

# Theology for Life

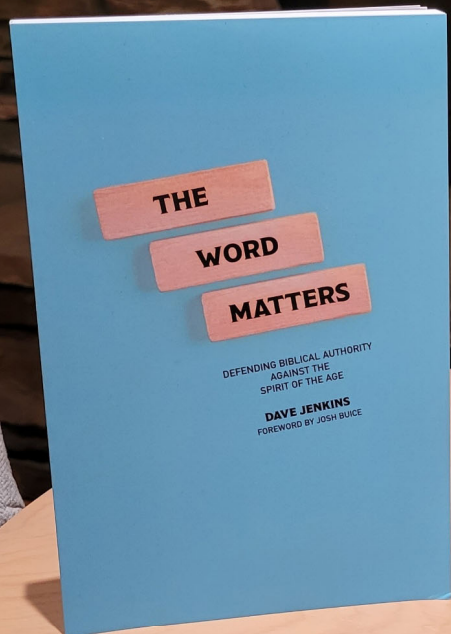
Volume 10 | Issue 3 | Fall 2023



## **Inside this Issue...**

- **The Blessing: Parenting in the Image of God**
- **The Image of God and the Unseen Realm**
- **The Image of God and Evolution**

In ***The Word Matters***, Dave Jenkins takes readers by the hand and helps them understand how serious the issue of biblical authority is and how the Bible is under attack, so that they can stand with confidence on the Word of God.



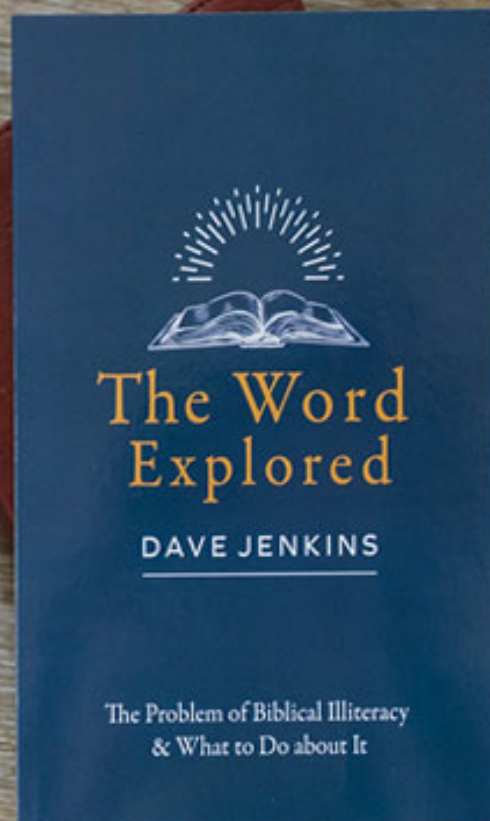
# The Word Matters

DEFENDING BIBLICAL AUTHORITY  
AGAINST THE SPIRIT OF THE AGE





**Grow in your relationship with God!**



*The Word Explored: The Problem of Biblical Illiteracy & What to Do about It* is an easy-to-read, biblically-based work for lay-people and pastors alike.



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## Editor's Corner

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The image of God is a massive theme in Scripture. From Genesis we discover we were made in the image and likeness of God (Genesis 1:26-28). In Genesis 3 we learn of the Fall of man and the ensuing chaos it caused on the human race—resulting in our sin nature. Even in the Garden of Eden it was revealed that the Lord had a plan to redeem man (Genesis 3:15), which we see fulfilled in the person and work of the Lord Jesus. The image of God that was marred at the Fall can be restored *only* by man being reconciled to Christ in repentance and faith in Him alone.

What we are witnessing in this age is not only an outright attack on the Genesis narrative (questioning whether it should be taken literally), but also the concept of Adam and Eve as real persons in real history. Additionally, we are observing (with increasing frequency) attacks on the image of God through homosexuality, pornography, polygamy, transgenderism, etc. We are seeing the fruits of the image of God further being marred through advocates of social justice, who preach a “social gospel” and aim to bring division between people groups—both inside and outside the Church.

The sexual revolution has aimed to “unhinge” people from biblical morality and a sexual ethic that many people argue is “Puritanical” (an insult that falls flat, since the Puritans were thoroughly grounded in the Bible). But these same people who argue that biblical morality and the biblical sexual ethic are “Puritanical”, are the same ones guilty of being the very thing they accuse Christians of being: hypocritical. Opponents of biblical morality and the biblical sexual ethic accuse of Christians being “intolerant” and “unkind”, while they also command us to stop being “judgmental” of people’s “choices”.

The real question is whether it is the person who is being consistent about their viewpoint from Scripture or the person who aims to “expose the inconsistencies” and yet silence the opposing side that is being “judgmental”. In this

era, those who oppose a biblical view of morality and sexuality aim to silence those who do stand on the truth of God's Word. Christians are marginalized in the media, while homosexuality and transgenderism are celebrated.

Meanwhile, in the United States our citizens celebrate the First Amendment (freedom of speech) as a virtue, despite the fact that Christians (and those who consider themselves "Conservative") are maligned and mistreated, while simultaneously the opposing side gets the "all clear" to say (and do) whatever they want. If the definition of judgment is making a decision based on facts, and the "liberal" side lacks the desire to recognize the facts (especially with regards to science and physiology), then Christians need to understand that we are not dealing with people who are willing to engage in facts.

What we are seeing with regards to homosexuality and transgenderism, and the larger attack on the image of God, is an outright assault on the glory of our sovereign Lord, who made man and woman in His image and likeness. We are witnessing the continued rebellion against the very God who made us in His image and likeness; the One who upholds the very world and gives them breath.

Remembering this, we can remind ourselves that we are messengers pleading with men (as Paul said in 2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians 5) to be reconciled to God, through Christ alone. We are engaging in a very real war—not of flesh and blood, as Paul said in Ephesians 6—but a very real war, nonetheless.

As Christians, we must speak the truth in love. We must be growing in Christ, despite our lack of perfection, and we must admit our own failings, confessing our sin, repenting, and continuing on in our mission of making disciples of the nations. We must contend earnestly for the sake of the Word for the good of all men and women, that they may be saved.

And that is precisely why, here at *Theology for Life*, we are doing this issue on the image of God. We want to equip you as you go out into your world to stand on what Scripture says about the image of God, as we help bring to light a biblical view of morality and a biblical sexual ethic, so that you might make disciples of the Lord Jesus. As you read this issue, our prayer is you'll be instructed in the Word and equipped to speak the truth to others in your local church, neighborhood, and workplace(s), and to contend for the faith once and for all delivered to the saints.

In Christ Alone,

Dave Jenkins

Executive Editor, *Theology for Life Magazine*



## The Image of God: The Fall and Jesus

By Scott Hurst



**What is a human being?** Christians answer with some form of “a human being is God’s image bearer.” Being made in God’s image is essential to being human. The image of God is a core concept in Scripture, informing how we treat others (Genesis 9:6; James 3:9) and how we worship God (Romans 1:20). It’s

a thread we ought to follow; yet, except for issues around abortion, it wasn’t a core topic for most of my discipleship.

In this article, I want to reflect on the relationship between the image of God, the Fall, and Jesus. Following this Biblical thread helps us reflect on a different dimension of salvation that nourishes our fellowship with God. Let’s start at



the beginning.

## The Image of God Given to Man

The Genesis narrative has a repeated rhythm in God's creation of living creatures. The sea creatures, winged creatures, livestock, crawling creatures, and wildlife are all created "according to their kinds" (Genesis 1:20-25). Then, the rhythm changes for humanity. *"Then God said, 'Let us make man in our image, according to our likeness.'"* God made human beings distinct from other creatures by creating them according to His image and likeness, and giving them delegated authority over other creatures (Genesis 1:26).

The climax of Genesis 1 is God creating humanity in His image. Through human beings, all of creation has a visible reflection of God's character. This gives people a unique responsibility and a privileged relationship.

### Work to Do

Unlike the other creatures, God gives men and women work. *"They will rule the fish of the sea, the birds of the sky, the livestock, the whole earth, and the creatures that crawl on the earth... God blessed them, and God said to them, 'Be fruitful, multiply, fill the earth, and subdue it. Rule the fish of the sea, the birds of the sky, and every creature that crawls on the earth'"* (Genesis 1:26, 28). To bear God's image is not like being a statue for spectators to see. Bearing His image comes with responsibility.

We see this play out in Genesis 2, when God places Adam *"in the garden of Eden to work it and watch over it"* (Genesis 2:16). Adam takes up this work as all the animals come to him to receive their names (Genesis 2:20). There are echoes of this in the story of Noah and the flood. A re-creation story where all the living creatures are given shelter and safety under the care of Noah, God's image bearer. Being made in the image of God does not give us the right to be proud. It gives us the responsibility to work and watch over God's creation.

## A Relationship to Enjoy

No other creature has the relationship with God that humans have—not even angels. Adam receives life by God’s breath, instruction from God’s Word, and compassion from God’s heart (Genesis 2:9, 15-21). No one else is made in the image of God, and no one else is given the prize of walking with God.

In my discipleship, I’ve heard many definitions of what being made in God’s image means. For some, it is the rational faculty, for others it is the authority over animals, while others spotlight the dignity of human beings. One piece that I think was underplayed for me, however, is the relational element. We can walk with

**“The pinpricks of light reminding us of the goodness of our original state also remind us of what was lost and force us to look to God for restoration.”**

God, in a real and loving relationship, because He made us in His image.

## The Image Tarnished

Genesis 1 and 2 are beautiful, but far from the reality we wake up to every day. Our world doesn’t make sense without Genesis 3. In Genesis 2 everything is good. Adam is doing his work and enjoying his relationship with God, but everything changes in the next chapter. Instead of being content with bearing God’s image, Adam and Eve believe the serpent’s lie and attempt to become gods themselves. After their fall, everything breaks (Genesis 3:1-9). Our world has both glimmers of the goodness of Genesis 1-2, and the thorns of Genesis 3.

The punishment and consequences of the Fall directly relate to the image of God. The responsibility of working and subduing creation still exists, but now the ground fights back. Work comes with pain. Being fruitful now comes with the la-

bor pains of childbirth. The punishment of death and separation from God make walking with Him impossible. A pride-induced desire to become God tarnished the image of God in man. Like Adam, his descendants now hide from God rather than draw near to Him (Genesis 3:10).

This tarnishing ripples through Biblical history. The Psalmist describes Israel's sin-filled worship during Moses' lifetime as an image exchange. *"They exchanged their glory, for the image of a grass-eating ox"* (Psalm 106:20). They forget God and become like other creatures. God anointed King Saul and, like Adam, gave him a mission to accomplish. Yet Saul, like Adam, disobeyed and rebelled against God (1 Samuel 15:17-23). The cycle continues through the prophets as people choose pride and idolatry instead of loving justice and walking humbly with God (Amos 4; Micah 6:8).

Like a torn painting, humanity still retains the image of God, but it's been corrupted. J. I. Packer has a good explanation of what happens to the image of God after the Fall: *"The Fall diminished God's image not only in Adam and Eve but in all their descendants, that is, the whole human race. We retain the image structurally, in the sense that our humanity is intact, but not functionally, for we are now sin's slaves and unable to use our powers to mirror God's holiness."*

The pinpricks of light reminding us of the goodness of our original state also remind us of what was lost and force us to look to God for restoration.

## **Jesus: The Perfect Image**

In Colossians 1:15, Paul describes Jesus as *"the image of the invisible God."* Jesus is the exact representation of God because He *is* God. In that same section, Paul makes it clear that Jesus is the Creator, Sustainer, and Savior of all things, which only makes sense because He is God (Colossians 1:16-20). When we look to Jesus, we see the image of God in perfection.

What does this have to do with us? Why does it matter that Jesus is “the image of the invisible God”? It matters because, in salvation, the image of God is restored in man by the perfect image of God—Jesus Christ.

“What then was God to do?” asks Athanasius, “Or what was to be done save the renewing of that which was in God’s image, so that by it men might once more be able to know Him? But how could this have come to pass save by the presence of the very Image of God, our Lord Jesus Christ? For by men’s means it was impossible, since they are but made after an image; nor by angels either, for not even they are (God’s) images. Whence the Word of God came in His own person, that, as He was the Image of the Father, He might be able to create afresh the man after the image.”

Athanasius doesn’t pull this out of nowhere. This idea is grounded in the New Testament. Hebrews connects our cleansing from sin to Jesus as the perfect representation of God. *“The Son is the radiance of God’s glory and the exact expression of his nature, sustaining all things by his powerful word. After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high”* (Hebrews 1:3). Paul does likewise in Colossians: *“He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation... For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, and through him to reconcile everything to himself, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross... now he has reconciled you by his physical body through his death, to present you holy, faultless, and blameless before him”* (Colossians 1:15,19-20, 22). Jesus Christ as the image of the invisible God is an important category for understanding what He accomplished as our Savior.

In His substitutionary death, Jesus rescues us from sin's punishment and cleanses us from it's poison. This is how Jesus renews the image of God in man, as Stephen Charnock says:



*“If the contagion and filth of sin had deformed and sullied our souls as much as before, if our guilt were only removed, we had been freed from punishment, but without restoring the divine image we had not been fit for any converse with God. It was necessary that our souls should be washed, and our faculties put into a state to serve, in some measure, the glory of God and the end of our creation. God would have seemed to deny his own holiness, if he had regarded only the reverence of his justice, by appointing a sacrifice for atonement, and not consulted the honour of the other by renewing his image in the nature of man.”*

Jesus takes on the work of restoring the image of God and succeeds. In Christ alone, we are rescued from sin and made fit for fellowship with God. The work and relationship given to Adam in the creation story are restored to us through Christ. I think this is why Paul refers to the image of God when he talks about the progress of sanctification. *“For those he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, so that he would be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters”* (Romans 8:29). *“We all, with unveiled faces, are looking as in a mirror at, the glory of the Lord and are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory; this is from the Lord who is the Spirit”* (2 Corinthians 3:18). *“You are being renewed in knowledge according to the image of your Creator”* (Colossians 3:10). In the gospel story, we see the creation, fall, redemption, and restoration of the image of God.

## Conclusion

As a pastor, I’m often reminded that theology is more than theory. Good theology leads to joyful worship and faithful living. I have not given much space for application in this article, so let me close with one.

I wrote this article because I believe understanding the connection between the image of God and salvation in Christ is vital. We are moving closer to a world where people will augment their bodies with computer chips, A.I.,

and robotics. What a human being *is* may not be so easy to answer in a few years—at least from a worldly perspective. Therefore, we need our theology to root us in Biblical truth.

The definition of being a human does not change. Understanding the image of God helps us know who we are; and understanding the connection to salvation helps us place our hope in the right place. Bearing the image of God is central to being human and being a Christian. God made us in His image and made us new creations in Christ, and He is renewing us according to His image. Reflecting on the image of God, the Fall, and Jesus Christ equips us to keep our head and flourish as true human beings in a tech saturated world.

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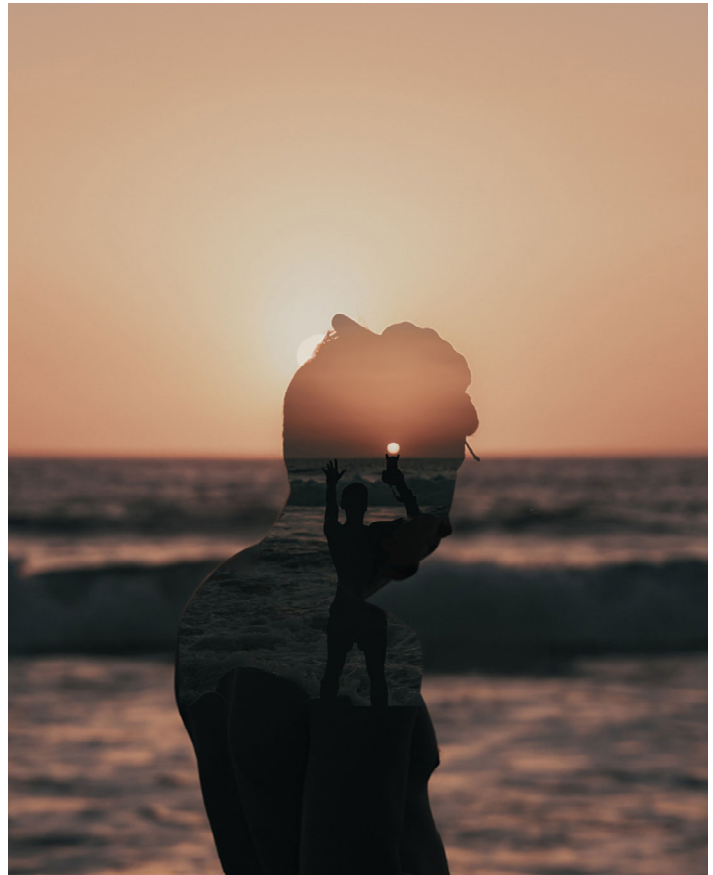
- i. J. I. Packer, *Concise Theology: A Guide to Historic Christian Beliefs* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 1993), 72–73.
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## The Image of God and the Unseen Realm

By Joey Tomlinson

### The scene begins in Mark

**5:1-10:** *“Then they came to the other side of the sea, to the country of the Gadarenes. And when He had come out of the boat, immediately there met Him out of the tombs a man with an unclean spirit, who had his dwelling among the tombs; and no one could bind him, not even with chains, because he had often been bound with shackles and chains. And the chains had been pulled apart by him, and the shackles broken in pieces; neither could anyone tame him. And always, night and day, he was in the mountains and in the tombs, crying out and cutting himself with stones. When he saw Jesus from afar, he ran and worshiped Him. And he cried out with a loud voice*



and said, “What have I to do with You, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I implore You by God that You do not torment me.” For He said to him, “Come out of the man, unclean spirit!” Then He asked him, “What is your name?” And he answered, saying, “My name is Legion; for we are many.” Also he begged Him earnestly that He would not send them out of the country.”

If you follow the biblical narrative closely, it seems that demon possession was more prevalent in Christ’s first advent—particularly in the three years of His public ministry. I think that is because of the significance of the gospel of God—the significance of Jesus’ death and resurrection in *this* world—and the resulting effect being the restoration of the Imago Dei. Our spiritual enemies tried to thwart that plan—this covenant that God promised back in the Garden of Eden, after the Fall of Adam and Eve, and accomplished in the life, death, and bodily and eternal resurrection of Jesus.

And in light of this, I truly believe that this world—every tribe, tongue, and nation—is still being subdued 2000+ years later to the unshakeable reality that Jesus, the eternal God, really did enter into our world as a man. He really *did* suffer. He lived in the shadow of our sins. He took the punishment that our sins deserved, thereby plundering hell and He bodily and eternally resurrected in *this* world.

That is what the whole of biblical narrative was moving toward, and that is what God promised in the Garden. We now live in light of knowing that the resurrection of Jesus means not just our spiritual resurrection, but one day, our physical resurrection. That is the glorious gospel of God.

Now at the same time, we should not be ignorant of a fierce, cosmic battle presently being waged. It is a battle in which our enemy, the devil, has been defeated, but not *finally* defeated. So, we must not and cannot afford to be ignorant of the reality of the unseen realm—that there is such thing as angels—both un-fallen and fallen. The fallen ones are better known to us as demons, and what we



experience in this life (this life where sin and suffering still exist) is a *spiritual battle*.

**“In Protestant circles, denominations like Assemblies of God are given to an overemphasis in this particular area.”**

We have spiritual enemies waging war on the souls of man. Hell has not yet been shut up forever. That happens in the second advent of Jesus. And while Christ is victorious *now*, there is still this subduing work that happens as the gospel of God is announced to the nations. While this is going on, our enemy—the devil along with his demons—seeks to devour.

C.S. Lewis, in his work of fiction called *Screwtape Letters* (which I highly recommend to you), says this in the preface of his book:

*“There are two equal and opposite errors into which our race can fall about the devils. One is to disbelieve in their existence. The other is to believe, and to feel an excessive and unhealthy interest in them. They themselves [speaking of the devils] are equally pleased by both errors and hail a materialist or a magician with the same delight.”*

By “magician” Lewis here means the one who is obsessed with demons—sees them everywhere and in everything. The magician has superstitious tendencies. In Protestant circles, denominations like Assemblies of God are given to an overemphasis in this particular area. In the Reformed tradition, the danger lies not in the camp of the magician, but in the camp of the materialist—functioning as if there is no unseen realm. There must be a biblical balance between the two.

For the purpose of the readers of this magazine (who are mostly in the Reformed tradition), I am going to push against the materialist perspective. *We must forsake a materialistic perspective of the world.*

We are made body and soul. We have a body that we perceive physically

**“This god was an Ammonite god and the offerings of worship included child sacrifice, as we see in Leviticus.”**

(sight, touch, etc.) and we have a soul—a spirit—that we cannot see. One day when we die, those of us who are in Christ, our souls will go to be with the Lord in heaven. One day when Christ returns, our souls will be reunited to our (glorified) bodies, and we will live forever with the Lord in the new Heavens and the new

Earth (1 Corinthians 15; Revelation 21). But we aren’t the only creatures made of what is seen and unseen—so are other parts of God’s magnificent creation.

The creation that Christ rules over is composed of heaven and earth. Consider Colossians 1:15-16, *“He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers...”*

The Greek (ἀρχαί, *archai*; ἐξουσίαι, *exousiai*) underlying the phrase “principalities or powers” means *Spiritual Beings*—and spiritual beings are both fallen and un-fallen— that is why elsewhere Paul says we *“wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world against spiritual wickedness in high places”* (Ephesians 6:12).

Now, if we were to take this man possessed by Legion in the Mark passage quoted earlier as a case study today, and have the country’s top doctors examine him and publish peer reviewed medical journals about this man, would demon possession be allowed to even factor into it? Is there any room for that at all? Or would we reduce his strength, his anguish, his self-harm to some materialist diag-

nosis that only acknowledges what is seen? This is a legitimate question if we are to maintain, as the Scriptures do, that this was a demonic possession. There are some things that are so evil and erratic and bizarre—so very twisted—that they rise to the level of being called “demonic”. Yet we rarely use that word.

Let me illustrate this further by bringing in a couple of Old Testament passages. First, Leviticus 20:1-2: *“Then the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, “Again, you shall say to the children of Israel: ‘Whoever of the children of Israel, or of the strangers who dwell in Israel, who gives any of his descendants to Molech, he shall surely be put to death.’”*”

Now, read Hosea 4:11-14: *“Harlotry, wine, and new wine enslave the heart. My people ask counsel from their wooden idols, And their staff informs them. For the spirit of harlotry has caused them to stray, And they have played the harlot against their God. They offer sacrifices on the mountaintops, And burn incense on the hills, Under oaks, poplars, and terebinths, Because their shade is good. Therefore your daughters commit harlotry, And your brides commit adultery. “I will not punish your daughters when they commit harlotry, Nor your brides when they commit adultery; For the men themselves go apart with harlots, And offer sacrifices with a ritual harlot. Therefore people who do not understand will be trampled.”*

One final Old Testament passage, 1 Kings 11:5: *“For Solomon went after Ashtoreth the goddess of the Sidonians, and after Milcom the abomination of the Ammonites.”*

In the Leviticus passage we see the name Molech (or Milcom as in the 1 Kings passage). This god was an Ammonite god and the offerings of worship included child sacrifice, as we see in Leviticus. We also see in Leviticus a stern warning from the Lord through Moses to the Israelites not to give their chil-

dren—their descendants—as a sacrifice to Molech and not to even allow it amongst them. That is why the “stranger” in Leviticus is brought up. The Israelites were not to even allow the stranger to offer a child in sacrifice to Molech. We also see that this sort of pagan influence and participation was worthy of the death penalty, which was righteous and just (equal weights and measures; Leviticus 19:35-36).

In the Hosea passage we read of what is called “ritual harlots”, which were temple prostitutes of sorts that promoted all types of sexual perversions. And these were done as acts of worship to what the text calls, “wooden idols”. Many biblical scholars believe this to be representative of the goddess Ashtoreth mentioned in 1 Kings. This goddess is also known as the “Queen of Heaven” a.k.a., Astarte, Ishtar, or Asherah. Ashtoreth was a goddess or god prevalent in Canaan and the followers of this cult promoted all sorts of pagan ceremonial acts which included sacrifices, self-mutilation, and perverse sexual acts, all done as a religious experience of sorts. What is this but not demonic?

We also see the contagious nature of this demonic religious practice. In the Old Testament, we have evidence of how quickly God’s own people including a King of Israel (Solomon) became desensitized to this type of wickedness. They tolerated it, began to participate in it, even promoting it at times. Furthermore, we see that participation in the demonic was always met with God’s fierce wrath.

As I’ve considered these texts, I can’t help but wonder if the starting point for them was ceasing to call the demonic “demonic”? In asking this question, I hope you can see some parallels already with demonic worship and with what is going on around us culturally. If I were to describe our society presently, I would say that it—far from being atheistic—worships Molech and Ashtoreth, merely dressed up in materialistic language.



What our present-day society does is deny the spiritual cosmic battle going on; it denies the “powers and principalities” through the manipulation of words and definitions. Our spiritual enemies work craftily in the PR department.

For instance, modern society takes the sacrifice of children—the murder of our descendants to the god of Molech (an ultimate marring of the image of God)—and instead calls it “Women’s Healthcare” or “Pro-Choice”. Furthermore, the priests wear white medical coats or the black Armani suits of politicians. This great and sinister PR attempt by our spiritual enemies creates a cultural environment that fosters a low view of children, one that leads to this sort of wickedness being tolerated, accepted, and even celebrated in society. We even become desensitized to it. We constantly hear talk about how expensive children are—how inconvenient they are. We view a family of 5, 6, 7+ strangely in our society.

Mothers that would dare stay at home to shepherd and steward the souls of their children have their work—their life’s work—constantly devalued. We take animals and treat them better than we do people, the only beings created in the image of God. And all of this helps to accelerate a wicked, demonic plan that fosters a low view of children and a low view of the family, which in turn paves the way to the acceptability of child sacrifice in our society.

That is just Molech, however. Think of the worship of Ashtoreth and how our culture offers this type of worship presently. We again use the power of words to downplay the demonic nature of things; pornography—including

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**“Think of the worship of Ashtoreth and how our culture offers this type of worship presently.”**

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what is in the TV shows many people watch—is considered entertainment and art instead of lust and the viewing of adultery for pleasure.

The LGBTQ+ movement and the promotion of castration or the maiming of the bodies of people—especially in our young people—is demonic. Yet instead of seeing the sinister, demonic, and oppressive body and soul harming nature of the movement, it is sold as a civil rights movement. And it is wreaking havoc on individuals created in the image of God—reminiscent of Legion. And anyone who loves people in this movement enough to be truthful with them faces real consequences in this present age. This is all *demonic*.

And we need clarity and conviction on this, because it is a gospel issue. Some may think it isn't—some may think it to be merely a political issue, and that the church has no business in the political—but they would be dead wrong. In fact, to think of these issues as political demonstrates just how well we have been assimilated into thinking about the world from a materialist perspective.

In contrast, maintaining a view of the world that is both seen and unseen allows one to have moral clarity in a world that calls what's righteous "unrighteous", and what is unrighteous "righteous". Maintaining a view of the seen and unseen realms can help you have the courage of convictions shaped by the Word, which leads to gospel clarity and to the redemption of individuals created in God's image. Having a view of the world that is seen and unseen will also help you to rightly fear God, who is over all things, instead of man who is merely a creature. And we must fear the One to whom all men must give an account.

#### References:

1. We see this goddess mentioned in Judges 2 & 3, Jeremiah 7 and other places in Jeremiah—we also see that this god was to be put away along with Baal in 2 Kings by King Josiah in the midst of his reforms.

# A Biblical Response to Arguments Against the Image of God

By Dave Jenkins



Over the last two decades, I've been reading and writing on the topics of biblical manhood, pornography, and purity. During this time, I've noticed that often the conversation focuses more on how men and women can overcome enslavement to pornography. Such resources are definitely needed, but the main problem is that by focusing only on over-

coming pornography, what is often missed is the teaching on the kind of people God wants us to become—men and women growing in the grace of God (2 Peter 3:18). For this article, we will also broaden our scope to consider sexual sin as a whole, and better understand how men and women are created in the image of

God to worship Him alone, not to do whatever we want. Through this, we'll see that the battle for biblical manhood and womanhood is grounded on the inerrant Word of God.

## **Biblical Gender Roles and Pursuing Purity**

Biblical manhood and womanhood are first and foremost about God. God is the One who created man in His image and likeness (Genesis 1:26–27). He then took from man's rib and made Eve to be a helper to Adam (Genesis 2:18–25). Man is to be a leader, both in the home and the church (Genesis 1–2; 1 Timothy 3:5; Ephesians 5). Women are to have a significant ministry to other women; specifically as older women instructing younger women (Titus 2:3–5). Women can also serve (for example) as deaconesses, writers, counselors (to other women and to children), and as a great help and support to their husbands as they preach and teach (if their husband is a pastor or an elder) in the local church (Titus 2:3–5).

The proper way to view these roles is through the prism of servanthood (Matthew 23:11; Luke 22:26). Every Christian is a servant of God's grace (Ephesians 3:7; 1 Peter 4:10). Every Christian has God-given gifts, abilities, and talents (1 Corinthians 12; Ephesians 4:7; 1 Peter 4:10). God is not saying, "I gave you this gift, now you can't use it." Instead, He says, "I gave you this specific gift to function this specific way, as I've designed within My church, just as I created you." The question is not "Can women serve as a pastor or elder?" but rather "Why shouldn't they serve as God designed them (Genesis 1:26–27; Titus 2)?"

Biblical gender roles apply to the discussion on sexual immorality (such as pornography and all sex outside of biblical marriage) and purity because they help us make sense of how God views each gender specifically. As men, we are to be the pastor-theologians in our homes (1 Timothy 3:1–5). Men are commanded to love our wives, just as Christ loves the Church (Ephesians 5:22–33). As Christians, we are to put off the flesh and put on Christ, daily (Colossians 3:7–17). Part of

your God-given identity is to take hold of the newness of your new life in Christ (Ephesians 1:5; Romans 6:16; 15:17). Christ has transferred you, dear Christian, from the kingdom of darkness to the kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ (Colossians 1:13). You are wholly His and He is yours, and you have union with Christ for communion with Him (John 15:1–10).

By understanding biblical gender roles, we come to understand the aim of our fight against sexual sins of all kinds. We are not just men and women struggling against a particular sin without the hope of the righteousness of God. Instead, we are men and women are created in the image of God

**“Men need role models like what Paul outlines in the letters to Timothy and Titus...”**

(Genesis 1:26–27). Through Christ, we are new creations in Him, and He is making all things new in our lives (2 Corinthians 5:17). As the Holy Spirit puts a spotlight on our sin and convicts us of it, He also points us to Christ’s finished and sufficient work, and then empowers believers to go out and make disciples for His glory (Matthew 28:16–20; John 16:6–8; Luke 19:10).

Many men and women today are failing at their God-given assignment. Instead of being biblical men, many men—even within the church—are apathetic to their God-given responsibilities (Ephesians 5:33); I speak to this as well, because I was once one of those men enslaved to pornography. As I continue working in ministry to men, I am convinced that pride and apathy are killing us. Men need role models like what Paul outlines in the letters to Timothy and Titus; men who take their walks in godliness seriously, coming alongside other men as Paul instructed us to do (1 Timothy 3:1–5; Titus 2:6–8). Likewise, many women are now struggling with pornography and other



sexual sin. Whether it's flirting sexually with someone at the office, indulging in illicit images or videos, or reading romance books that take one into a fantasy world, women are struggling with enslavement to pornography and sexual impurity. Women today need to live out Titus 2 just as much as men; both younger and older women, who can walk alongside those who are struggling and guide them in their growth in grace and spiritual maturity.

## **The Image of God**

At the heart of much of the discussion on gender—whether it's discussing homosexuality, transgenderism, gender dysphoria, or polyonymy—is a wrong understanding of the image of God in mankind. Much of this discussion is occurring in a secular media that wants to promote “equality and tolerance among all ‘genders.’” Such a view encourages people to believe that there is fundamentally no difference between being a man and being a woman. The biblical evidence is overwhelmingly in favor of a man being a man and a woman being a woman—all based on the creation account in Genesis and references to those passages later in Scripture (Genesis 1:26–28, 2:20–22).

The transgender movement today has further conflated matters about the image of God. The LGBTQ movement has convinced people to such a degree, using primarily cultural/social argumentation, that now people accept homosexuality and transgenderism as a normative state (even within the church). Yet, the truth of the Bible stills stands in opposition to this view, because God had a specific idea in mind when He created man and woman in His image.

Likewise, many people today are convinced that marriage isn't between one man and one woman, but rather that it can (and even should) be between two men or two women, one man with two women, or any number of other non-biblical configurations. Despite this cultural belief, the Bible says one man and one woman is not only the God-given standard, but the only way to have a mar-

riage that honors God (Genesis 2:20–22). And pornography also degrades women (and men) by giving people permission to see others not as a helpmate to man (Genesis 2:20), or in cases of men being objectified, seeing them not as the true leader of the home, but only as someone to be viewed as an object of someone’s pleasure.

In addition to these challenges to gender roles, evolutionary thinking has led many people to conclude that there is no difference between humans and other organisms. By this, I’m referring to the Theory of Evolution, which suggests that all organisms have come to into existence through a blind, unguided process of random variation, natural selection, and other effects, such as genetic drift. Although there are different versions of evolutionary theory, this one (the Theory of Evolution) is prominent, and it carries serious implications with regards to what it means to be human.

### **Evolution’s Attempt to Deface Imago Dei**

One result of the Theory of Evolution is its promotion (by extension) of the degradation of the moral significance of life. Those that teach this theory as “truth” claim that morality is up to the individual or the culture—therefore, morality is relative. By saying this, they suggest that others should tolerate moral differences in each other, but don’t see where this thought process leads: that moral relativism makes moral progress impossible.

Moral progress, such as proposed by people like Martin Luther King Jr., cannot be obtained when the target by which it is initially judged continues to move (moral relativism). If one person or group thinks, “This is the standard,” and another disagrees, how can such a standard ever be improved upon? And because the Theory of Evolution promotes such moral relativism, due to its lack of moral guides/standards (as provided in Scripture), we will forever have a vague and shifting standard—one in which improvement cannot be achieved.

We face issues on every front regarding biblical morality and sexuality. For example, within a generation, we've seen homosexuality accepted culturally, and on the heels of that, the acceptance of transgenderism. A cultural norm is an accepted behavior in our culture, something the majority deems "correct", or at least "not wrong". As Christians, we are people of truth, because Jesus says He is the Truth (John 14:6), therefore, we stand fast on the Word and declare it. Such a message is viewed by a secular culture as hostile to its "truth" claims, because they view it as "outdated" and/or

**“Naturalism says there is no God, no spiritual reality, and there are no souls, only bodies.”**

“unimportant”. For example, Christians who proclaim that God created mankind in His own image will face resistance on the subject of abortion, because—according to what Scripture teaches—God's people believe that life begins at conception, and therefore stand for the baby's right to life as a human being in the womb. Christians are pro-life from the womb to the tomb and everywhere in-between. It's not only on issues of biblical sexuality that Christians face opposition, it's also on biblical morality and ethics.

As believers, we have to understand we live in a culture that exemplifies Romans 1, and that people are not just dead in their trespasses and sins, but they are spiritually blinded by Satan (Ephesians 2:1–4; 1 Corinthians 1:18–30). We must not compromise on the ethics, morality, and sexuality as taught in Scripture, but stand fast on the Word (2 Timothy 3:16–17). Christians are to give an answer for a reason for their hope, but do so with gentleness and respect (1 Peter 3:15). We are to contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints (Jude 3). As believers engage others, they are to do so being patient and loving, because every single person is made in the image of God, and thus deserving of

dignity, value, and respect (Genesis 1:26–27, 2:20–24; 2 Timothy 2:24–26).

## The Image of God Strikes Back

Commenting on the work of J.P. Moreland, who wrote a book called, *The Recalcitrant Imago Dei: Human Persons and the Failure of Naturalism*, Tom Gilson says, “Imago Dei means the “image of God” in Latin. Naturalism is the theory (roughly) that nothing exists but nature—nothing but matter and energy, interacting by natural law and chance.” Naturalism says there is no God, no spiritual reality, and there are no souls, only bodies. He further remarks:

*Recalcitrant is the keyword [in Moreland’s title]. It means “obstinately uncooperative.” We use it to describe misbehaving kids or criminals who won’t change, no matter how much correction gets applied to them. Human nature is obstinately resistant to cooperating with what evolutionary theory says we ought to think about ourselves. If unguided evolution is true, we shouldn’t be fooled by these “illusions” of consciousness or free will—but we just can’t help ourselves. We shouldn’t think we’re more significant than any other organism, but we just won’t get with the program!*

But there’s a reason for our stubbornness. Tom Gilson explains:

*“The fact is we are humans, and no matter how hard someone might try to talk ourselves out of it, we’re always going to be human. [And as such,] we were created in the image of God. That’s who we are, and that’s who we will always be. Being created in God’s image means that we glorify Him by thinking, feeling, deciding, relating, building, and creating—even in so-called “non-spiritual” realms of life; and these are good things to do. It also means that we have moral significance. It means we can fail morally and turn all of this to bad ends.*

Genesis 1:26–28 explains our existence in these terms:

*“Then God said, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over*

*the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth." So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. And God blessed them. And God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth.""*

Humanity is the pinnacle of creation. Human beings are made in the image of God (Genesis 1:26, 5:1–2) and the life we have is, therefore, sacred (Genesis 9:6). Human beings are to resemble God in every sphere of life, as we were created to worship Him and enjoy relationships with one another (Hebrews 10:25). Humanity's calling is, in summary, to be fruitful so that the glory and goodness of God would multiply through us (Genesis 1:28), and to be agents of God's dominion on earth, so the blessing of fruitfulness would enable us to fill the earth with God's image-bearers (Genesis 1:26–28, 2:20–24). His rule is extended to every corner of the earth by His direct influence, and by His image-bearers, which we are privileged to be.

**“Through Jesus’ perfect life and His suffering— the penalty for our sins as the perfect God-man— He provided for humans to be renewed in the image of God...”**

Humans failed by their sinfulness (Genesis 3) to fulfill their image-bearing responsibilities (Genesis 11:1–9; Ps 2:1–2). The Lord renewed the mandate of fruitful multiplication to Noah (Genesis 9:1, 7) and later with Abraham (Genesis 12:2; 17:2, 6, 8). He similarly blessed Israel (Exodus 1:7) and promised to bless the nation of Israelites as they humbly obeyed (Leviticus 26:9). Yet, again and again, the nation of Israel failed.

Jesus Christ, as the second Adam, fulfills God's image-bearing purposes



and enables Christians to do the same. The apostle Paul speaks of “*the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God*” (2 Corinthians 4:4; Colossians 1:15). Jesus is the image of God that we were intended to be (Colossians 1:15). Christians are united to Christ by faith, so the Lord now sees the people of God as clothed in the righteousness of Christ (2 Corinthians 5:21), to whom we are being conformed (Romans 8:29) in righteousness and holiness (Ephesians 4:24).

Through Jesus’ perfect life and His suffering—the penalty for our sins as the perfect God-man—He provided for humans to be renewed in the image of God through faith in Him (2 Corinthians 3:18; Philippians 2:6–7; Colossians 3:10). God’s intended goal of spreading His righteous rule throughout the earth is being realized by the preaching of the gospel in-and-through the local church. The example of Adam and Eve reproducing and multiplying was used in the early church to emphasize the need of Christians to reproduce and multiply disciples of Jesus to the nations (Acts 6:7, 12:24, 19:20; Colossians 1:8–15).

The truths of Genesis 1–2 are coming under increasing attacks from the ideologies of homosexuality, polygamy, pornography, and transgenderism. Such attacks strike at the heart of what it means to be created in the image of God. Christians have good answers to these issues, because the Word of God speaks to them, which is why they need to speak up and proclaim the truth, as provided in the Scriptures.

## **The Heart of the Matter and What to Do About It**

At the heart of current cultural discussions on morality and sexuality is the idea that one can live however they want. Whether this entails having sex outside of marriage, multiple partners/spouses, attempting to “marry” the same-sex, divorce for any reason, or attempting to change one’s gender, we see these lifestyle choices becoming more and more popular, even within the church. The whole idea of living however we want is not new, but rather has been around

since the fall.

When Christians speak out against such ideas, they invite ridicule and the accusation of hypocrisy and bigotry. Christians should not be afraid of such criticism but continue to stand fast on the holiness of God revealed in His Word (1 Peter 1:13–15). Christians are called out of worldliness to a new life in Christ to be new creations who shine His light to a perishing world (Matthew 5:10–12; 2 Corinthians 5:17–21).

At the heart of the argument against “living however we want” is the Lord’s call on our lives; it is He who is the Creator and we are His creation (Psalms 24, 145). People respond to such an argument with, “You can’t judge me for how I live!” Even so, the Lord will judge man because He is the rightful ruler over creation. He who creates has the right to define the terms for how we live (Revelation 1:4).

For example, even in the Christian Church, if a pastor preaches on the holiness of God, or on what God requires of man in light of Christ’s finished and sufficient work, he will get accused of legalism. During World War II, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, a pastor who ministered in the underground Church in Nazi Germany, wrote the (now classic) book, *The Cost of Discipleship*. Bonhoeffer argued for the concept of costly grace versus cheap grace. Costly grace was what Jesus did on the cross. Cheap grace is living however we want because of the costly grace of God in Christ. I fear that some people think they need to out-nuance the Bible in order to avoid the accusation of legalism, but by doing so they end up compromising the truth of God’s Word. An example that we have in Scripture is where Paul, who, after explaining how man — when left to his own devices — will naturally love more of his sin and not God (Romans 1–3), shows how man can be declared not guilty through Jesus (Romans 4–5).

Romans 6 opens this way after explaining how we can be declared not

guilty with this question (vs.1), *“What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound?”* Such a question is an important one and gets to the heart of our discussion in this article.

God’s grace has made us new creations in Him (2 Corinthians 5:17– 21). Christians do not live however they want, which is Paul’s point in Romans 6:1.

**“Christians are saved by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone (Ephesians 2:8-9).”**

Instead, we have a new master in Jesus. We were once dead in our trespasses and sins (Ephesians 2:1–5). We were once held captive to the prince of the *“power of the air”* (Ephesians 2:2). Now, Christ has transferred us to His Kingdom at the moment of our salvation, and declared us children of God bought by grace alone (Colossians 1:13). In light of the grace of

God that we’ve received, we are to live a new way because we belong to the King, who tells us to *put off the old way* and walk in the newness of new life in Him (Colossians 3:1–18). Christians are not to walk in the oldness of life, but walk in a manner worthy of the calling they’ve received (Ephesians 4:1).

When Jesus taught about counting the cost, He had in mind the way the disciples would live (Luke 9:23). Jesus is the rightful ruler and covenant Lord (Revelation 1:4). In the ministry of Jesus, we see Him giving many “hard words”, such as counting the cost and following Him in all of life (Luke 9:23–27). When Jesus gave “hard words”, people abandoned Him, despite the fact that it is He alone who can offer eternal life (John 6:60, 66).

Christians are saved by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone (Ephesians 2:8–9). It is because of what Christ has done that we do not live how we want, nor by our own rules, but by the revealed Word of God (2 Timothy

3:16–17). The Creator has the right to dictate to His creation the terms of eternal life, so living however we want as His children cheapens the costly grace of God in Christ. Some Christians think all they have to do is “repent and confess” and all will be well, but the mark of true and genuine repentance is not only sorrow, but *turning away from sin and returning to the Lord with all your heart* (Joel 2:12; Ezekiel 14:6; Acts 26:20).

**“If there’s no evidence at all in your life that you are being conformed into the image of Christ, you have great reason to be concerned and should examine your salvation...”**

In 1 John 1:6, the apostle says, “*If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth.*” What John has in mind here are those who say they can live however they want because they belong to the Lord. But these people aren’t “*practicing the truth.*” In the previous verse (1 John 1:5), John says, “*This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all.*” John contrasts those who walk in the light with those who don’t, but claim to be children of light. With this comparison, he says in verse 8: “*If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.*” Then John tells us in verse 9 that we are to confess our sin, which acknowledges our wrongdoing before the holiness of the Lord. Only then will the Lord “*cleanse us from all unrighteousness.*”

Christians do not cohabit before marriage, nor support/practice the homosexual lifestyle, nor participate in polygamy, pornography, adultery, prostitution, pedophilia, or bestiality, because the Lord created the institution of marriage between *one man and one woman* (Genesis 2:20–24).

Through the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit, Christians put off the lust of the flesh, lust of the eyes, and the pride of life by putting on Christ (Colossians 3:1–18; 1 John 2:16). As a result of being transferred from the kingdom of Satan to the kingdom of the Lord Jesus (Colossians 1:15), Christians have a new desire for righteousness, and therefore renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, while they await the imminent return of the Lord Jesus (Titus 2:12–14). Therefore, we live as God requires us: in obedience to the Lord because of the grace we've received from Jesus, and increasingly display the fruits of the Spirit in our lives (John 15:9–11; Galatians 5:21–23).

Living however one wants cheapens the costly grace of God in Christ. Paul's response to this, as described in Romans 8, is that we are to live by the Spirit (Romans 8:5, 13). Paul's point is that if we desire to live a holy life—a life that pleases and honors God—we will live under the power of the Holy Spirit. This life, however, is possible only because of Christ and the present work of the Holy Spirit.

What should you do in light of this biblical teaching? Understand that you've been saved for a purpose. That purpose isn't just for you, it's for God's glory. The life you've been called to as a Christian is one of sacrifice. When the first followers of Jesus heard Him say that they were to count the cost and follow Him, many people left His side forever (John 6:60, 66). Those who are Christ's will obey Him (John 14:15). Those who refuse to obey Him give evidence that they are not His (Matthew 7:20–21).

While all of our obedience to God is only partial in scope, any obedience is better than none. As Christians, we should see evidence, year by year—regardless of how little—that we are growing in grace (2 Peter 3:18).

If there's no evidence at all in your life that you are being conformed into



the image of Christ, you have great reason to be concerned and should examine your salvation (2 Corinthians 13:5). If there is even the tiniest bit of evidence that you're changing and conforming to the image of Christ, then give glory to God. Such evidence is a means by which God is encouraging you in your faith (2 Peter 1:3–10).

The true Christian goes back to his/her identity in Christ, because that is where he/she finds genuine assurance and confidence before God. The fruit of

**“Christian, we must stand firm upon the Scriptures...”**

our lives will testify whether our profession is true. This is why our profession of faith must be matched by His possession of our lives. These two things—profession and possession—work together to give Christians assurance and increasing confidence in Christ. If you lack

confidence before God, examine your life in light of Christ. See where you're lacking, then repent and return to your first love—Jesus Christ. He is ready and waiting for you. His throne of grace bids you come to Him. Your Intercessor and High Priest beckons you to Himself (Hebrews 2:17–28, 4:14–16).

## Summary

While proclaiming that marriage is between one man and one woman will only come with increasing persecution from a secular society, Christians must speak the truth in love (Ephesians 4:15). We must challenge the worldview of those who reject the biblical view of marriage, because such a rejection is not merely a rejection of *marriage*, but an assault on the God of the Bible, from whom this institution came (Genesis 2:20–24).

Christian, we must stand firm upon the Scriptures and declare the whole counsel of God (1 Corinthians 15:1–10; 2 Timothy 3:16–17). On topics related to

gender issues and marriage, we need to understand that the truth of the Word of God matters for our faith and practice. Since the Bible is sufficient, reliable, authoritative, and trustworthy, Christians believe that God created man in His image and likeness (Genesis 1:26–27, 2:20–24). Ultimately, how we view the first few chapters of the Bible will have a dramatic and significant implication for how we view the rest of the Bible.

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# The Image of God and Evolution

By Jacob Tanner

Evolutionary theory is only a *theory*, but often accepted as scientific and historic fact.

The theory, made extremely popular by the likes of Charles Darwin and his philosophical progeny, colors the

entirety of a person's worldview. If one believes that evolution on a macro scale is both possible and legitimate as an explanation for man's place in the cosmos, then things like ethics, metaphysics, and even historical studies cease to matter.

In fact, if evolutionary theory is believed, nothing truly matters at all. After all, the cosmos is theorized to be the result of an accidental cosmic bang—the earth is supposed to be 4.5 billion years old, and man is thought to be the achievement of millions of years of macro-evolutionary advancements, climb-



ing the scale of progress from accidental, protoplasmic goo, to monkey, to Neanderthal, to hominid. In such a theoretical system, nothing really matters because history is always forgotten, ethics are invented in the minds of evolved pieces of goo, and there's no real meaning behind anything.

Of course, the entire theory loses traction once one begins to seriously ask the question, "Where did the cosmic big bang originate? Where did the necessary matter come from?" Though more theories are offered, none are truly compelling. There must be something that created the something, because something does not simply begin to exist on its own. What the origin of the universe requires is the eternal existence of a transcendent Being, who did not come into existence but simply always has been. And, as it turns out, Christianity offers such a Being in the transcendent, eternal, and Triune God of Scripture.

### **Scripture and a More Compelling Origin**

The Scriptures offer the most compelling alternative to the Darwinian Theory of Evolution. The Bible gives man a compelling meaning in the cosmos, imbuing his life with purpose and meaning with the insistence that man was intelligently designed by God, in the image of God, and for the purposes of God. Rather than being a cosmic accident, the Bible speaks of man as having been intentionally and intelligently designed by God.

*In Genesis 1:26-27, the Bible records man's origins by explaining: "Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth." So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. And God blessed them. And God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing*

*that moves on the earth.””*

Right out of the gate, the Bible explains that God created man to be in His own image, He created mankind to have dominion over the earth, and He created male and female so that mankind could, ultimately, procreate and fill the earth in his subduing of it, for the glory of God. Then, God blessed the first man and woman as He sent them forth to take dominion.

It does not take one a long time to see how these truths completely change one's worldview and outlook on man's place in the cosmos. Suddenly, human life matters and is imbued with meaning. If man is in God's image, then every life is precious and valuable. Murder is wrong because God created humans to reflect His glory upon the earth, and to extinguish that glory by the taking of a life is one of the worst things a person can do.

**“The fact that man was made in God’s image means that from womb to tomb, life is meaningful and valuable.”**

Suddenly, an entire ethical system can be established, based on the Word of God. This is because, since man is made in God's image, and since God has spoken to man in His Word, man must listen and obey what his divine Creator commands. Thus, the basis of love is established; man must love his fellow man, made in the image of God, because he is called to love his God, and to love the Creator necessitates one love His creation as well—especially those beings bearing His own likeness and image.

Mankind also has a purpose. He's not a cosmic mistake, but a person made and fashioned by God Himself, for a specific purpose. Though there is not enough space here to describe and detail all the things human beings may be called to do in their lifetime, at the most foundational level, all people exist for



the purpose of subduing the environment around him, for the glory of God. This doesn't mean that man simply utilizes and warps his environment to achieve supremacy and dominance over various animal species to make himself the top of the food chain, and the one most fit for survival; it means that man rules the earth as viceregents, reflecting God's glory every place he goes.

And, whereas an evolutionary worldview would permit abominations like abortion, the Christian worldview can allow for no such injustices. The fact that man was made in God's image means that from the womb to the tomb, life is meaningful and valuable. At the very moment of conception—and in one sense, from eternity past—that person has had an eternally designed purpose, created by the Creator Himself.

## **Evolution's Belittling of Man**

We have already seen how the Biblical view of creation offers a far more compelling worldview than that offered by evolutionary theory. This is because the Biblical view of creation is the true and historical view, as opposed to evolutionary theory, which is merely an attempt to obscure the origins of mankind. Man was created in the image of God, and despite sin corrupting and marring that image, the image still exists even in unrepentant sinners.

This means that mankind is more than evolved goo, more than evolved amphibians with opposable thumbs, more than advanced apes, and is actually of the greatest worth and value in the created order.

In fact, as the Christian philosopher, Boethius, wrote in *The Consolation of Philosophy*, man is actually the pinnacle of God's creation. But, when concepts like evolution blur reality, the result is that man forgets his place in creation. “The condition of human nature is just this; man towers above the rest of creation so long as he realizes his own nature, and when he forgets it, he sinks lower than the beasts. For other living things to be ignorant of themselves, is natural;

but for man it is a defect.”

Evolutionary theory is not only wrong, but absolutely defective. Those who buy into it become, by implication, defective in their ethical reasoning, philosophical understanding, and metaphysical upholding. Apart from recognizing his origins—that he is made by God and in God's image—there can be no advancement of civilization. Perhaps one of the most damnable results of evolutionary theory is that it evolves and advances *nothing*. Rather, it demoralizes and devolves man's thinking until, eventually, man finds himself staring into the abyss, and the abyss stares back at him. Unthinking. Unfeeling. Uncaring.

**It's untruth, unreality. And the only solution is to return to the biblical worldview of man created by God, in His own image.**

## The Image of God and Our Engagement with Others

By David Van Bebber



**It is not uncommon to scroll through a social media feed and quickly realize the toxic nature of human communication online.** This

“keyboard warrior”

mentality is a hot topic for Christians and non-Christians. Many are concerned about the cruelty initiated in the comments sections of social media posts, news articles, and blogs. But how did things get like this, and should we be concerned?

Individuals have consistently recognized that some spoken words, and

even the tone of words, communicate negative emotions like contempt, rage, and hatred, and those words are viewed as less socially acceptable. Generally (and at least historically), in the public square, most refrain from this type of “locker-room talk.” However, “locker-room talk” seems no longer confined to the locker room and is the general norm in most social media comment sections.

One could debate whether the current hostile environment of online communication has elevated in recent years, but this is hard to prove objectively. Christians, however, recognize that Scripture declares humanity’s sinful nature and the darkness of the fallen human heart (Jeremiah 17:9; Ephesians 2:1-3;

**“Yet, the responsibility of all Christians to engage fellow image-bearers has remained the same...”**

Romans 3:10-18; Psalm 51:5), which impacts spoken and written communication. Further, Christians are reminded that “what comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart” (Matthew 15:18). So, when one remembers that humanity is fallen and has a wicked heart, it will not come as a shock when wicked words

spew forth from wicked people.

This last paragraph does not surprise a biblically consistent Christian. Since the Fall, humanity has battled against one another because the curse changed human nature (Genesis 6:5) and, therefore, impacted spoken words (Genesis 11:1-9). Conflict with and between fellow image-bearers often involves using harsh spoken or typed words in today’s world. Yet, Christians should “[l]et no corrupting talk come out of [their] mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear” (Ephesians 4:29). Scripture warns, “the tongue is a fire, a world of unrighteousness...setting on fire the entire course of life and set on fire by hell” (James

3:6). Due to the destructive nature of an uncontrolled tongue, Christians must use caution when considering how to engage other image bearers in a culture obsessed with controversy.

These are unique times in the area of human connectivity and relationships. Human beings have access to more people than ever in the history of the world. Any person with a smartphone and a social media account can reach millions. This is a powerful tool, and the impacts of this type of connectivity still need to be fully understood.

Yet, the responsibility of all Christians to engage fellow image-bearers has remained the same (Matthew 28:19-20). Further, God's Word reveals the nature of humanity and, at the same time, provides a powerful tool for navigating the method of engagement with all image-bearers in the current hostile mediated landscape. Given the mediated communication landscape, Christians need to consider how being made in the image of God impacts engaging other image-bearers. Therefore, this article will identify some unique aspects of the current communication climate before demonstrating how a biblical understanding of humanity can guide Christians when engaging others.

## **The Unique Mediate Climate**

The current landscape of communication and human interaction is shifting by the minute. This shift is evident to most individuals but is more complex than many assume. While spoken and written words were the primary means through which most communication took place at one time, Neil Postman contends there is a shift in human communication, specifically its form over the last few decades, in emphasis from text-centered to image-centered. Stated briefly, in a text-centered or "typographic" culture, people read a newspaper or a book, and the text content of the medium allows an individual to process the infor-

mation in an ordered, sequential pattern.

Text-based communication was the dominant medium of exchanging ideas for centuries. A typographic culture even processes spoken words differently since it is a culture where written text reigns supreme. Postman and other Media Ecologists contended that a text-based culture is better primed for rational and linear thinking. Following an argument through to its conclusion, and being able to separate logic from emotions, are all primed due to text-based communication.

Progressing from the telegraph to radio, then television, and now to digital communication, the dominant form of human communication shifted to an image-centered culture. In an image-centered culture, the “sequence of propositions” lacks context, altering how one processes content. “Changes in media bring about changes in the structure of people's minds or changes in their cognitive capacities.” This change is easily observed in the dominant forms of social media. Even the short-lived phenomenon of social media is moving from more text-centric platforms (i.e., Facebook) to image-centric platforms (i.e., Tick-Tok).

Postman argues that, since the proliferation of broadcast media and 24-hour news services, the way in which individuals process information has changed how people think about themselves and those around them. In the digital and mediated space, emphasis is given to images and appearance rather than the credibility of argument and reasoning. Image-based communication primes individuals to respond immediately, often devoid of rational linear central processing. It is not that those in an image-based culture cannot rationalize, but they are more prone to immediate, emotional responses.

Postman passed away before the rise of the internet, and subsequent rise of social media and access to instant messaging. Yet, the shift in how individuals rationalize the understanding of self and others has altered, given the rise of digital communication mediums. The shifting view of self is much more nuanced than



this article can fully explain. Yet, it is summarized quite well by Carl R. Truman, when he described the rise of “expressive individualism.”

Truman notes, “The rise of technology is clearly important to...changing the relationship of human beings to their environment.” Since Christians are called to communicate a transcendent text-based message, it is important to understand the cultural shift and the implications of a shifting view of self. This challenge must be faced when taking the gospel (a text-based message) into the public square.

When considering the arguments of Postman and Truman and combining them, they layout like this: Due to the rise in social media, the emphasis on image-centered communication, and the decline of Judeo-Christian morality in Western culture, a paradigm-shift in how one understands self, morality, and culture has occurred.

As a further extension of this, one observes that social media has drastically impacted adolescents. This has given rise to skyrocketing suicide and depression rates. It is not prudent to blame all of this on social media or the shift from a text-centered to an image-centered culture. Still, it is essential to understand that these changes impact how individuals understand themselves in relation to others and how they view communication with others.

Primarily, then, Christians must ask a few questions. If the cultural understanding of self has shifted drastically, what does that mean for Christians engaging a lost culture? How does having a view of humanity grounded in Scripture help when engaging with an image-based culture, often filled with vitriol?

**“How does having a view of humanity grounded in Scripture help when engaging with an image-based culture, often filled with vitriol?”**

## A Biblical Understanding of Humanity as a Guide

After reading the previous section, some may feel overwhelmed, thinking, “I *am* struggling to understand how to interact with individuals since their view of self, due to the impacts of social media and an image-based culture, has changed.” Well, there is incredible hope for the Christian. Ecclesiastes 1:9 notes, “There is nothing new under the sun.” Despite changes in how individuals understand self, and despite changing mediums of communication, humanity is still the same. While observing that the medium of social media has impacted how individuals understand themselves and others, Christians are reminded, “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?” (Jeremiah 17:9). When Christians engage others online, then a Scripture-based understanding of humanity is foundational.

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**“Christians seeking to love their neighbors as themselves should stand out in online interactions...”**

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The Christian Worldview defines humanity by noting, “Human beings are created in the image of God and thus possess personality, self-transcendence, intelligence, morality, [sociability] and creativity.” When dealing with others, Christians understand that our words matter because we are dealing not with random, rearranged particles resulting from a cosmic accident, but beings made in God’s image, who has value. This reality extends to one’s actions when engaging others in the unique cultural context of online communication. When considering engaging others, either online or in-person, a Christian starts with Scripture. Since this is the case, Christians have all the tools to speak truth into a broken society (Luke 21:14-15).

Understanding that all image bearers have transcendent value (that is, timeless and more than just physical value), should bring about compassion in a Christian's communication. One can understand how most people view themselves and how the world around them has changed, but the gospel's message is timeless in its relevance. Because Christians realize that "on the day of judgment people will give account for every careless word" (Matthew 12:36), a Christian's words when engaging other image bearers should be "always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone" (Colossians 4:6).

Even though the image of God in humanity "has been marred" due to the Fall, it has not been erased. As Millard Erickson notes, "The image of God has not been lost as a result of sin or specifically the fall." This proves a pivotal "point of contact" for the believer. Like the one whose image humanity bears, people are rational, spiritual, moral, and social beings. Therefore, Christians seeking to engage others who struggle to understand themselves and the culture around them can appeal to these dimensions despite the fallen nature of humanity.

Christians seeking to love their neighbors as themselves should stand out in online interactions as they appeal to the rational nature of humanity, using logic and reasoning. This is complemented by engaging non-believers with issues that appeal to the spiritual darkness in which the lost are immersed. Further, while Judeo-Christian morality has often been outright rejected, general revelation has embedded universal morals into human nature. A concept like the value of human beings, honesty, and human dignity are essential points of contact for sparking conversations with non-believers.

Finally, God is relational, and so are the humans that bear His image (Genesis 2:18, 23; 3:6-8; 4:1, etc.). Christians must seek to "become all things to all people" (1 Corinthians 9:22). They must attempt to connect with those "who

by their unrighteousness suppress the truth” (Romans 1:18). This compassion is demonstrated in carefully using words and genuinely “considering others as more important than yourselves” (Philippians 2:3). Knowing who God is and how that applies to His creation should drive interactions with non-believers in every aspect and medium of a Christian’s communication.

## Conclusion

The reality is that even though many in our culture are confused in their understanding of *self*, the gospel has not changed, the fallenness of man has not changed, and the image of God impressed on all humanity remains constant. Because a Christian recognizes that being made in the image of God is foundational to one’s understanding of others, his/her engagement with the lost should stand out. Also, Christians’ interactions with others in online mediums should be a light in the darkness because of its content and charity.

Unfortunately, what frequently happens is that Christians fail to remember what it means to be made in God’s image when sitting at a keyboard or in front of a camera. This type of forgetfulness is sinful and dishonestly represents the Lord of Glory. So, being grounded in a biblical understanding of the image of God, as found within mankind, is vital to engaging others. Without knowing the true God and what He has said about His creation, a person may only add to the acidic nature of online communication and fail to stand out as the “salt” and “light” Christians are commanded to embody.

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# The Image of God and the Restoration of All Things

By Jacob Tanner

**There are really only two kinds of people in this world:** those who are part of fallen humanity, who have had the image of God within them, marred due to Adam and Eve's transgression in the Garden; and those who are part of redeemed humanity, who belong to Jesus Christ and have had their sins atoned for



by His innocent shed blood. As great as the sin of the first man, Adam, the grace and mercy of the second man, Jesus, is far greater still. The Bible says, *"But the free gift is not like the trespass. For if many died through one man's trespass, much more have the grace of God and the free gift by the grace of that one man Jesus Christ abounded for many"* (Romans 5:15). The sole requirement to experience the grace



of God, and therefore become part of this redeemed humanity, is to believe by faith in Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

When one believes in Jesus, an amazing thing happens. A sinner is not merely forgiven of their sins, not only granted eternal life, and not just filled with the Holy Spirit, but in God's gracious act of regeneration, they are reborn and made anew. The image of God in man, which had been marred by sin, is remade. The sinner always possessed God's image, but it was like a fractured mirror. In Christ, the mirror is mended; the cracks and fissures are fixed. The one who is saved by Jesus finds the image of God is saved, too.

But, though the image of God in man is mended in Christ, there is more to be done. The body of flesh is still under the curse of sin and will experience disease, sickness, and eventually death. While it is the tendency of Christians to forget what God has promised, the truth is that a person is incomplete until they have experienced the future resurrection that God has promised. It is not enough to spiritually be brought into the presence of Jesus at death (though that does happen when the Christian dies). The soul must one day be reunited with a resurrected body. The image of God in man will not experience its full unveiling until the Lord restores the flesh of man to his pre-fallen state. In fact, more than this, the image of God will not be fully unveiled until the Christian experiences the glorification promised through the future resurrection of the dead. And, coupled with this promise of the fully unveiled and mended image of God in man through the future resurrection, is a promise of a future restoration of all things upon this earth.

## **The Future Restoration of Creation**

Gnosticism is, at the most basic level, a belief that the physical is bad and only the spiritual is good. This belief, though damned as heretical, has continued to permeate through much of popular evangelicalism—so much so that many Christians believe the eternal state is to simply exist as an ethereal soul in

the presence of Christ in Heaven forevermore. After all, if disease, sickness, and death exist within the physical realms, and if sin is committed in physical bodies, would it not make more sense for the physical to be destroyed and for the spiritual to exist eternally?

But this is not what happened to Jesus. He was physically raised from the dead with a resurrected, glorified, and physical body. In Heaven, He has retained His humanity, and will dwell in a physical body forevermore.

Furthermore, to live eternally as merely spiritual beings is not the promise of God's Word. The physical will be raised and restored to its perfect state, prior to the Fall. Far from being bad, the physical was created good. In fact, before Adam and Eve sinned, God created the cosmos, including the celestial spheres, the earth and all that is in it, and all unseen things too, and He pronounced mankind to be very good (Genesis 1:31).

What does this mean for creation as a whole, then? In part, it means that when Jesus returns to this earth to make all things new, He will wipe out sin completely. Sin, along with all evil and wickedness, and those who refuse to repent, will be raised to only then be judged and cast into the eternal lake of fire, which is the second death (Revelation 21:8). The new earth and heavens, then, will be the dwelling place of God and His people, and *"nothing unclean will ever enter it, nor anyone who does what is detestable or false, but only those who are written in the Lamb's book of life"* (Revelation 21:27).

This is what creation itself longs for. When Adam and Eve sinned, all of

**“Sinners will be cast into the Lake of Fire, but Christians are never going to experience God’s judgment or condemnation (Romans 8:1).”**

creation itself was subjected to sin's penalties and curses. But it now eagerly awaits the full redemption Christ has promised. As the Apostle Paul wrote in Romans 8:18-23:

*"For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us. For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies."*

There is an eager anticipation, not only in the Christian, but experienced by all of creation, for the day of Christ's return and redemption of all things.

## **The Restoration of the Body**

Sinners will be cast into the Lake of Fire, but Christians are never going to experience God's judgment or condemnation (Romans 8:1). This means that, when Jesus returns to this earth, something incredible will happen: those who have been waiting in Heaven, in an intermediate state, will return with Jesus to be reunited with their physical bodies. Those who are still living will, likewise, be caught up into the air, experiencing glorification in that same moment, to welcome Jesus to His Kingdom on the earth. And, as Jesus goes forth to war to finally trample His enemies underfoot, so we — as His people — will march the earth with Him.

The Apostle Paul explains the chain of events in this way in 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17: *"For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together*

*with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord."*

So we will always be with the Lord, physically upon the new earth. But what will be of our bodies? We know they will be glorified, but in what way? First Corinthians 15 offers many great assurances, like our corruptible bodies being made incorruptible, and our mortal bodies being made immortal. But will they look different? Will they act differently? What will they really be like?

The honest answer is that the Bible doesn't exactly tell us what these glorified bodies will be like. We know they'll somehow be like Jesus', and we know they will be incapable of sinning, incapable of experiencing sickness or disease, and incapable of dying. Somehow, they will evidently be able to stand in God's presence. But, probably the best answer of what the glorified body will be comes to us from the Apostle John:

*"Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is" (1 John 3:2).*

**It is safe to say that whatever we imagine the glorified body to be, it will be significantly greater than anything we can possibly imagine.** And, even greater than a glorified body, even greater than redeemed creation, will be the fact that we are in the presence of the Lord eternally, to work the earth and glorify His name.

# The Image of God and Transgenderism

By Dave Jenkins



The questions at the heart of this article considering transgenderism are, “Who are we as human beings?” and, “Does it matter?” The answer to both questions is clear from Genesis 1-2. The Lord made Adam from the dust and made Eve

from Adam’s rib. So, the answer from a biblical standpoint about who we are and why it matters is crystal clear from the Scripture. But when confronted with the matter of transgenderism the waters become murky for many people. They wonder, “Is that really what Scripture says in Genesis?” And this question is often followed up with, “Can I trust the Bible?”

We need to understand that our culture has a viewpoint, and that viewpoint stands opposed to the Bible. Romans 1 clearly explains that men love the

creation rather than the Creator. At some point in the sovereign determination of the Lord, Romans 1 teaches that He will give some people over to their sin. Do we know when that is? No. Does God? Yes!

We see the matter of transgenderism facing the Church in the news almost every single night. From the push for kids in our schools to become what they aren't (boys becoming girls and girls becoming boys), to transgenderism being pushed from the pulpit, this is a matter that will not go away anytime soon. But why? Because Romans 1 and other biblical texts are clear: when men love darkness, they will pursue it at any cost, apart from the Lord, and in open defiance against Him.

What is being offered in the transgenderism revolution is another religion that aims to counter the biblical and sexual ethic of the Scriptures. We have seen this attempt now for the last 50+ years with the sexual revolution—an attempt by the forces of darkness to strip the Church of a core message: that a man is a

**“And yet, in His Word, the Lord offers hope: yes, the image of God was marred at the Fall, but it can be restored by repentance and faith in Jesus Christ.”**

man, and a woman is a woman. We have seen this with feminism, with social justice, with toxic masculinity, with homosexuality, and now with transgenderism. The Lord has something to say about all of this. He has spoken finally and fully in His Word about who and what man is, and what mankind is to do. The Lord created man out of the dust and made man in *His image* and likeness. He caused Adam to fall asleep and then took a rib from Adam's side to make Eve. The thing that is made clear in the Genesis narrative is the story of humanity.

We see how we are made in the image and likeness of God, and how the Lord assigns our gender at the moment of conception. So, the idea that



transgenderism is biblically true is refuted by God Himself through the Genesis 1-2 narrative. God created a man to be a man, and a woman to be a woman. Unfortunately, however, one of the fruits of the Fall of mankind in Genesis 3 is the sexual revolution.

From the Nashville shooter situation earlier in 2023, to how kids in our schools are being educated on the matter of transgenderism, the topic under consideration is one of lasting importance. What the transgenderism radicalists want is for this concept (of transgenderism) to be normalized, and the idea that people are made in the image of God be replaced by the erroneous view that humans can be whatever they want themselves to be. To put it another way they want transgenderism normalized in society and everyone who opposes them to be silenced.

It's always interesting to notice how the more a culture navigates away from the Bible and its foundation of biblical, absolute truth, the more its morals and grasp on reality are lost. What we are witnessing in this age is a total devaluing of the image of God in man, particularly within the concept of transgenderism.

And yet, in His Word, the Lord offers hope: yes, the image of God was marred at the Fall, but it can be restored by repentance and faith in Jesus Christ. What transgenderism offers is a sinful way of seeing the world, where men and women are not stationary within themselves. In transgenderism, people can exchange their genders for whatever they want, whenever they want, like exchanging goods at a store if the first one wasn't as seemingly desirable as option two. The problem is that our gender cannot be "exchanged". We were made a certain way, to function in a specific way, as consistent with the gender we were given by the Lord God at conception.

So, what should we, as Christians, do about this topic of transgenderism? First, we need to be clear about who and what we are as human beings, made in the image and likeness of God. This is vital because men are men down to their

DNA, just as women are women. By understanding and acknowledging this fact, we are standing on the truth found in Genesis 1-2, and declaring that this is not merely our personal opinion or a subjective feeling. This is the objective, special revelation of the God who made us, and who assigns us our gender at conception.

Second, we need to not apologize for how the Lord made man and woman, nor do we need to fear what our culture says. Instead, we need to stand firm on the Scriptures and with gentleness and respect say, "This is what God says about you." God has a clear message about who and what we are, and about our need for Christ. We do not need to apologize for the fact that God has spoken through His Word. We need to declare what the Lord has said.

**"We need to remember who we were before salvation, so that we will have compassion as we truthfully point sinners to Christ..."**

We need to not be fearful of what others say. Look at the Apostles standing in the public square in Acts 4-5 as an example of this. They boldly declared the glories of Christ, despite persecution from all fronts. Today we have social media, podcasts, and more to declare biblical truth in the public square. The world may try to silence us, but we will not be silent.

We must share the truth that the Lord has spoken fully and finally in His Word.

Lastly, as we speak, let's remember to speak the truth in love and to exercise the fruits of the Holy Spirit. The last thing anyone needs is to be beat over the head with the Bible. Speaking the truth may go a long way, but it goes even further when shared in love. As Christians, we are to be wise as serpents, yet gentle as doves.

Paul commands us in Ephesians 4:15 to speak the truth in love. Love is at the top of the list of the fruits of the Spirit that Paul mentions in Galatians 5:22-23. It was for the sake of the Lord's love (without compromising the justice of

God) that He sent forth Jesus to pay the penalty in our place and for our sin, to be buried, and rise again.

“But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ— by grace you have been saved...” (Ephesians 2:4-5). We need to remember who we were before salvation, so that we will have compassion as we truthfully point sinners to Christ, confronting our culture with the glories of Christ from the Word.

**By being clear about who we are and what we are—by not apologizing for what the Lord has said in His Word—and by speaking the truth in love, we will faithfully represent Christ and bring Him glory.** In a culture full of confusion about gender roles and sexuality, our job is to be biblically clear on these matters and speak as God has spoken, living as He intends, by His grace and for His glory.

## The Blessing: Parenting in the Image of God

By Kelly Benware



Parenting has been one of the hardest, but most sanctifying, journeys in my life. It is this adventure that provides some of the most challenging moments that

sharpen us to be the best possible version of ourselves. I have personally lost a child to miscarriage, missed school Picture Days, dropped kids off at preschool in socks, woken up to the stylings of scissors in the hands of a four-year-old, hidden in the bathroom for moments of silence, picked our kids up from falling down, and helplessly watched one daughter seizing through epilepsy. Really, the list is endless, as I am sure any other parent's is as well!

I feel weary in these moments of growth. Do you wonder if parents will feel tired until kids are out of the home, like me? And then, I assume, my own age will be the culprit of fatigue! No rest for the weary, eh?

In spite of the weary, there is a deep gratification found in “the busy”, though not always in that exact moment. It hurts to see your children aching. It is humbling to realize the many faults we have as parents; I speak from experience. I am more aware than ever that I am a sinner with many means to grow. And there are endless moments of weighing through, “What really is wisdom for me and my child?”

**“Your consistency reflects that you are trustworthy as a parent.”**

Great news: God does not get weary! Even when we do as parents, He is fully understanding and wise. He is ready to meet our needs and fill us up with strength. *“Haven’t you known? Haven’t you heard? The everlasting God, the LORD, the Creator of the ends of the earth, doesn’t faint. He isn’t weary. His understanding is unsearchable”* (Isaiah 40:28).

Thankfully, it is all these nanoseconds that have taught me that the weary parenting moments are God-moments, too. When we have no other choice but to be fully dependent on the Savior, we develop a stronger bond with our Heavenly Father. We learn to trust God more, just like your children deepen their faith in you each time you pick them up from practice or by place a meal on the table. Your consistency reflects that you are trustworthy as a parent. God’s consistency, over generations, provides His children a history of fulfilled promises and goodness, over and over.

Have you thought of starting a gratitude journal of all the ways God has

shown His faithfulness in your life and that of your family? It is in the weary moments that we must cling to the fulfilled promises and memories of God's faithfulness! It is the early mornings with a baby crying that should remind you of a Creator who gives life! It is the late night when your teen is ready to talk that should fill you with gratitude for relationships, though you desperately want your pillow more.

**“It is in moments of great weariness that God has given me a greater understanding and acceptance of His blessing, whatever that may be.”**

Over the years, I have attended many services where the pastor has prayed this prayer over the congregation before they parted ways on Sunday afternoons: *“The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make his face shine on you and be gracious to you; the Lord turn his face toward you and give you peace”* (Numbers 6:24-26). And then the verse became a worship song called, “The Blessing”. As a Christ-follower, this blessing sounded wonderful and I wanted God's blessing on my life, but there was still an emptiness to these words. It was not as if I wanted God to give me a million dollars and take away all difficulty in life. I had wholesome prayers. But I also wanted financial security, my kids to not be sad, life to be easier. And then I realized that my whole prayers may not be how God wants to bless my family. If so, could I be ok with accepting this? At the time, I did not think so.

It is in the moments of great weariness that God has given me a greater understanding and acceptance of His blessing, whatever that may be. In America, blessing is understood as, “the act or words of one that blesses...something that makes one happy or content.” (Merriam-Webster, Online Dictionary). Or in Christian circles, many think of a prayer or “God's favor and protec-



tion” (Oxford Languages - Online Dictionary).

What I had to process, as a believer and a mother, is how I understood God’s favor and protection. It was watching my blue-faced daughter in seizures and seeing her sit in her room, essentially lifeless for months, that forced me to face that I am good with God’s hand in my life, whatever it may be. I had to recognize that I can still live a “blessed” life, if I *choose* to rest in God’s plan being the best, even in challenging circumstances.

God’s idea of blessing is not the same as the world’s and/or that of many “Christian” circles. *“Blessed is the man who trusts in the LORD, whose trust is the LORD. He is like a tree planted by water, that sends out its roots by the stream, and does not fear when heat comes, for its leaves remain green, and is not anxious in the year of drought, for it does not cease to bear fruit”* (Jeremiah 17:7-8).

God has not chosen to heal my daughter’s epilepsy and may never do so. But I am blessed to have her living and see her smile every day. I am blessed to know God’s grace and peace. My perspective, knowledge of God’s Word, and my faith have grown. That is yet another blessing in drought. *“The LORD is my strength and my shield; in him my heart trusts, and I am helped; my heart exults, and with my song I give thanks to him”* (Psalm 27:8).

My idea of blessing has now been surrendered to trust that God’s blessing, whatever it may be, is best. The Creator sees a much greater painting of my life and that of my family. He sees the final masterpiece. I only see a limited brush stroke of each moment. I can honestly say that I believe God’s favor is on my family and His hand of protection is around us, and I would still believe the same had we lost the life of our daughter. But I had to grow my faith in my Savior to be able to trust Him with the outcome.

Humans were made for and by the Creator. Our true home is not here on earth. We must understand that Yahweh placed breath in our lungs and made us

in His image; He did so desiring that all humans would someday live in Heaven with Him. When believers embrace this truth and rest in God's greater plan, they more intimately understand what it means to be a believer (and parent) made in the image of God. **Enjoy the here-and-now, but remember your ultimate identity and eternal home.**

## Recommended Reading on the Image of God

In this issue of *Theology for Life Magazine*, we've been considering the subject of the image of God. We understand that we haven't covered everything on this topic, but it is our prayer that, hopefully, readers of this issue will grow in their understanding of it so they can stand fast on the Word of God.

If you've found this issue helpful and would like to study this subject further, please check out the following reading list. These books are at the top of their genre in both excellence and readability.

- *Created in the Image of God* by Anthony Hoekema
- *Man: The Image of God* by G.C. Berkouwer
- *The Christian View of Man* by J. Gresham Machen
- *Human Nature in its Fourfold State* by Thomas Boston
- *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood* John Piper and Wayne Grudem (Editors)
- *Willing to Believe* by R.C. Sproul
- *The Bondage of the Will* by Martin Luther
- *The Freedom of the Will* by Jonathan Edwards
- *The Doctrine of Sin* by Iain Campbell
- *Sin* by G.C. Berkouwer
- *The Evils of Evils* by Jeremiah Burroughs

I hope you'll find these resources helpful as I have.

In Christ Alone,

Dave Jenkins

Executive Editor, *Theology for Life Magazine*

## About the Authors:



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Kelly Benware earned a BS and MA in Intercultural Studies and spent time working in various Christian organizations and universities. After years in a seemingly woke “Christian” environment, she noticed the diversity conversation changing. The anti-biblical message of the new “social justice” gospel forced Kelly to ask some pertinent questions, as it should do the same for all of us. Her research led to the formation of “Steadfast Truth Ministries”, a 501(c)(3) of which she is both Founder and President.



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## Servants of Grace Ministries

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