

THE IMAGE OF GOD

Genesis 1:26,27; Romans 8:29; Colossians 1:15; Hebrews 1:3

At the creation of man, God said: "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: . . ." (Genesis 1:26). Before creation, and in order that creation should come to pass, He Who was known in the fulness of time as Jesus Christ the Son of God, was "the Image of the Invisible God" (Colossians 1:15). The **ultimate goal** of redemption is expressed by the use of this same term: "For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, . . ." (Romans 8:29). This **glorious goal** is anticipated by the working of grace within the believer "who has put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him" (Colossians 3:10). The **consumation** of this blessed commencement awaits the resurrection. "As we have borne the image of the earthy, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly" (1 Corinthians 15:49).

Visibility cannot be known in the spiritual realm. God as Spirit cannot be seen. "Now unto the King eternal, immortal, **invisible**, the only wise God, . . ." (1 Timothy 1:17). "Who only hath immortality, dwelling in the light which no man can approach unto, **whom no man hath seen**, nor can see: to whom be honour and power everlasting. Amen." (1 Timothy 6:16). "**No man hath seen God at any time**; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him" (John 1:18). "No man hath seen God at any time. . . ." (1 John 4:12).

Therefore God who is Spirit, in the person of Jesus Christ, ". . . took upon Himself the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: And being found in fashion as a man, . . ." (Philippians 2:7,8). "And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, . . ." (John 1:14). We only see God in the face of Jesus Christ. ". . . lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them. . . to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" (2 Corinthians 4:4,6).

We have two creations before us in Colossians 1:15-19. (1) The original creation in which Christ is pre-eminent as the Image of the invisible God. (2) The new spiritual creation in which Christ is pre-eminent as the Head of the Body, and the One in whom all fulness dwells. It is almost impossible to handle aright the truth of the doctrine of the invisible God and of Christ His Image. The mighty sweep of creation that is unfolded here leaves the mind in a sort of wonderment. Yet even more amazing is the transition from the Headship of creation to the Headship of the Church which is His Body. That He should create is natural, but that He should redeem and reconcile is a revelation of greater glory.

In Colossians 1:15, Christ is the image of the invisible God. He is so the image of God as the son is the image of his father, who has a natural likeness to him. In this text Paul rises higher to set forth the dignity of the person of Christ. Christ is the eternal Word, the only begotten Son of God by nature, very God of very God, and doth exactly and perfectly represent the Father of whose person He is the express image. He is the image of the invisible God, i.e. the Father, because the Father cannot be known to us except in the Son, and as His image He represents, or manifests the Father (John 14:9). It is not a physical image to be looking for because it is written, ". . . he hath no form nor comeliness; and when we shall see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him" (Isaiah 53:2), but rather it is in Christ that all the attributes, perfections, affections, and excellencies of God clearly shine forth.

Christ is the firstborn of every creature, or He was begotten before all creation, which is the Scriptural way of representing eternity. He is the Head of creation and to be such must have taken creation form to create. He has the dominion over all things, as

the firstborn in the family is considered heir and lord of all. "Hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds" (Hebrews 1:2). Christ not only had being before He was born of the virgin, but He had being before all time (Proverbs 8:22-31). "Who verily was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you" (1 Peter 1:20).

The title "the Image of the invisible God" occurs only in Colossians 1:15, but there are kindred passages to consider which give light on the meaning of this title.

(1) John 1. We have the Word, the Word was God, all things made by Him, the only begotten Son, His fulness, God never seen, and He is preferred before John the Baptist.

(2) Colossians 1. We have the Image of God, the invisible God, all things created by Him, His pre-eminence over all, all the fulness dwelling in Him, by Him all things consisting, and He is the firstborn.

(3) Hebrews 1. We have the Heir of all things, the worlds made by Him, He is the express Image, all things upheld by the word of His power, He is the Substance, He is the first begotten or firstborn, it is His throne, O God, and He is superior to angels.

(A) Genesis 1:26,27.

The first mention of the words "image" and "likeness" occur in Genesis 1. When we read in Colossians 1, that Christ is "the image of the invisible God, the first born of every creature," we learn that Adam was made "after the likeness of the Saviour." Adam was "**a figure** of him that was to come" (Romans 5:14). The making of Adam in the image and after the likeness of his Maker faintly forehadowed the coming Saviour, and as well, the coming Glory (1 Corinthians 15:45-49; Colossians 3:10).

Man is made by the Divine Word and the sovereign command of God. We have two words used to describe the making of man. They are: image and likeness. They have different usages which greatly bear upon our understanding of what they mean. The word "image" is **representation or manifestation**. The word "likeness" is **resemblance**.

The Lord Jesus Christ is the "express image" of God (Hebrews 1:3). The word "image" in the N.T. has the same meaning in every reference except here. In this reference it means "a representation," or "an exact copy." The Lord Jesus Christ is God, and as the God-man is the exactness of the Father. He is an engraven image of the Father, **in every way like Him**. The word intimates its distinction from what is impressed upon it, and so is the Son's distinct relation in having all that might liken Him to the Father. He is not the character of the Godhead, or of the Divine essence, but of the Father, the personal subsistence in the Deity. He is one and the same God with the Father. He is the visible representation of God. "For in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily" (Colossians 2:9).

This simply means that He is the exact representation of God. If we were to have a stamp of God and press it on paper, and also have a stamp of Christ, they would both be exactly the same. There would be no flaw or difference in either. Christ stated that He and His Father were one (John 10:30), which defines "express image." When the Pharisees asked the Lord concerning the lawfulness of giving tribute to Caesar, the Lord asked them for a coin, and said, "Whose is this image and superscription?," and they immediately replied Caesar's (Matthew 22:20). They recognized the image of Caesar which was a resemblance, but not a perfect representation. They did not have the

means to make a perfect copy.

Man made in the image and likeness of God is not God, but in the new creation he is to resemble God in his thinking (Philippians 2:5; Colossians 3:2), and walk (Ephesians 4:1). When the Lord Jesus Christ came into this world to fulfill what the law could not do, we read, ". . . God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh" (Romans 8:3). This sheds light on the meaning of likeness. Christ was made in the likeness of sinful flesh, but He had no sin in Him. He became a man in likeness to sinful flesh, i.e. He had the appearance of man physically, but not man's sinful nature. "But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men" (Philippians 2:7). The people of Lystra said, ". . . The gods are come down to us in the likeness of men" (Acts 14:11). Of believers it is written, "For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection" (Romans 6:5). The Psalmist looking forward to future glory wrote, "As for me, I will behold thy face in righteousness: I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with thy likeness" (Psalm 17:15).

In the second commandment we read, "Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth" (Exodus 20:4). This command was not to make anything of representation or resemblance to replace the true and living God. We know that Israel did not obey this command and Aaron made the golden calf. Paul also writes about mankind, "And changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and fourfooted beasts, and creeping things" (Romans 1:23).

(B) When Adam was created in the image of God, what exactly did it mean?

Adam was created in the image (representation) of God and displayed that image until his fall into sin. Adam was ruler over all (Genesis 1:28,29). He was ruled by God, and thus he could rule, for no one except God can rule without being ruled. Adam was ruler over all creation including the nature of man which is man's mind, affections, and will. In Adam's ruling over all creatures he is the type of man in Christ as God makes him, which means that God is ruling our mind, affections, and will, by their being in subjection to His Word. Adam was in total submission to God for he was made in His image and likeness. He was created erect in his walk, looking upward, depending on God, able to recognize the mind and will of God above him, and with an understanding to know, and a will to bow, to a Superior. Therefore **the image of God** is a mind thinking God's thoughts, having communion with God, and being in subjection to His will. Before his fall Adam had an affection to love God that was pure and perfect.

From the human perspective Adam failed to do what he was created to do. Then what was the result of Adam's fall into sin? I believe he died spiritually, and began to die physically. His spiritual death was the loss of the image of God in that Adam's mind could no longer think as God thought, he could no longer commune with God, and he suffered the loss of his will to be in subjection to God's rule over him and be obedient to His commands. In other words Adam became a sinner, he did not want God to rule over him, and his mental and emotional faculties fell to the level of the beasts. The only exception was that of having a rational mind.

(1) His mind.

Adam could no longer comprehend God's Word. He was incapable of recognizing the will of God above. He literally was living in unbelief and his understanding was darkened. The flaming sword at the gate of Eden shut man out in mercy because he is unfit to deal with heavenly truth. When Adam was innocent he had

the power to rule over every creature faculty, i.e. his mind, his affection, and his will. He was in harmony with God and in subjection to God's rule. Now man says, ". . . who is lord over us?" (Psalm 12:4). "Therefore they say unto God, Depart from us; for we desire not the knowledge of thy ways" (Job 21:14). "The wicked, through the pride of his countenance, will not seek after God: God is not in all (any) his thoughts" (Psalm 10:4)

(2) His affection.

The fall misplaced his affections and he became selfish. Instead of loving God with all his heart, he loved self. What he was originally made for he hates, and loves what he should hate. Sin blinds man so that he does not know what sin is. Then self becomes the judge of good and evil. Today man actually believes that sin is blessedness, i.e. it doesn't get any better than this, and not to sin as he wills is considered bondage. The truth is that man must trust someone, and having given up God, he trusts himself and obeys sin for it is stronger than he. He becomes a slave to his sinful nature, and loves himself.

(3) His will.

Adam became independent, and in the place of God's rule, self-rule came about. His way was away from God to self-indulgence and self-rule. His mind and will became subject to, instead of, ruling the lower creatures. He began to live selfishly, lustfully, and in the pride of his own heart. He becoming self-ish left his God-likeness, his understanding errs, and his will is seduced, and the two agreeing together determine the course of his action. Being independent and self-willed Adam now tries to regain favor with God by using aprons of fig leaves to conform himself to God (which man cannot do). Man does not want God to rule over him (Luke 19:14)

(C) Romans 8:29.

"For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren." The word "firstborn" comes from our English word which means "prototype."

As man was first made by the Divine Word, so he must be re-created by the Divine Word (Ephesians 2:1; Hebrews 4:12). "Let there be life," and "let there be light." Without the preaching of the Word there can be no salvation (1 Corinthians 1:21; Romans 10:17). "For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword, **piercing even to the dividing assunder of soul and spirit**, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart." I believe when God quickens a man, He changes the soulish man back to his original place by dividing the soul and spirit, and the spirit of man can now commune with God again. He no longer lives by the seat of his emotions, but lives by communing with God, and the Spirit of God revealing to him the will and purpose of God.

The elect of God were predestinated to be conformed to the image of His Son. In Divine grace the elect of God are restored to this image. The disorder and enmity of their minds is taken away and they are given the mind of Christ. Their minds are restored to their proper center of thinking, i.e. to glorify God. Their will is given over in submission to God's control again, and their affection raised to love and please God. How is this accomplished? "But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord" (2 Corinthians 3:18). The world of religion has a "form of godliness," i.e. they fabricate an image of God.

Christ is the firstborn among many brethren. Christ was the perfect Man, the express image of God's person. The elect of God are to be conformed to His image, i.e.

to a representation of God in Christ (position), and to His resemblance or likeness (in experience). Christ had the Father's mind, and when tempted by the same one who won over Adam in the garden, Christ yielded not, but said, "It is written" (Matthew 4:1-11). He was in full submission to the Word of God. This must also be our mind and defense.

He was in total submission to the Father's will, and His affection and love to the Father was unselfish. "For I came down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me" (John 6:38). In His great agony in the garden He said, "Not my will, but thine be done." In the perfect obedience of Christ we are brought back to what Adam was before his sin. "Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new" (2 Corinthians 5:17). Old things, i.e. a mind of the lower creation, and of unbelief; of hatred and selfishness in our affections; and of rebellion in our will against God.

The Lord Jesus Christ as the firstborn among many brethren, places a limitation on the conformity of the elect. Though the elect have a likeness unto Christ, yet there is not an equality; Christ still retaineth the dignity of the firstborn for He is the federal Head of the elect and Ruler of all the family of God in heaven and earth.

(D) Colossians 3:10.

"And have put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him." The mind is restored or renewed again. In being re-made in the image of God, it says that we have "put on the new man which is **renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him.**" This is the reason that Paul many times exhorts us to be renewed in the spirit of our mind. This is to have a mind again thinking God's thoughts, communing with God, submitting our will to His Word, our affection again in love with God, and the desire to please Him in all things. This is to have Christ in us, His Word in us controlling and ruling us as it did our Lord Jesus Christ. This is the new man in me crying out "let there be light," until the new man in me rules every faculty.

This is to have the Word of God ruling in us that our mind, affection, and will, be raised back to their created purpose which is to glorify God. That the life, light, and fruit, the image of God created in righteousness and true holiness may shine forth. **The mind,** "Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 2:5). **The affection,** "If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth" (Colossians 3:1,2). **The will,** ". . . but as the servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart" (Ephesians 6:6). How is it with us? Do we have the mind of Christ? Do we have a love and affection for Christ? Is our will in submission to His will?

(E) Paul the pattern.

At his conversion on the road to Damascus Paul begins what every new creature in Christ is in the renewing of the image of God in them. Paul is regenerated, and his mind is changed from persecuting the Lord to serving Him. He now communes with God again, and is restored to fellowship with Him. His will is now desirous of being ruled by the Lord and the Word of God. "And he trembling and astonished said, Lord, what wilt thou have me to do? . . ." (Acts 9:6). Hereafter Paul's being is filled with love and devotion for the Lord Jesus Christ.

Paul then exhorts us continually concerning the renewing of our minds, putting off the old man, and putting on the new man (Romans 12:2; Ephesians 4:22-24; Philippians 2:5; Colossians 3:9,10).

While this is a personal issue with every believer, I believe the ultimate revelation and consumation is seen in the One New Man, the perfect man, of which Christ is it's

Head. Christ is our wisdom, His glory is our motive for living our life, and He is the seat of our affection. We grow up into Him in all things, glorify Him in all things, and submit to Him in all things.