

“Imago Dei” Mankind Created In The Image Of God

“Princeton ethicist Peter Singer defines ‘speciesism’ as ‘a prejudice’ that favors ‘the interests of members of one’s own species . . . against those members of other species.’ Singer regards ‘speciesism’ as being the moral equivalent of racism. For Singer and company, the offense is not only that we treat animals badly—it is that we think that people are human and, thus, different than animals.” Such thinking has led to states (such as Florida and California) seeking legislation that would give animals similar rights as humans (Chuck Colson, Breakpoint, Nov. 13, 2007)

Certainly, the Bible makes it clear that animals are not to be mistreated (Prov. 12:10). Nevertheless, the Bible also makes it clear that over and above the rest of creation man alone is made in the image of God (Gen. 1:26-28; 9:6). What this means is that humans have a higher value than animals (Mt. 12:12). When that distinction is blurred, the end result is not just the elevation of animals, it is the devaluation of human life.

In our first four devotional readings we have established what a worldview is and then looked in some detail at creation, the headwaters of the biblical worldview. One of the effects of knowing that God created mankind is the understanding that mankind is the crowning glory of all He made (Ps. 8:5-8). He resembles and represents God in a way that nothing else can. There are some significant implications this has for how we understand and view human life.

To begin with, we see a number of ways that mankind resembles God which serve as part of the *imago dei*. We are able to create and to bring order to the world around us (cf. Gen. 1:26-28; Ps. 8:5-8). We are diverse social beings who, as male and female, complement one another (Gen. 5:1-2). What is more, as the Bible teaches how God remakes us into His image (i.e. fixes the image marred by sin), we learn that being made in the image of God includes the realities that we can know and think, as well as we are spiritual beings with the capacity of relating to Him (Eph. 4:24; Col. 3:10).

Even though we learn that the image in man is twisted because of sin (Gen. 3; Rom. 3:10ff.; Eph. 4:24; Col. 3:10), nevertheless, the image is still present in humans, whether we are Christians or not. James 3:9, talking about the tongue, reads: “With it we bless our Lord and Father, and with it we curse people who are made in the likeness of God.”

Psalm 8:5-8: Yet you have made him a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned him with glory and honor. You have given him dominion over the works of your hands; you have put all things under his feet, all sheep and oxen, and also the beasts of the field, the birds of the heavens, and the fish of the sea, whatever passes along the paths of the seas.

“We’re no better than bacteria!”
-Eric Pianka, University of Texas biologist, speaking of mankind’s value.

Tom Barnes, [Living In The Hope Of Future Glory](#) (Evangelical Press, 2006), 24: “In affirming that we are made in the image of God, the Old Testament Scriptures teach us that we both resemble and represent God.”

What is more, we see that human life is sacred. In Genesis 9:6 God says that whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed, for God made man in his own image.” In other words, the Old Testament teaches that if a person takes the life of another without just cause, the life of the murderer is to be taken. This helps to preserve the special place man has as *imago dei*. This means that unless a life is taken by accident (Joshua 20), in self-defense (Exodus 22:2), in protecting one’s family (Exodus 22:2; 1 Tim. 5:8), as part of a just war, or as capital punishment (Gen. 9:6; Rom. 13:4), it is immoral.

In light of the sacred nature of human life, we see that not only are unlawful murders sin (e.g. abortion, euthanasia, infanticide), but so also are all actions or attitudes which treat humans as a commodity. Humans are not to be experimented on as they were in Nazi Germany. What is more, humans should not be brought into existence simply to harvest their organs. Such actions devalue human life and are not only unethical toward that particular individual, but also tend to devalue all life within a society.

Something else that is important is this, we need to see that we are called to love and to serve all kinds of people. After all, they are all created in God’s image and thus important. Cf. James 2:1-13

Finally, we should understand that much of what God is doing within us as He saves us is remaking us into the image of our Lord. Vernon Grounds (5/28/04 [Our Daily Bread](#)) explains this well:

As a young boy, theologian Alister McGrath enjoyed experimenting with chemicals in his school's laboratory. He liked to drop a tarnished coin into a beaker of diluted nitric acid. He often used an old British penny bearing the image of Queen Victoria. Because of the accumulated grime, Her Majesty's image couldn't be seen clearly. But the acid cleansed away the grime and the Queen's image reappeared in shining glory. We know, to be sure, that we were created in the image of God (Genesis 1:26), but that image has been defaced by our sin. We are still His image-bearers, however. Once we invite Jesus to enter our lives as Savior, He goes to work to restore the original image. He transforms us to make us like Himself (2 Corinthians 3:18). This process is described as putting off some behaviors and putting on others. For example, we are to "put off all these: anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy language" (Colossians 3:8) and to "put on love" (v.14). Unless and until our sin-tarnished souls are cleansed by Jesus' forgiveness, God's image is obscured in our lives. But when we trust Jesus' sacrifice on the cross, we are forgiven and the restoration begins.

“The Scriptures teach that God created humans in his own image, giving each a unique moral character. Christianity, as Mother Teresa used to say, is anti-statistical. Every human being, at every stage of life, has intrinsic, not merely instrumental, worth.” -Chuck Colson: [Christianity Today](#), Feb. 2003: 144.

Westminster Shorter Catechism Q. 10.
How did God create man?
A. God created man male and female, after his own image, in knowledge, righteousness, and holiness, with dominion over the creatures.

Discussion Questions

1. What is meant when we say that mankind is made in God's image?
2. What are some ways that we resemble God?
3. Name some of the ways that this teaching should shape our treatment of others.
4. What are some ways which our society devalues human life? What should Christians do about this? What should you do?