

God Is Not Made In Your Image

From Genesis

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Bible Text: Genesis 1:26-27; Colossians 3:10; Ephesians 4:24

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The text this morning is Genesis chapter one verses 26 and 27.

Then God said, “Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; and let them rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over the cattle and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.” God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.¹

The Superbowl is over. March madness is not far off and about to begin. And the NBA play will continue on into the Spring.

The media makes the athletes, both college and professional, larger than life. And some of the athletes themselves think that they are actually larger than life. More than one basketball player has hurtled up the court to slam dunk the ball and then gone back down the court beating his chest while looking up at the fawning fans.

And when individuals like this begin to think that they are larger than life, they also too often begin to bring God down. Yes, when we too exalt ourselves we tend to bring God down.

And when we do this, we often get the sense that God is made in our image. Hence, the title of the sermon this morning, “God is not Made in Your Image.”

The Bible tells us that we are made in God’s image and he is not made in our image although we tend to think of it this way. And so as we look at this text this morning in Genesis chapter one, we see verses 26 and 27 are quite emphatic. “Then God said, ‘Let Us make man in Our image.’”² Verse 27, “God created man in His own image.”³ I remind you of the fact that God is not made in your image. And you ought not to bring him down as is so often the tendency. You are made in God’s image. I repeat, Do not bring God down to your level; He is not made in your image.

¹ Genesis 1:26-27.

² Genesis 1:26.

³ Genesis 1:27.

Let's begin this morning with the subject that we addressed a couple of weeks ago, the fact that God is a most pure Spirit without body parts or passions.

For the most part we understand that this is the case, that a spirit does not have a body, that God does not have a body. He is a spirit and does not have a body like men, as the children's catechism puts it. He does not have hands. He does not have eyes. He does not have ears. He does not actually have a mouth. He does not have feet or other bodily parts. He doesn't catch a cold. He doesn't have to blow his nose. He doesn't get asthma. He doesn't have these bronchial tubes that we have. God is a spirit and does not have a body like men. For the most part we understand this.

And, of course, the harder part is that he does not have *human* passions and *human* emotions. I ask you to hear me on this. He does not have *human* emotions. He does not have *human* passions just like he does not have *human* bodily parts.

We think of the human passions as that which are reactive; jealousy is an example. Perhaps you work hard in the office or perhaps at school and you have the sense that you ought to receive proper recognition. If someone else gets the recognition, what happens? You are liable to react to the situation. You may get a little jealous or perhaps even be a little angry. You see, these human passions are reactive.

But God does not react. God is active. And God uses means to carry out his ends. For example, when Jonah preached in Nineveh God was using the preaching of Jonah as a means to bring about the repentance of the people in Nineveh. God was not surprised when the people of Nineveh repented. And when the Bible says that God repented or changed his mind, the Bible is using a figure of speech.⁴ God does not react to what we do. He is always active. He is proactive as a matter of fact. And so we need to understand that this is the case with regard to God.

Now the significant thing here for us is that our text now says, "Then God said, 'Let Us make man in Our image.'"⁵ And verse 27. "God created man in His own image."⁶

In other words, God set about to make a likeness of himself. This is what verse 26 says if you look at it again. "Then God said, 'Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness.'"⁷ In other words, when God created Adam and Eve in the beginning there was a certain likeness between God and Adam and a certain likeness between God and Eve. They were not totally identical. When God created Adam, Adam wasn't identical with God. And when God created Eve, Eve was not identical with God. You understand this is the case. However, there is a certain similarity between God and the human creature, between God and Adam and Eve.

⁴ See Jonah 3:10.

⁵ Genesis 1:26.

⁶ Genesis 1:27.

⁷ Genesis 1:26.

Now let's probe this a little bit. God, for example, is a personal being. God is not an inanimate object. Human beings can make idols which are inanimate objects. If you go to Japan, for example, on almost every street corner, you see people bowing down to various types of idols, inanimate objects. God is not an inanimate object. God communicates with the likes of us. God speaks to us. God listens to us. He listens to our prayers. He is a personal God.

God is also a spiritual being. We have touched on this already, haven't we? God is a spirit and does not have a body like men. He is a spiritual being. Well, in addition to you being a personal being, being a person who can communicate with others, you also—at least in part—are spiritual. That is, you have a spirit or soul. You have an invisible part, a soul that will never die. And so from this perspective you are like God, you see.

God is also a rational being. God has a mind. The Bible talks about the mind of God. God is a rational being. Human beings were also created with minds. Now, of course we can act irrationally. This is, of course, the case. But still, because we have minds, we are rational beings. We can think. We can plan. We can envision the future, you see. And we are similar to God in this respect.

God is a moral being. God sets forth that which is right and that which is wrong and we too are moral beings. We ought, at least, to know what is right and wrong. Children ought to know what is right and wrong. They ought to be taught what is right and wrong because we too, like God, are moral beings, you see.

And significantly enough God is immortal. You realize this, do you not? I have alluded to it already. But you also have a soul that will never die. And from this perspective you too are an immortal being. And when Christ comes a second time in glory and the dead are raised, this body of yours will be raised from the grave and you will be lifted up bodily into heaven to live there in bodily form, in body and soul forever. And from this perspective, you see, you too, like God, are an immortal being.

So you see, there are certain similarities between you and God. From a theological perspective, we call these similarities the image of God in the broad sense. That is, we speak of the image of God broadly. Now let's narrow it down a little bit.

Adam and Eve were created with knowledge and righteousness and holiness. We read from Colossians just a little bit ago. Would you turn back there with me please to the third chapter of Colossians. We read Colossians chapter three and verse 10. Well, let's read verses nine and 10 to get the complete sentence.

Do not lie to one another, since you laid aside the old self with its evil practices, and have put on the new self who is being renewed to a true knowledge according to the image of the One who created him.⁸

⁸ Colossians 3:9-10.

As a Christian, you are being renewed to a true knowledge according to the image of the Creator. You see, when Adam and Eve were created they had true knowledge. And in part we as Christians have true knowledge. Adam and Eve knew who they were. They were creatures of God. Hopefully you know who you are as a creature of God. Do you realize this? They knew who God was, their Creator. They understood this. They had this knowledge. And so they also understood the created order around them that God had made. And as God spoke to them they understood that this knowledge that God was imparting to them was important.

So this is one aspect of God's image, knowledge. God has knowledge. And do you know what he does? He shares his knowledge with you and me. I would say this is fairly significant. Again, this is part of the image of God, this knowledge. You can know things. You can know things about yourself. You can know things about God. And he shares this capacity for knowledge with you. This is part of the image of God.

A little earlier in Ephesians—would you turn to the fourth chapter of Ephesians, Ephesians chapter four and verse 24. This is a companion verse. Paul exhorts the Ephesians and he exhorts you and me, “Put on the new self, which in the likeness of God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth.”⁹ Or we could say it this way. “Created in righteousness and true holiness.”

In other words, in addition to God imparting knowledge to you and me, and imparting knowledge to Adam and Eve in the beginning, God shares righteousness with us. The word “righteousness” means that in the beginning Adam and Eve could judge justly. They understood what was right and wrong. When God came to them and said, “You see this tree here in the middle of the garden? You see this fruit? Don't eat it because in the day that you eat it, you are going to die.”¹⁰

Adam and Eve knew that what God said was right and to act contrary to God was wrong. They were able to judge justly. Now, that would be a tremendous thing in our culture today, the ability to judge justly. Would that some civil and criminal judges understood this. But this is what Adam and Eve had. And we are being renewed to a capability to judge justly.

And then the additional thing in verse 24 is holiness, true holiness. Adam and Eve had true holiness. God is holy. God is able to judge justly. And so God comes along and shares this ability to judge justly and this holiness with his creatures. This is part of God's image.

What is holiness? Well, in the beginning Adam and Eve didn't need to be sanctified, to be made holy, because they were already perfect. Holiness actually means being set aside for the purposes of God. This is what holiness is. Adam and Eve were perfectly set aside for God's purposes. And this is what God is doing with you and me. God is setting you aside and setting me aside more and more for his purposes.

⁹ Ephesians 4:24.

¹⁰ See Genesis 2:17.

And so we have these three things, true knowledge, righteous and holiness. “How did God create man? God created man in his own image with knowledge, righteousness and holiness and dominion over the creatures.”¹¹ This is the Westminster Shorter Catechism which is taken from the Bible. Knowledge, righteousness and holiness are aspects of the image of God originally given to Adam and renewed in you and me. And so there are similarities between God and us. We are not identical with God. Correct? There are simply similarities between us. This is what we have to get.

And in addition, as you go back now to Genesis chapter one, as God can share knowledge, holiness and righteousness with us, there are other things God cannot share with us.

The Catechism again. “What is God? God is a spirit, infinite, eternal and unchangeable in his being, wisdom, knowledge, holiness, justice, goodness and truth.”¹² God is a spirit, infinite, eternal, and unchangeable. God is an infinite spirit. In other words God is present everywhere. And the amazing thing is that God is fully present everywhere. God is not like Saran Wrap that you pull off a roll and stretch thin. God is fully present here and at the same time he is fully present in Japan and he is fully present in Afghanistan and he is fully present in every other place. He is infinite in his presence.

Now, I don’t think you can say this about yourself. You can only be in one place at one time. You are very different than God. Although there are similarities, you are very different than God.

God is infinite and eternal. He is eternal in his being. There is no beginning to God and no end to God. You had a beginning. I had a beginning. You were born into this world. Not so with God. He is the beginning and the end. He is quite different than you and me.

And then the Catechism adds this: infinite, eternal, and unchangeable. God is the unchangeable God. He is the one, dear friends, who has a plan which is comprehensive and unchangeable and worked out in every intimate detail. This is why you are here this morning and this is why I am here this morning uttering the very words that I am speaking. God’s plan is overarching, infinite and unchangeable.

When I went to seminary I used to think, wrongly, that God had a series of contingency plans. If I went in direction X God implemented contingency plan 452,932. If I went in direction Y God implemented contingency plan 452, 933. Not so. God has no contingency plans. He has one perfect fixed plan. And the wonder of it is that God uses you in his plan. Our difficulty as creatures is that we have to look back to see his plan as it has already unfolded. And then we can give thanks to him because of what he has done.

God is unchangeable. And you know as well as I do that you are and I am very changeable. And this was the case with Adam and Eve also.

¹¹ Westminster Shorter Catechism question and answer #14.

¹² Westminster Shorter Catechism question and answer #4.

We read this morning from the Confession of Faith. Would you look at your bulletin? Chapter IV of the Confession of Faith. In the middle of this section, after the Confession of Faith speaks about the creation of the world it says, “After God had made all other creatures, he created man, male and female, with reasonable and immortal souls, endued with knowledge, righteousness, and true holiness after his own image, having the law of God written in their hearts, and power to fulfill it; and yet under a possibility of transgressing, being left to the liberty of their own will, *which was subject unto change.*”¹³

In other words, when God created Adam and Eve they were changeable. It was possible for them to change. Remember, the serpent came to Eve and said to her, “You see that fruit? That fruit will make you wise. That fruit will be good for you. Take it and eat it.” And she did. She disobeyed God. And then she went to Adam and she said, “Here it is Adam. Look at this good fruit. It is good for me. It is good for you. Take it and eat it.”

And Adam, when he looked at Eve, he knew, he knew full well, having true knowledge given to him from God, he knew that God had said, “You shall not eat of that fruit.” And having been given righteousness from God, Adam knew that it was wrong for him to eat that fruit. He could judge justly. He knew that he had been set aside for the purposes of God. He knew that if he would transgress the commandment of God and eat that fruit he would no longer be set aside for the purposes of God. Adam knew that this was the case. And in an act of brute rebellion against his Creator, he took that fruit and he ate it. And he was changed so that he no longer had true knowledge, righteousness and holiness. His vision was now blurred. His sense of right and wrong was perverted. He was no longer self-consciously set aside for the purposes of God. *This* is how sin entered into the world.

Oh you can say, “What about that devil? That devil was a liar from the beginning.” Yes, true. He is a fallen angel and in the spiritual realm in the realm of the angels, yes, there was, apparently, a rebellion. And Satan, as he is called, was the chief of that rebellion in the spiritual realm. But in this world, in this visible world where you live and where I live and where Adam lived in the beginning, in this visible world, sin originated with Adam.

“By one man sin came into the world and death through sin.”¹⁴ It was by the rebellion of this one man, this is how sin came into this world, into this visible world. And this is why Jesus Christ ultimately had to come to deal with the problem of sin among human beings like us, taking the form of a man as we have said before.

God is unchangeable. Adam and Eve were changeable, quite different from God in this respect. And so there are, you see, similarities between you and God. But there are vast dissimilarities, vast differences between you and God.

¹³ Westminster Confession of Faith, Chapter IV, paragraph 2, emphasis added.

¹⁴ See Romans 5:12.

And for the individual who is steeped in sin it is quite easy to look up and to say, “Well, you, God, are made in my image.” And as Calvin put it, “Our minds and our hearts are idol factories.” We are continually manufacturing idols and bring God down to our level. Imagine our audacity in saying that God, the great God who is above all, who is without body parts or passions, the great immutable, unchangeable God, the God who is omniscient, who has all knowledge, the God who is omnipotent, who has all power, is made in our image.

Yes, we have a little bit of power but not all power. We have a little bit of knowledge but not all knowledge. And we are changeable. God is the unchangeable God. Yes, we are very changeable and we sin. And so it is.

And the Bible says clearly, “Then God said, ‘Let Us make man in Our image.’”¹⁵ And “God created man in his own image.”¹⁶ You were created in God’s image. God is not made in your image. So don’t bring him down. Don’t bring him down to your level.

Peggy Noonan tells a little story in a recent *Wall Street Journal* Op-ed piece. Cassius Clay, also known as Muhammad Ali, was on a plane trip to a fight before he had become well known. And when the stewardess went by and looked down, his seat belt wasn’t fastened. And so she politely said, “Fasten your seat belt.”

She came back a little bit later and his seat belt wasn’t fastened. And she said, “Please fasten your seat belt.”

Seeing the boxer was unmoved by her request, the stewardess bent down and again said, “Fasten your seat belt.”

And the response was, “Superman doesn’t need a seat belt.”

Quick on her feet, the stewardess responded, “Superman doesn’t need an airplane. Fasten your seat belt.”

And he did.

How easy it is for not only athletes to think that they are Superman and to exalt themselves and to puff themselves up and beat themselves on the chest as though they are larger than life and at the same time to bring God down.

God is not made in the image of Muhammad Ali and God is not made in your image either. God was pleased to make you in many respects—not in all respects—in many respects like him. Rejoice in the fact that this is the case, friends. Do not bring God down to your level; remember he made you in his image; he is not made in your image.

Let’s pray together.

¹⁵ Genesis 1:26.

¹⁶ Genesis 1:27.

Father, we've had a theological lesson this morning but also a practical lesson for us. Forgive us because we too often forget that we are creatures, creatures made by you, the infinite, eternal, unchangeable God. Renew within us true knowledge, righteousness and holiness so that we see ourselves properly, that we see you properly, that we judge justly and that we are properly set aside for your purposes. For give us when we exalt ourselves and in like manner to bring you down. Forgive us when we impute our image to you and think of you as being created in our image when it is exactly the opposite. You have been pleased in many respects to create us in your image. Humble us with this understanding and as this is the case, we pray, may we better be able to live as your creatures in this world you have been pleased to give us. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.