other creature can have?⁴² As with the functional view, this question exposes the inadequacy of the relational view in defining the image of God. The underlying *capacity* that man possesses to rule God's creation and relate to God and his fellows is what brings us to the heart of defining the image of God in man.⁴³

As important as the concepts of rule and relationships are to the discussion of the image of God in man, they do not finally define it for us. Granted, Gen 1:26–28 bypasses a concise definition of the image of God in order to focus our attention on the *results* of God's creating man in His image, which reveal His *purposes* for thus making man: that man might rule God's creation and relate to God and his fellows in a special way. Nevertheless, there is plenty of evidence in the opening chapters of Genesis to point us to a substantive approach in defining the image of God in man.

Man's Capacity to Rule and Relate

The opening pages of Scripture present a sharp contrast between God's creation of man and His creation of the animals. The latter appears indirect and less personal. God declared, "Let the

⁴⁰ Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, 3.1.195. Barth goes on to ask, "But what is the original in which, or the prototype according to which, man was created? We have argued already that it is the relationship and differentiation between the I and the Thou in God Himself. Man is created by God in correspondence with this relationship and differentiation in God Himself: created as a Thou that can be addressed by God but also as an I responsible to God; in the relationship of man and woman in which man is a Thou to his fellow and therefore himself an I in responsibility to this claim" (*Church Dogmatics*, 3.1.198).

⁴¹ Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 527.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 530.

⁴³ As Bray puts it, the "relationship between Adam and Eve, and that between men and the rest of creation is specified in connection with the image, but as a consequence and not as an essential part of it" ("Significance of God's Image," 223).

waters teem,” “let birds fly,” and “let the earth bring forth living creatures” (Gen 1:20, 24). In contrast, God created man directly and personally. God deliberated, “Let us make man” (v. 26), and personally formed an individual man and an individual woman (v. 27; 2:7, 22). Also distinct from the animals was God’s two-stage creation of man. First God formed man’s body from the ground, and then He breathed the breath of life into him (2:7).⁴⁴

Furthermore, God apparently did not create animals individually. Instead, He appears to have created them *en masse*—He filled the waters with sea creatures, the air with birds, and the earth with land animals all at once—and blessed them corporately to procreate. However, God formed only one man and one woman, and brought them together in a unique, one-to-one, one-flesh relationship (2:7, 20–25). Finally, God’s blessing of man differs markedly from that of the animals. While God blessed them all equally to be fruitful, multiply, and fill the earth (1:22, 28a), He blessed man further to rule over the animals (1:26, 28) and subdue the earth (v. 28). But we can go beyond these basic distinctions to describe the immaterial *nature* of the man God created. We can do this from information gleaned from the Genesis narrative.

Intelligence

God gave man *intelligence*, the human faculty of knowing and reasoning.⁴⁵ God made man a rational creature. God commanded man to rule the animals and subdue the earth (1:28). God put man into the garden to cultivate it and keep it (2:15). God brought the animals to man for him to name (v. 19). These all demanded intelligence. Hand in hand with intelligence came language.⁴⁶ Not only did God speak to the man (2:16–17; 3:9, 11) and to the woman (3:13a), but they were able to speak with God (3:10–13) and with each other (2:23; 4:1, 25) right from the beginning. God created man with intelligence, which included the gift of language.⁴⁷

⁴⁴ The text does, however, reveal some similarities between man and animals: like the animals, man’s body came from the earth (cf. 1:24; 2:7a); and like the animals man was a “living being” (חַיָּה נֹפֵשׁ; cf. 1:21, 22, 24; 2:7b). Man was special but still an earthly creature (cf. 1 Cor 15:45–49).

⁴⁵ Intelligence is the ability to “use one’s existing knowledge to meet new situations and to solve new problems, to learn, to foresee problems, to use symbols or relationships, to create new relationships, to think abstractly ... to perceive one’s environment, to deal with it symbolically, to deal with it effectively, to adjust to it, to work toward a goal” (Philip Babcock Gove, ed., *Webster’s Third New International Dictionary of the English Language*, unabridged ed. [Springfield, Mass.: Merriam-Webster, 1993], 1174).

⁴⁶ Language is the “systematic means of communicating ideas or feelings by the use of conventionalized signs, sounds, gestures, or marks having understood meanings” (Gove, *Webster’s Third New International Dictionary*, 1270).

⁴⁷ Related to intelligence is aesthetic sense, which is sensuous cognition or that which involves feelings in contrast to strict ratiocination (Gove, *Webster’s Third New International Dictionary*, 34). With this sense man can appreciate beauty and create artistic beauty of his own (Anthony A. Hoekema, *Created in God’s Image* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986], 70–71). We see Adam’s aesthetic sense in his exclamation regarding the woman God gave him, which is the first piece of poetry in the Hebrew Bible (Gen 2:23).

Volition

Along with intelligence God gave man *volition*—the ability to will or choose a course of action or an end for which to strive.⁴⁸ The same tasks that required intelligence called for volition. Adam needed to make thoughtful choices as he tended the garden (2:15), named all the animals (vv. 19–20), and named the woman (v. 23). God’s commandment regarding which fruit to eat and which fruit not to eat likewise required Adam and Eve to make thoughtful choices (1:16–17). God created man with volition, the power of thoughtful choice.

Morality

God made man morally responsible. This is related to volition. God not only endowed man with the ability to make thoughtful choices generally, but also specifically to make moral choices—choices “capable of being judged as good or evil or in terms of principles of right and wrong action.”⁴⁹ In the world God created there was potential for good and evil choices. God permitted man to eat from many trees in the garden (1:16), but prohibited him from eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (v. 17a).⁵⁰ It was a moral choice and a matter of life or death for man (v. 17b; cf. v. 9; 3:22). God created man morally responsible for his choices and actions.⁵¹

⁴⁸ Gove, *Webster’s Third New International Dictionary*, 2562.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 1468.

⁵⁰ There are two usual interpretations of the “tree of the knowledge of good and evil.” First, by eating the fruit, man would come to know by experience the good he had given up and the evil he had earlier known only by name. Second, the tree was God’s test of Adam’s obedience, so that God would know whether Adam would cling to the good (obedience) or choose the evil (disobedience). Shedd sees both as true (William G. T. Shedd, *Dogmatic Theology*, reprint ed. [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1971], vol. 2, 154). Chafer concurs (Lewis Sperry Chafer, *Systematic Theology* [Dallas: Dallas Seminary Press, 1947], vol. 2, 211–12). However, in Gen 3:22 God states that by eating the fruit Adam became like God, knowing good and evil. This cannot mean that God had likewise committed evil and thus knew it by personal experience. Furthermore, Gen 3:22 also shows that Adam’s knowledge is at issue, not God’s. Thus, a third view is better: by eating the fruit Adam took to himself the divine right to declare what is good and evil. The underlying idea of the tree and the command is that only God knows what is good and evil. Man’s task is not to decide for himself what is good and evil, but to follow God’s assessment of good and evil. By eating what was forbidden by God, Adam rejected God’s knowledge and decided for himself what was good and evil. It is in this sense of moral self-determination that Adam became like God (see Sailhamer, “Genesis,” 45).

⁵¹ Not only did God make man moral in the sense of morally responsible, but also in the positive sense of morally good (1:31). Nevertheless, man’s goodness was not perfect like God’s, but rather creaturely and unconfirmed; he could and did lose this moral goodness when he chose to disobey God (Charles C. Ryrie, *Basic Theology* [Winona Lake, In.: BMH Books, 1986], 202). Amazingly, Bray argues that Adam had no moral awareness before the fall because God forbade him to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. When Adam ate from that tree God said Adam had become “like one of Us, knowing good and evil.” Bray takes this to mean that Adam only attained moral awareness after the fall. But this reflects a misunderstanding of the tree. For Adam to now know good and evil was not to finally attain moral awareness, but rather to usurp the divine prerogative of determining what is good and evil (see my previous footnote). This is why there was a grain of truth in Satan’s lie of Gen 3:5: if Adam and Eve ate they would indeed become like God in the sense of exercising moral self-determination. But grasping that prerogative from God brought them moral ruin. Adam certainly possessed moral awareness before the fall. Bray argues that the prelapsarian Adam’s “blessedness is attributed to Adam’s obedience, not to his consciously moral behavior” (“Significance of God’s Image,” 222). But how could Adam obey God’s command without consciously making a moral choice? How could God set before Adam a moral choice—a choice between good and evil—if He hadn’t first created Adam with moral sense?

Spirituality

God formed man from the ground and “breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being” (2:7). Animals were also “living beings” (1:21, 22, 24) “in whose nostrils was the breath of the spirit of life” (7:22). Therefore, the last clause of 2:7 probably means simply that “man became alive” or “started to live.” Nevertheless, it seems significant that only man, not the animals, received the breath of life from God directly.⁵²

There are other indications in the text of man’s spirituality or affinity to God.⁵³ God had person-to-person fellowship with man alone, not with the animals (1:28–30; 3:8–9). God commanded man alone to obey His moral directives, not the animals (2:16–17). God held man alone accountable, not the animals, for moral choices (3:9–13). God offered to share eternal life with man alone, not with the animals (2:9, 16; 3:22).⁵⁴ So hand in hand with granting man intellect, volition, and moral responsibility, God made man a spiritual being, possessing the ability to commune with God and share in His very life.⁵⁵

Summary of the Image

God created man “metaphysically as a complex material-immaterial unity.”⁵⁶ The creation narrative paints a functionally holistic portrait of man, suggesting a “functional integration or unity of the psychophysical totality” which is man.⁵⁷ Nevertheless, man is

constituted from two different and mutually irreducible sources, elements, ingredients, “stuffs,” or principles. First, Adam is *adamah*, from the earth, the dust (*’apar*) of the ground. . . . Earth is the “stuff” or substance, if you will, of which our bodiliness is made. . . . But that body is still lifeless. Thus a second ingredient must be added: the *ruach* or *neshama*, the life-force or power of breath which comes from God. . . . Aside from their both being created by God, dust and life-breath may have no properties whatsoever in common. But whatever each is, they amount to a mutually irreducible duality which God puts together to get one person.⁵⁸

⁵² Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 60–61. Moses might also be making a connection between God’s creating man in His image in 1:27 and His breathing life directly into him in 2:7. To bear God’s image is to possess something of the very nature of God Himself.

⁵³ Man is spiritual in the sense that he can “act in ways that are significant in the immaterial, spiritual realm of existence” (Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 446).

⁵⁴ Though not yet revealed in the opening narrative of Genesis, another clear scriptural indication of man’s spiritual life in God’s image is his immortal soul (Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 446; Augustine, *On the Holy Trinity*, 14.4, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 3).

⁵⁵ According to Genesis, “Man is made for personal and endless fellowship with God, involving rational understanding (Gen 1:28ff), moral obedience (2:16–17), and religious communion (3:3)” (Carl F. H. Henry, “Image of God,” in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Walter A. Elwell [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1984], 548).

⁵⁶ Lewis and Demarest, *Integrative Theology*, vol. 2, 134.

⁵⁷ John W. Cooper, *Body, Soul, and Life Everlasting: Biblical Anthropology and the Monism-Dualism Debate*, reprint ed. (Vancouver: Regent College, 1995), 48.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 52. Thus with Cooper I take a holistic view of man with regard to his function and a substance dualism or dichotomy view of man with regard to his essence.

God gave of His divine “life-breath” to man alone. This not only made man a living and breathing creature, but also a thinking, speaking, volitional, moral, and spiritual being. These aspects of God’s own nature which He granted to man at creation constitute the *imago Dei*. In this sense God created man after the pattern of His own nature, for the Creator God is likewise a living (Gen 1:1), thinking, speaking (v. 3), choosing (v. 5a), deliberating, creating (vv. 26–27), evaluating, and morally judging (v. 31a) spiritual being (v. 2). It seems defensible from the opening pages of Scripture to argue that the *imago Dei*, the “likeness of God,” according to which God created man, is the complex of uniquely personal characteristics that God imparted to man at creation, which adhere to the immaterial aspect of man’s being.⁵⁹ God created man to be a personal, spiritual, God-like being.

Corollaries of Rule and Relationships

Man’s rule over creation and his relationships with God and his fellows are important corollaries of the image, since they reveal God’s purposes in creating man to bear His image. The corollary of relationships shows us that God did not create man “for existence in isolation, but ... in community, with his mate, with other human beings, and with God.”⁶⁰ The corollary of rule shows us how God desired that man, “as the unique representative of God, should exercise stewardship over the lower forms of earthly life.”⁶¹ Thus man’s rule and relationships are “consequences or applications of the image rather than ... the image itself. Although very closely linked to the image of God, experiencing relationships and exercising dominion are not themselves that image.”⁶² Rather, they reveal God’s purposes in creating man in His image: God created man in His image *so that* man could enjoy personal relationships with God and his fellow man, and *so that* man would rule the earth as God’s royal representative.⁶³

Question of the Body

I stated above that God created man in His image to function holistically as a complex material-immaterial unity. This raises the question of the body: what is the relationship between the *imago Dei* and the physical body of man? Is man’s body in any way the image of God or at least some aspect of it? Earlier when discussing the meaning of אִמָּגוֹ דֵי אֱלֹהִים, I claimed that since God has no physical form (Deut 4:15–18) after which He might pattern man, the *imago Dei* must communicate something of the immaterial or spiritual reality of God’s nature. The connection I

⁵⁹ Garrett claims this view is “incompatible with the Pauline texts relative to the *imago Dei*, which uniformly presuppose that the image must be renewed or restored” (*Systematic Theology*, vol. 1, 400). However, Garrett himself acknowledges earlier that 1 Cor 11:7 seems to refer to the image as something humans have by virtue of creation. Either Paul is incoherent, claiming in one place that the image remains after the fall and in another that the image was lost and needs to be restored, or perhaps we ought to understand Paul’s renewal passages in terms of redeemed man’s restoration to a complete or full expression of God’s image (see Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 445). As we will see later, this is what Paul seems to mean when he describes our future conformity to Christ, who is the perfect image of God (Rom 8:29; 2 Cor 3:18; Col 3:10; cf. Eph 4:24).

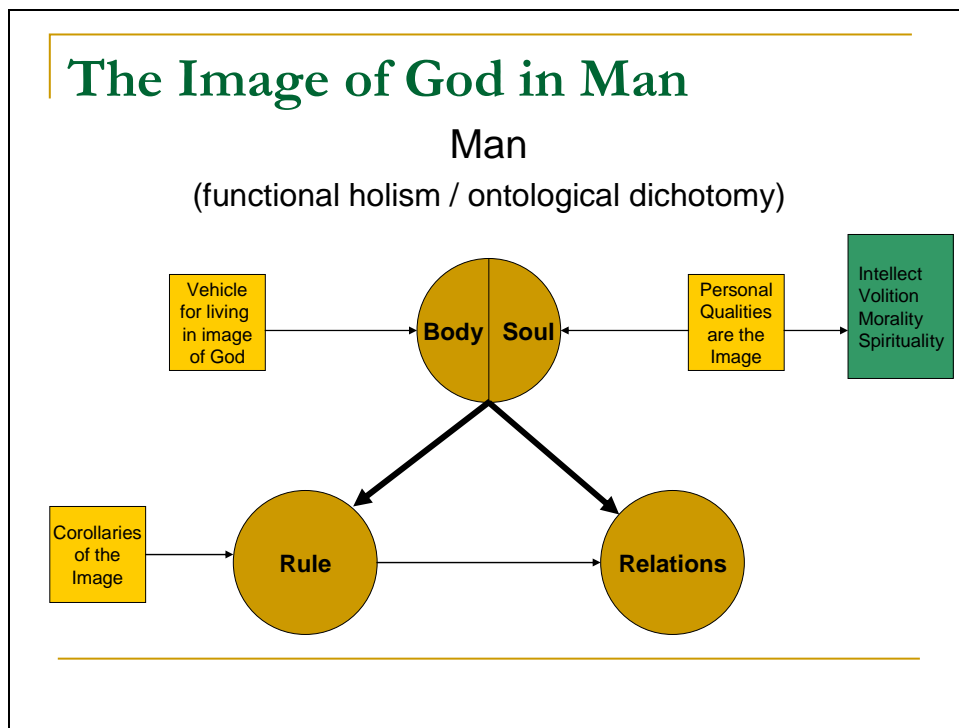
⁶⁰ Lewis and Demarest, *Integrative Theology*, vol. 2, 135.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 532.

⁶³ Hoekema concurs, calling the image of God “the entire endowment of gifts and capacities that enable man to function as he should in his various relationships and callings” (*Created in God’s Image*, 70–71).

see between the *imago Dei* and man's body is this: the body is the *vehicle* which enables man to function on this earth as a human being created in God's image. For example, with his eyes man sees even as God sees, although God does not need physical eyes to do so. With his brain man thinks and with his hands he accomplishes his heart's desire, even as God thinks, plans, and accomplishes His own will. The one-flesh union of marriage pictures man's spiritual union with His Creator as well as the triune fellowship of the Godhead. Man's ability to reproduce children in his own image and in the image of God is a reflection of God's power to create human life. Man's body is not the *imago Dei* itself (contra Clines); rather, the body is the vehicle which enables man to function on this earth in God's image particularly in relation to the two important corollaries of ruling God's creation and enjoying personal relationships with God and his fellows. Altogether, then, the image of God in man as personal characteristics, the corollaries of rule and relations, and the body as the vehicle for living in God's image form a composite picture of man in his being and function as seen in the following diagram:



The Post-Fall Image of God

How did the fall affect the image of God in man? According to Pelagius it had no affect. The *imago Dei* is man's faculties of reason to rule creation and his free will to serve God. Adam's descendents possess the same intellectual and moral capabilities as he did before the fall.⁶⁴ For Pelagius, then, the *imago Dei* was unaffected by the fall. Clines takes the same view, albeit for a

⁶⁴ Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1910), vol. 3, 802–9.

different reason.⁶⁵ But for whatever reason it's held, the view that the fall didn't affect the image of God in man doesn't hold up against Scripture. Man's death (Genesis 5) and moral corruption (Genesis 6) are enough to show that the fall affected the image of God in man.⁶⁶ Furthermore, if the image didn't even suffer a partial defacement by the fall, why do the redeemed need renewal to the image of God in Christ (Rom 8:29; 2 Cor 3:18; Eph 4:24; Col 3:10)?

At the other end of the spectrum was Luther, who defined the image exclusively as the righteousness, holiness, and wisdom which God granted man at creation. When man sinned he forfeited this original state of holiness, thus losing entirely the image of God.⁶⁷ For Luther, then, the *imago Dei* was obliterated by the fall. But how can we reconcile this with Gen 9:6, 1 Cor 11:7, and Jas 3:9, which imply that fallen man remains in the image and likeness of God?

Early church fathers took a mediating position that the fall marred but did not obliterate the image. Irenaeus did this by distinguishing image from likeness. The image was the endowments of reason and free will, which persist at least to some degree after the fall.⁶⁸ The likeness, however, was a spiritual endowment of grace which man lost in the fall but regains through redemption.⁶⁹ But this view does not hold up under scrutiny. There is no evidence in Gen 1:26 and its context for such an understanding of these terms. The words "image" and "likeness" and the prepositions "in" and "according to" are essentially interchangeable in Gen 1:26, 5:1, and 5:3. Furthermore, post-fall man remains in the likeness of God, and not just in His image (Jas 3:9).

Following Irenaeus, later Catholic theologians defined the image as the natural powers of reason and will retained after the fall, and the likeness as the *donum superadditum*, the added gift of righteousness, lost at the fall and regained in salvation.⁷⁰ However, because mankind retains the image intact, everyone is capable of gaining true knowledge of God through reason alone (natural theology) and doing good deeds apart from grace.⁷¹ But this Catholic development of Irenaeus's view does not agree with the testimony of Scripture that the fall has seriously marred the human faculties of reason and volition to the extent that fallen man actively suppresses the truth of God (Rom 1:18), does not know God or seek Him (Rom 3:11), and cannot subject himself to God (Rom 8:7) or please Him (Rom 8:8; Heb 11:6).

⁶⁵ For Clines the whole man is the *imago Dei*, the "visible corporeal representative of the invisible, bodiless God." Passages like Gen 9:6, 1 Cor 11:7, and Jas 3:9, which prove that man is still the image of God, afford "no indication of a loss, or even a partial defacement of the image" ("Image of God," 100–101, emphasis added).

⁶⁶ Pelagius argued that physical death was a law of nature that man would have experienced without sin, and that passages mentioning death as the consequence of sin speak of moral corruption or eternal damnation (Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, vol. 3, 804). But there was only life, not death, for man before the fall. Furthermore, spiritual death, or man's loss of life enjoyed in fellowship with God, was the natural inheritance of the entire race from Adam (Eph 2:1–3; Rom 5:12).

⁶⁷ Jaroslav Pelikan, ed., *Luther's Works* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1958), vol. 1, 61–63.

⁶⁸ Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, IV.4.3, in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 1.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, V.6.1

⁷⁰ See Lewis and Demarest, *Integrative Theology*, vol. 2, 126 for supporting quotations from Lombard, Bonaventure, and Aquinas.

⁷¹ Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 523.

Scripture teaches that man remains in the image of God after the fall (Gen 9:6; 1 Cor 11:7; Jas 3:9). However, fallen man “is certainly not as fully like God as he was before.”⁷² Earlier I defined the *imago Dei* as the complex of uniquely personal characteristics that God imparted to man at creation, which adhere to the immaterial aspect of his being. How did the fall affect these personal characteristics? The Genesis narrative shows us how. Starting with intelligence, man was still a thinking and speaking being after the fall (Gen 3:10). But something was now wrong: he didn’t think or speak the truth. Adam and Eve both deflected blame through rationalization, a hallmark of intellectual depravity (vv. 12–13).⁷³ As for volition, man retained the power of thoughtful choice, but his bent was now toward wrong choices (4:8, 23; 6:5; 8:21). Morally, fallen man remained responsible for the moral choices he made (3:11, 13; 4:7), but he lost the moral goodness of his character (6:5). Spiritually, sinful man cut himself off from face-to-face personal communion with God (3:10). Furthermore, he forfeited the uninterrupted enjoyment of eternal life in fellowship with God (vv. 22–24). Nevertheless, his soul remained immortal after the fall, and though fallen he is redeemable.

Besides the image itself, the important corollaries of rule and relationships were affected by the fall as well. Ruling a cursed and uncooperative creation was now toilsome and futile (Gen 3:17–19). Bearing children was now painful (v. 16a). Man still sought relationships in marriage and society, but they were now marred by sin (v. 16b; 4:8, 19, 23).

The fall affected the entire man, body and soul. His body dies, returning to the dust from whence it came (Gen 3:19). Thus the body, that vehicle by which man is to function on this earth in God’s image, suffers the corrupting effects of sin. As for man’s soul, the personal qualities that liken him to God formally remain, but they are twisted and corrupt in their operation.⁷⁴ The cause was the sinful desire to “be like God” (v. 5) and the ensuing rejection of God’s authority through disobedience. Though created in God’s image, man sought the impossible: equality with God. By thus cutting himself off from God, man gained only death and the distortion of all that he was and was meant to be in fellowship with his God.⁷⁵

Fallen man now uses the dull and damaged tools of his heart and mind to serve himself, sin, and the devil instead of God. He goes astray from the womb (Ps 58:3). His heart is deceitful and

⁷² Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 444.

⁷³ To rationalize is to “provide plausible but untrue reasons or motives for a course of conduct” (Gove, *Webster’s Third New International Dictionary*, 1885).

⁷⁴ Carl Henry distinguishes the formal and material image of God. The fall is not destructive of the formal image (man’s personality, i.e., his moral responsibility and intelligence), but the material image (man’s knowledge of God and God’s will for man) suffers distortion though not demolition (“Image of God,” 547). The recovery of what Henry calls the material image is presently taking place in the believer’s renewal to a true knowledge of God and to the righteousness and holiness of the truth (Col 3:10; Eph 4:24). Hoekema distinguishes between the structural and functional aspects of the image. Fallen man still possesses the gifts and capacities with which God has endowed him, but he now uses these gifts in sinful and disobedient ways. Thus the believer’s renewal in God’s image enables him to once again use his God-reflecting gifts in such a way as to image God properly (*Created in God’s Image*, 72). I will say more about the renewal to God’s image later.

⁷⁵ God made man for personal and endless fellowship with Him, which is why He gave man rational understanding, a moral character, and spiritual life (Henry, “Image of God,” 548). Cutting himself off from God could only bring about a distortion of those qualities in man.

desperately wicked (Jer 17:9). His mind and conscience are corrupted (Titus 1:15). He is darkened in understanding, excluded from the life of God, ignorant, and hard-hearted (Eph 4:18). He is foolish, disobedient, deceived, and enslaved to lusts and pleasures (Titus 3:3). Yes, the image of God in man remains after the fall, but it is badly marred and in need of restoration and renewal in Christ.

The Image of God Renewed in Christ

Two times the NT reconfirms man's creation in the image of God. Jas 3:9 reminds us that men have been made according to the likeness of God (καθ' ὁμοίωσιν θεοῦ). In 1 Cor 11:7 Paul calls man the image and glory of God (εἰκὼν καὶ δόξα θεοῦ).⁷⁶ Neither of these passages limits this truth to believers. Mankind generally was not only created in God's image, but remains in God's image even after the fall.

There is another set of NT passages, however, which takes this discussion in another direction. The apostle Paul speaks of a renewal to the image of God for the believer. This has created controversy over the image of God. If man is still in the image of God after the fall, then why and in what sense does he need to be restored to that image? Let's examine these Pauline passages and see if we can answer this question.

There are nine occurrences of the word εἰκὼν in Paul's writings. Three do not appear to be directly relevant to the discussion of the image of God in man.⁷⁷ 1 Cor 11:7, as we have seen, recalls the truth from Genesis that God created man in His image. The remaining five usages fall

⁷⁶ In contrast, Paul adds, the woman is the glory of man. This in no way demeans the woman or means that she is inferior to man or created in something less than God's image. Gen 1:27 makes clear that male and female were both created in God's image. Rather, seeing as how Paul has already set forth a line of functional authority from God the Father to Christ, man, and woman (v. 3), and how he later contrasts dishonor with glory (vv. 14–15), it seems here in v. 7 that Paul's point is this: man honors his functional authority, God, when he functions appropriately as a man, while woman honors her functional authority, man, when she functions appropriately as a woman. To do otherwise is to bring shame on the one whose glory one is intended to be (Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, NICNT [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987], 516). At first glance Paul's statement about man being God's image might seem to give credence to Cline's assertion that man is created "not *in* God image ... but *as* God's image" ("Image of God," 101, emphasis original). However, while Paul is certainly alluding to Gen 1:26, he is not trying to interpret it. His interest here isn't finally in man being God's image, but rather in his being God's glory (Fee, *1 Corinthians*, 515). Barrett observes that "in this context Paul values the term image only as leading to the term glory" (C. K. Barrett, *A Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians* [New York: Harper & Row, 1968], 252).

⁷⁷ These three appear in Rom 1:23 and 1 Cor 15:49. The reference in Rom 1:23 to an image in the form of man (and of birds, etc.) most likely refers to the human shape reproduced in idols and not to the image of God in man (Bray, "Significance of God's Image," 210). The two uses of the word εἰκὼν in 1 Cor 15:49 likewise refer to the body. Adam had a natural body fit for life on earth (vv. 45a, 46a, 47a), and we have borne that earthly image (vv. 48a, 49a). Christ, however, by virtue of His resurrection, has a spiritual body fit for life in heaven (vv. 45b, 46b, 47b), and we who are in Christ will bear that heavenly image (vv. 48b, 49b). The context here is the difference between the present body and the resurrection body. In the resurrection the "body of our humble state" will be transformed into the likeness of Christ's glorious body (Phil 3:21). Thus in heaven we will be like the glorified Christ in our bodies (Hoekema, *Created in God's Image*, 92–93). The resurrection does relate indirectly to the image of God in man in the sense that God gave man his body as a vehicle by which he could live on this earth in God's image and carry out the corollaries of rule and relationships. When man finally receives his resurrection body he will have the perfect vehicle to be and do what God wills.

into two distinct categories: (1) Christ as the image of God; and (2) believers as renewed to the image of God. Let's examine these five passages and draw some conclusions regarding their relevance to the image of God in man.

Christ as the Image of God

Concerning the first category, in two passages Paul calls Christ the image of God. In 2 Cor 4:4 Paul explains how Satan blinds the minds of unbelievers so they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, "who is the image of God" (ὅς ἐστιν εἰκὼν τοῦ θεοῦ). Paul explains that light further in v. 6 as "the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ." Thus Christ is God's image in the sense that He Himself possesses the very same glory of God. This is why His glorious gospel can save lost sinners.

Similarly, in Colossians 1 Paul describes our redemption in Christ, "who is the image of the invisible God" (ὅς ἐστιν εἰκὼν τοῦ θεοῦ τοῦ ἀοράτου, v. 15). He explains what that means in the following context. Christ is the creator (v. 16) and sustainer of all things (v. 17). He is the head of the church, having the first position in everything (v. 18). This is because it was the Father's good pleasure that all the fullness would dwell in Him (v. 19), which Paul later clarifies as the fullness of deity (2:9). Thus, Christ is God's image in the sense that He possesses the fullness of deity by nature; therefore, He can exercise the prerogatives of God and in particular accomplish our redemption.

Bray explains the thrust of these two passages in relation to the image of God in man:

The implication common to both texts is that Christ was able to accomplish something which no other man or other being could, so that "image of God" becomes a phrase which sets Christ apart from us, not one which unites Him to us in Adam. We ought therefore to interpret it as a statement about Christ's equality with the Father, and not about his identity with us.⁷⁸

It seems clear, then, that by calling Christ the image of God in 2 Cor 4:4 and Col 1:15 Paul's intention is to link Christ not to us, but to God. For Paul, calling Christ the "image of God" is a way to assert His deity. Christ is no less, but much more, than a man, for while God created man in, or after the pattern of, His own image, Christ *is* the very image of God. As we have seen, Scripture shows us ways in which man is *like* God, but Jesus Christ *is* God.

Believers as Renewed to the Image of Christ

As for the remaining category, man's renewal to God's image, Paul states it clearly in three passages. The first two speak of the believer's present experience. In 2 Cor 3:18 Paul describes the glorious salvation which believers in Christ possess. What Israel enjoyed under the Old Covenant was glorious, but not as glorious as what believers in Christ now have (vv. 7–11). Yet Jews refuse to accept this truth. Their minds are hardened and a veil lies over their hearts,

⁷⁸ Bray, "Significance of God's Image," 211.

keeping them from accepting Christ (vv. 14–15). But when someone does turn to the Lord “the veil is taken away” (v. 16); it can only be removed in Christ (v. 14b).

Paul continues to use the metaphor of the veil in v. 18 to explain the glorious transformation that believers in Christ experience. While Moses was veiled and the people of Israel couldn’t see the glory of God in his face (v. 7), we who are in Christ gaze with unveiled faces directly into God’s glory. This wonderful privilege has been afforded us by Christ and the Spirit, for “where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty” (v. 17). And meanwhile the Spirit is transforming us into the image of the Lord from one stage of glory to another (v. 18).⁷⁹ The wonder of salvation in Christ is the sanctifying work of the Spirit, who is transforming us into the very image of Christ. Paul does not define the image of Christ here, nor tell us in what way we are being transformed into it. His purpose here is simply to contrast the greater glory of his gospel ministry with the lesser glory of old-covenant ministry.

In the next passage in this category, Col 3:10, Paul does get more specific. He exhorts believers in this chapter to live in light of who they are in Christ. The reason we are to put off all the sinful passions and behaviors Paul lists is because when we got saved we put off the old man with his practices (3:9b) and put on the new man (v. 10a). Paul uses two aorist participles here to picture completed action: at conversion the believer put off (ἀπεκδυσάμενοι) the old man and put on (ἐνδυσάμενοι) the new man. Earlier he described this as having died and then having one’s life hidden with Christ in God (3:3), and earlier still as being buried with Christ and raised up with Him from spiritual death to life (2:12–13). Similarly, in Romans Paul describes conversion as death to sin (6:1), the crucifixion of the old man with Christ, and deliverance from the slavery of sin (6:6).

However, returning to Col 3:10, Paul uses a present participle to describe an on-going process of renewal in the life of the believer. As a new man, the believer is continually being renewed (ἀνακαινούμενον) “to a true knowledge according to the image of the One who created him” (εἰς ἐπίγνωσιν κατ’ εἰκόνα τοῦ κτίσαντος αὐτόν). Three things are notable about this clause. First, “it is impossible to miss the allusion to Gen 1:27” in the reference to the creator’s image.⁸⁰ The image of God is in view, but now in relation to the believer and not to mankind in general. Second, the believer is continually undergoing a renewal in relation to the image of God. Third, Paul says that the believer is being renewed to a true knowledge (εἰς ἐπίγνωσιν). In what sense is the believer being renewed to knowledge? According to Bruce, the believer is gaining “nothing less than the knowledge of God in Christ, the highest knowledge to which human beings can aspire.”⁸¹ Being renewed to the knowledge of God is more than just attaining information about Him, although that’s certainly part of it. But more importantly, this renewal entails the transformation of the believer’s character into that which mirrors the very character of

⁷⁹ According to this verse the Spirit is the agent who accomplishes the transformation of the believer into the image of Christ. This process is gradual and progressive and will finally culminate in the believer’s conformity to Christ (Ralph P. Martin, *2 Corinthians*, WBC [Waco, Tex.: Word, 1986], 71–72).

⁸⁰ F. F. Bruce, *The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984), 147.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 148.

God. This is why Paul stresses the new attitudes, passions, and behaviors of the believer throughout this passage. To come to know God in Christ is essentially to come to be like Him in one's character and conduct.⁸²

Before moving on to the last place where Paul uses the term εἰκῶν in relation to the believer's renewal in Christ, I want us to look at another passage which closely parallels the one we just studied. While Paul doesn't use the term εἰκῶν in Eph 4:22–24, he speaks of the believer's putting off the old man, putting on the new man, and the new man's renewal just as he did in Col 3:10. Paul's exhortation in Ephesians 4 is the same as in Colossians 3: live in light of who you are in Christ. Paul challenges believers to walk in a new way and not in the way of unbelievers (Eph 4:17), who greedily practice every kind of impurity because they have given themselves over to sensuality (v. 18). But this is not the way of the believer, who has put off the old man (v. 22a) and has put on the new man (v. 24a).

Just as he did in Col 3:10, Paul uses two aorist forms here, in this case infinitives, to describe decisive and completed activity. The teaching of Jesus is that at conversion believers are to put off (ἀποθέσθαι) the old man and put on (ἐνδύσασθαι) the new man. Earlier Paul described the conversion experience as being made alive together with Christ (Eph 2:5) and created in Christ Jesus for good works (v. 10). Returning to Eph 4:23, when Paul refers to the ongoing renewal of believers he does so with a present infinitive: we are taught in Christ Jesus to be renewed continually (ἀνανεοῦσθαι) in the spirit of our mind. In the surrounding context this renewal of life means cultivating humility, gentleness, patience, tolerance, and love (v. 2). It means truthfulness (v. 25), honest work (v. 28), wholesome and edifying speech (v. 29), and kindness, tenderheartedness, and forgiveness toward others (v. 32).

Paul seems to imply the image of God in v. 24. The new man which the believer has put on has been created “in the likeness of God ... in righteousness and holiness of the truth.” The first part of this phrase actually just reads “according to God” (κατὰ θεόν). The clear parallel between this passage and Col 3:10, where Paul referred to our renewal as “according to the image” (κατ' εἰκόνα) of God, is a strong argument for thinking that Paul has God's image or likeness in view here as well.⁸³ After the reference to God Paul adds the ways in which the believer has been created in the likeness of God: “in righteousness and holiness of the truth.” The genitive “of the truth” perhaps refers to that “which is based on truth” or “originated from truth.”⁸⁴ Or, Paul may intend a Hebraism, meaning “true righteousness and holiness.”⁸⁵ In either case, Paul is clearly telling us that God's goal for believers is that they be new creations in the areas of righteousness and holiness. Combining what Paul said in Col 3:10 with what he says here in Eph 4:24, Bruce

⁸² Paul speaks here of “a knowledge resulting in likeness to its object” (Maximilian Zerwick, *A Grammatical Analysis of the Greek New Testament*, unabridged 5th rev. ed., trans. ed. Mary Grosvenor [Rome: Editrice Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 1996], 609).

⁸³ So says Bruce, *Colossians, Philemon, Ephesians*, 359. It is possible that Paul means “in God's way” (Zerwick, *Grammatical Analysis of the GNT*, 587), but the clear parallel to Col 3:10 tips the scales toward the idea of God's image or likeness. Thus, the preposition κατὰ denotes a measure of similarity or equality (The NET Bible, in loc.; cf. BDAG, 513). In other words, the believer is a new man who has been created to be like God.

⁸⁴ The NET Bible, in loc.

⁸⁵ Zerwick, *Grammatical Analysis of the GNT*, 587.

summarizes the goal of divine renewal for the believer, “The knowledge of God is never divorced from walking in his ways: to know him is to be like him, righteous as he is righteous, holy as he is holy.”⁸⁶

What we have seen in Col 3:10 and Eph 4:24 is that the believer’s present experience of renewal to the image of God concerns the attainment of true knowledge—not just the accumulation of information about God but the transformation of one’s life to conformity with the very character of God. For Paul this centers on exhibiting in one’s life in an ever-increasing way the communicable divine attributes of righteousness and holiness. As God is holy, the believer is to be holy in all his behavior (1 Pet 1:15). As God is righteous, the believer is to display righteousness in every sphere of his life (1 John 2:29; 3:7; cf. Eph 5:9; 1 Tim 6:11; 2 Tim 2:22; Titus 2:12).

It seems legitimate, then, to distinguish two aspects of the image of God in man. Carl Henry calls them the formal and material image. The formal image of God in man is man’s personality, that is, his moral responsibility and intelligence.⁸⁷ To these I would add the volitional and spiritual aspects of man’s immaterial nature as I set them forth earlier. The fall did not destroy this formal aspect of the image—the cluster of personal attributes—so in this sense all men remain in the image of God after the fall (Gen 9:6; 1 Cor 11:7; Jas 3:9).⁸⁸

Henry defines the material aspect of the image as man’s knowledge of God and of his will for man. The fall caused the distortion, though not demolition, of this aspect of the image of God in man.⁸⁹ The fall did not demolish this aspect of the image because all men have some knowledge of God and His will for man via general revelation and God justly condemns them for suppressing it (Rom 1:18–32). Yet this aspect of the image is certainly distorted because lost mankind does not know God personally, which requires salvation through the Lord Jesus Christ. Man’s sin has separated him from God (Isa 59:2), he is without God in the world (Eph 2:12), and he cannot please God with his life (Rom 8:8). Only in Christ can the material aspect of the image of God in man be restored. Paul describes it as the believer’s present experience of being renewed to a true knowledge of God. This occurs as the believer, with the aid of the Spirit, aligns his thoughts, words, and deeds to the standard of God’s righteousness and holiness as delineated in Scripture on a daily basis. The renewal of the believer to the image of God is simply progressive sanctification, the process by which the believer conforms himself more and more to the communicable attributes of God. In this way the believer is enabled to be properly directed toward God, others, and the entire creation.⁹⁰

⁸⁶ Bruce, *Colossians, Philemon, Ephesians*, 359.

⁸⁷ Henry, “Image of God,” 547. Hoekema calls the aspect which remains after the fall the structural image of God (*Created in God’s Image*, 70–71).

⁸⁸ However, as I said earlier, while the fall didn’t destroy this aspect of the image, it certainly damaged it. Sin has affected fallen man morally, intellectually, volitionally, and spiritually.

⁸⁹ Henry, “Image of God,” 547. Hoekema calls this the functional aspect of the image; it is man’s “proper functioning in harmony with God’s will for him.” The tragedy of the fall is that “man is now using God-given and God-imaging powers and gifts to do things that are an affront to his Maker” (*Created in God’s Image*, 72).

⁹⁰ Hoekema, *Created in God’s Image*, 88.

The Image of God in Glory

This leads us to the final Pauline passage that speaks of the believer's renewal in the image of God, Rom 8:29. Here, according to Paul, God predestined believers to become "conformed to the image of His Son" (συμμόρφους τῆς εἰκόνας τοῦ υἱοῦ αὐτοῦ). God's goal for believers is that they be like His Son. The process is already underway through progressive sanctification and God will complete it in glory, for those God calls and justifies He also glorifies (Rom 8:30). In a similar vein, Paul tells the Thessalonians in 2 Thess 2:13–14 that God chose them from the beginning for salvation "that [they] may gain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ." The goal of our salvation is glory; glorification marks the completion of our salvation, and complete salvation means full and final conformity to the image of the Lord Jesus Christ.

In heaven believers will never be God, but they will be like God (1 John 3:2), for God has called them to become partakers of His own divine nature (2 Pet 1:4). The process of renewal to the image of God will be complete. We will be complete in Christ (Col 1:28), holy and blameless and beyond reproach (v. 22). In that day we will finally be what God intends us to be. We will be like Him in character and just like His Son in our glorious resurrection bodies.

Conclusion

In this paper I revisited the vexing issue of the image of God in man. After focusing my study on the content and context of Gen 1:26, I argued for a substantive view of the *imago Dei*. The image of God in man is that complex of uniquely personal characteristics which God gave man at creation to make him like God. These personal qualities are intelligence, volition, morality, and spirituality. They adhere to man's immaterial nature, which when combined with a body make a whole man. Man's physical body, his ruling function, and his relationships are not themselves the image of God. However, they are related to the image of God in this way: God gave man a body to serve as the vehicle by which he might live on the earth and carry out the two important corollaries of the image, namely ruling over creation as God's royal representative and enjoying personal relationships with God and his fellows. The corollaries tell us *why* God made man in His image, and the body is man's *means* of living out God's will. The image itself is the immaterial qualities of personhood which when combined with the body enable man to rule and relate as God wills.

When man fell in sin the image of God in him suffered serious distortion. Man was still in God's image in the sense that he remained a rational person responsible to God for his moral choices. However, sin corrupted the personal characteristics which made man like God. Sin affected man's intellect, volition, morality, and spirituality to the extent that man could no longer think, choose, live, and relate in ways that pleased God. The image of God remained in fallen man, but it needed renewal for man to be like God and live as God intended.

Through salvation believers can and do experience renewal to the image of God in the Lord Jesus Christ. Renewal in Christ doesn't restore the formal image of God which remains after the fall. Rather it transforms the character and conduct of the believer to match our righteous and holy God. Present renewal to the image of God is simply progressive sanctification. God will complete the process in glory. In that day all our thoughts, words, and deeds will finally please

God in every way as we enjoy complete conformity to Christ in body and soul. As those created in God's image and conformed to the image of His Son we will finally be what He wants us to be and do what He wants us to do, perfectly and forever. That will be glory indeed!