

Shaped in the Image of God

Thomas Robinson, *Body & Spirit in a Difficult World 2*, May 3, 2020

Genesis 1:26-31

²⁶ Then God said, “Let’s make a human being (adham) in our *image*, according to our *likeness*. And let them rule the fish of the sea, the birds of the heavens, the livestock, and over all the earth, and over all that moves about on the earth.”

²⁷ And God created the human being in his *image*, in the *image* of God he created the human. Male and female he created them.

²⁸ God blessed them! And God said to them, “Be fruitful and increase in number! Fill the earth and subdue it! Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the heavens and every living thing that moves about on the earth.” ...

³¹ God saw all that he made— and it was very good! There was evening, and there was morning – a sixth day.

Colossians 3:9-14

⁹ Don’t be false to each other, because you’ve stripped off that old person with its practices ¹⁰ and you’ve put on the new person, who’s being renewed so as to be recognized by the *image* of its creator.

¹¹ Here, there’s no Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free; but the Anointed King defines all things, and is in all.

¹² This means that you live as people chosen by God, holy and dearly loved by God, by putting on that new person in the form of a heart of compassion, kindness, a mind that values others, gentleness, and long patience.

¹³ It means that you put up with each other and graciously forgive each other, if one has a complaint against another. Just as the Lord in his grace forgave you, so you too give that grace.

¹⁴ And it means that over all these things you put on love, which holds them together and marks your maturity.

1 Corinthians 15:47-49

⁴⁷ The first human was from earth, of dust! The second human is from God’s heavenly realm! ⁴⁸ As is the human made of dust, just so also are we who are made of dust. And as is the human who belongs to heaven, so also are we who belong to God’s realm. ⁴⁹ Just as we have carried the *image* of the dust-human, we’ll also be carrying the *image* of the human who belongs to heaven.

2 Corinthians 3:16-18

¹⁶ Whenever our heart turns to the Lord, the veil is taken off. ¹⁷ Here we meet the Lord in the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there freedom opens new possibilities! ¹⁸ And we all,

with an unveiled face, when we reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed toward his very *image* from a present glory into a glory coming from the Lord's own Spirit.

2 Corinthians 4:4-6

³ But if our Good News is still veiled, it's veiled among those who are being ruined ⁴ by the little god of this age blinding their ways of thinking to block off faith, so that the light that gleams in that Good News won't shine forth to show the glory of the Anointed King (*Christos*), who is *God's image*. ⁵ We're not talking about ourselves, but rather we're proclaiming, "Jesus the Anointed King is Lord," Ourselves? – we're your servants because of Jesus. ⁶ This is from God, the one who said, "*Let light shine out of darkness!*" He shone light into our hearts, the brilliance of the knowledge of God's glory shining in the face of Jesus, Anointed King.

Colossians 1:13-20

¹³ God rescued us from the authority of the darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of the Son who embodies his love. ¹⁴ In Jesus we receive God's deliverance from slavery, the forgiveness of sins.

¹⁵ He is the *image* of the God who can't be seen, God's firstborn for all creation. ¹⁶ Because all things came into existence by him, things in the heavens and on the earth, the visible and the invisible, everything that claims royalty or mastery or power to rule or any authority – all things were created through his power and for his purposes. ¹⁷ And he himself is before all things, and in him all things are embraced.

¹⁸ And he himself is the head of the body, the assembly of God's people. He is a new beginning as firstborn from all the dead. In that way, in all things he himself becomes the one who goes first. ¹⁹ He's all these things, because all God's Fullness dwelt in him with complete delight, ²⁰ and through him reconciled all things to him, since he made peace through the blood given on his cross – uniting things on earth and things in the heavens.

Introduction

Missing each other's physical presence. Learning to enjoy, not resent Zoom.

Looking for bright spots: Meredith Finney, former member, now in Austin. Card.

Bethany Schneider – Pop-up card

Who am I? What am I worth? The contrast between brokenness and God. Is the value of my life, a human life, calculable in economic terms? It's done every day. I don't like to think of others calculating the worth of my life? But in this time the cost of economic dislocation and loss crashes into the cost of human lives.

But beyond that, day by day, how do I value my own life. What do I do with it? To what extent do I throw my own life away, hour by hour, in choices, relationships, actions.

- 1 We start from wonderful passage Col 3:9-14 that you heard read from congregation members in Belize (Tracey Hebert-Seck) and California (Kimberly Hebert). We'll notice especially the idea of the "Image of God." ("learn to know your creator and become like him")
- 2 We go back to the story of Creation in Gen 1 where that understanding of God's image first comes into focus.
- 3 We try to see how the journey from Gen 1 through Jesus to the guidance in Col 3 points us to understanding who we are, why we as humans matter so much, what it means very practically to live life as people Shaped in the image of God.

As a starting point just notice those first two verses of our Col reading. My trans.

Colossians 3:9-10

⁹ Don't be false to each other, because you've stripped off that old person with its practices ¹⁰ and you've put on the new person, who's being renewed so as to be recognized by the image of its creator.

It starts from something seemingly simple: don't lie, don't be false. But in reality that's one of the hardest things to do in life, in relationships. It's the profound challenge of the basic growth, transformation that Jesus teaches.

The reason: You've become a new person. Stripping off...putting on. old person, humanity, nature (*anthropos*) marked by recognized practices new person, humanity, nature. That's what Paul's calling us to.

That involves an ongoing process of renewal of that "new person" because we're living in a world and society that continually calls us back into old way, our old person. There's a process of learning and expanding that new reality into all areas of life.

The renewal, the new person, takes effect in our life journey as we move to be more and more recognizably like the image of the one who created us.

Image = eikon, icon. The process is about as grand and comprehensive as any human could imagine. Its is becoming like God, letting the image of God, imbedded in every human shine forth in recognizable form.

Profound Reality in the Story of Creation – Imago Dei

The phrase “image of God” has a clear origin: the very first chapter of scripture: the creation narrative in Gen 1.

In that amazing, parabolic account of God bringing all things into existence and giving them order and beauty and life, the narrative moves through six days of creation laid out in beautiful narrative dance to show all things flowing from God’s life and power. It climaxes at the end of the 6th day with the creation of the human (adham).

Genesis 1:26-31

²⁶ Then God said, “Let’s make a human being (adham) in our image, according to our likeness. And let them rule the fish of the sea, the birds of the heavens, the livestock, and over all the earth, and over all that moves about on the earth.”

²⁷ And God created the human being in his image, in the image of God he created the human. Male and female he created them.

²⁸ God blessed them! And God said to them, “Be fruitful and increase in number! Fill the earth and subdue it! Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the heavens and every living thing that moves about on the earth.” ...

³¹ God saw all that he made— and it was very good! There was evening, and there was morning – a sixth day.

Just note a couple of things. God the creator speaks to God’s self in the plural. “Let us make...” “our image” “our likeness.”

God also acts as a singular unity: God creates the human in God’s image, singular.

Similarly, the “human being” (ha-adham) is singular, but also plural (male & female)

The reality of “God’s image” is stressed by repetition. Very important, but not exactly explained.

“Image” often later used of “idols” little human gods. God is making the whole world as his temple or tabernacle and the only image he wants in his house is the human being as the image of God.

Also seems to be closely linked to the role of the human in the creation.

Humans are to take charge of it, take responsibility for it, care for it.

But the language is extravagant.

In Biblical times to speak of humans as ruling the fish of the sea or the birds of the heavens was about as “aspirational” as for me to claim to rule the western hemisphere.

The words set a direction, they called the human beings to a great journey of growth, care, realizing the gifts of mind, heart, will, spirit, and just and caring action that their creator had given them.

Learning also that these gifts have their true character only as they correspond to the nature and life of the God who created them.

The humans, male and female, are to be God's image in a creation that God sees is "very good."

That starting point is established in Genesis in the clear knowledge that the world and the human situation didn't remain so unblemished. Gen 3-9 describe the breaking of that wholeness, the breaking of a trusting relationship with God, the inbreaking of violence, corruption, destruction, human self-deception, sin.

The "image of God" challenged people to think deeply about what it means to be human. What went wrong? The whole story of scripture is the long process of God's intervention to call his beloved creatures back to their highest, most challenging, most beautiful purpose. To the life of self-giving love and trust that lies at the very heart of God.

The Meaning of Jesus – Human and Divine – the Image of God

All through the NT we hear those early putting into words the astonishing discovery that flowed out of the life of Jesus.

Jesus was a good man, a fascinating, captivating man, a great teacher, a powerful healer, a great prophet, God's messianic/anointed king!

But he was more, immeasurably more. Death could not stop him. God raised him in victory over death. But what that meant was that in him as a human whom they had known, heard, followed, eaten with, watched, loved, mourned for, in him as one of ourselves, God was personally present among us, doing what only God can do.

They went back to that idea of God's image in Genesis.

So in our text in Colossians. The reference to the "image of the Creator" in 3:9, refers back to the beginning of the letter

Colossians 1:13-20

¹³ God rescued us from the authority of the darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of the Son who embodies his love. ¹⁴ In Jesus we receive God's deliverance from slavery, the forgiveness of sins.

¹⁵ He is the image of the God who can't be seen, God's firstborn for all creation. ¹⁶ Because all things came into existence by him, things in the heavens and on the earth, the visible and the invisible, everything that claims royalty or mastery or power to rule or any authority – all things were created through his power and for his purposes. ¹⁷ And he himself is before all things, and in him all things are embraced.

¹⁸ And he himself is the head of the body, the assembly of God's people. He is a new beginning as firstborn from all the dead. In that way, in all things he himself becomes the one who goes first. ¹⁹ He's all these things, because all God's Fullness dwelt in him with complete delight, ²⁰ and through him reconciled all things to him, since he made peace through the blood given on his cross – uniting things on earth and things in the heavens.

This description of Jesus as the Image of God reaches back to creation to the One God who creates humans in Our Image.

That means that the meaning of one God over all creation comes into focus in Jesus as creator. Nothing and no one is outside his all-encompassing care. Even structures that claim authority and power and set themselves in opposition to God cannot ultimately escape his embracing rule.

But it also shows the reach of God, to come physically among us to share our life, community, suffering, death. The aim was to reconcile all things to him, as a process that gives life to the peace that he made in his blood on the cross. He unites all things in earth and heaven.

Being in the image of a God who cannot be seen is real but difficult from a human point of view.

Jesus lives among us. He is one of us. He gives us God's Spirit and thus God comes to live in us.

The process of us broken humans knowing and realizing our most fundamental and beautiful reality moves to a whole new level.

Paul reflects on the light of the Good News as like the light of creation:

2 Corinthians 4:4-6

³ But if our Good News is still veiled, it's veiled among those who are being ruined ⁴ by the little god of this age blinding their ways of thinking to block off faith, so that the light that gleams in that Good News won't shine forth to show the glory of the Anointed King (*Christos*), who is God's image. ⁵ We're not talking about ourselves, but rather we're proclaiming, "Jesus the Anointed King is Lord," Ourselves? – we're your servants because of Jesus. ⁶ This is from God, the one who said, "*Let light shine out of darkness!*" He shone light into our hearts, the brilliance of the knowledge of God's glory shining in the face of Jesus, Anointed King.

Just a bit earlier in 2 Cor. Paul reflected on the process of that light shining on us, empowered by God's Spirit as we look and Jesus and are transformed by his whole life, death and resurrection.

2 Corinthians 3:16-18

¹⁶ Whenever our heart turns to the Lord, the veil is taken off. ¹⁷ Here we meet the Lord in the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there freedom opens new possibilities! ¹⁸ And we all, with an unveiled face, when we reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed toward his very image from a present glory into a glory coming from the Lord's own Spirit.

Now, Paul is talking to just ordinary believers like you and me, like anyone. This is what Jesus does by the power of God's Spirit in our everyday human lives. He calls us to see ourselves on a

new level. To see and know a new person, human, nature that changes how we see and experience ourselves and everybody else.

From Grand Vista to Everyday life

And so we come back to Col 3. Just let yourself soak in these words this week. They are very distinctive, challenging, beautiful, life-giving. It starts from an instruction based on a new reality given by grace to you and opening new possibilities.

Colossians 3:9-14

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¹¹ Here, there's no Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free; but the Anointed King defines all things, and is in all.

¹² This means that you live as people chosen by God, holy and dearly loved by God, by putting on that new person in the form of a heart of compassion, kindness, a mind that values others, gentleness, and long patience.

¹³ It means that you put up with each other and graciously forgive each other, if one has a complaint against another. Just as the Lord in his grace forgave you, so you too give that grace.

¹⁴ And it means that over all these things you put on love, which holds them together and marks your maturity.

After those first two verses, notice the steps that Paul takes us through.

First, the breaking of barriers. We live in a world with all kinds of barriers, but because of our history of Christianity we have a bad conscience about them. Paul's writing in a world that absolutely affirms and enforces all kinds of barriers, political, racial, ethnic, gender, religious, class, wealth, rule, conquered, etc.

This is a call to a radically new vision, new practice, new reality.

A community without barriers. One assembly, one head, one God, one humanity.

Second, Recognize who you are. God has intervened to call us and choose us by coming among us in Jesus. God builds the bridge that we could not build.

We participate by receiving God's grace, knowing that we belong to God as God's creatures, and as dearly loves.

We choose to live our lives growing into that astonishing reality.

Third, We open ourselves to the new reality embodied in Jesus. This is not just any new satisfying thing. It has a distinct character as Jesus shows us the face of God. Paul's brief list points to what to look for and focus on as we look at Jesus.

a heart of compassion, (*splanchna oiktirmou*)

kindness, (*chrestotes*) genuine goodness

a mind that values others, (*tapeinophrosyne, humility*)

gentleness, (*prautes*)

and long patience (*makrothymia*).

These are all things that are practiced in close-up everyday relationships that correspond to the breaking down of barriers on the macro-scale.

This list comes to its clearest focus as he calls us to forgiveness.

Colossians 3:13

¹³ It means that you put up with each other and graciously forgive each other, if one has a complaint against another. Just as the Lord in his grace forgave you, so you too give that grace.

He starts with the everyday need to just put up with / bear with each other. So needed when we're closed in. But when we're closed in complaints grate more.

But then he helps us see the flow from what God has done for us in Jesus to our call to give the same grace

Colossians 3:14

¹⁴ And it means that over all these things you put on love, which holds them together and marks your maturity.

We're dearly loved by God. Not at all because we're so wonderful and talented that God just really wants us on his side.

But because God is Love and loves his creatures. The Image of God in Jesus penetrates into the very heart of God. The strong force that binds the Trinity in one is the force that holds this new person in a beautiful wholeness in our lives.

All of this is played out on the smallest scales of everyday life and on the broader scales of the interactions of broken groups in society and on the largest scale of the reality of God.

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This is our call, this is our beauty, this is our challenge.

It's not too hard. It's a wonderful creative life. This is God's work in us.

May God bless us as we are renewed in the Image of God.

Amen.