

Image is Everything!

“Who am I?” “What is my personal self-worth?” “How can I develop a more positive self-image?” “Why don’t I feel good about myself?” We have all heard those questions! By 1960 it was already recognized that the teaching regarding self-image was the most important psychological discovery of the twentieth century.<sup>i</sup> Having a positive self-image became the thrust not only of modern psychology but also of almost every educational program across the country. Today, we have inherited the fruit of that “great” discovery. It is obvious that the “primary focus of interest today is upon man, his life, his actions, his feelings, his struggles, and his potentialities.”<sup>ii</sup> We are a “self-focused” society. Even the religion of our culture has discarded anything which would detract from a person’s self-image and embraced positive thinking for a positive self-image.

Not being one to buck a trend, let us assume that the understanding and implementation of a proper self-image is the most important pursuit for man. Let us go back to the beginning and determine where man got his self-image to start with! Evolution, the prevalent view of the origin of man, is the foundation for most of man’s study of man. Studying man in an evolutionary context is nothing more than studying chance. Man and life have no meaning, no purpose, because chance has no meaning. Hence, man’s search for self-image is vacuous in an evolutionary system!

So, what happened to God in this picture? What does He have to say about the self-image of man? First of all, God knows that evolution is nothing more than part of man’s elaborate scheme to find meaning apart from Him (Rom. 1:21-25). He created this world and the men that walk in it (Gen. 1-2). All men have known God, rejected God, and, instead, have chosen to replace the worship of the God who made them with the worship of an image in the

form of corruptible man (Rom 1:23). And do you know what God says about that? God says that corrupted man's heart is wicked and deceitful – it cannot think right. So, when men study man apart from God, they cannot determine the truth about man's self-image (Jer. 17:9)! The only way we can understand man's self-image is to go to the God who created man and study His revelation on the subject.

Genesis 1 is the only true record of the creation of the heavens, the earth, and guess who? Man. Verse 1 says, "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." This is a summary statement. The rest of the chapter gives the details of this first verse. In the first six days of creation, God created (1) light along with the material for the rest of His creation, (2) the sea and the heavens, (3) the earth and plants, (4) the lights, the sun, the moon, and the stars, (5) the sea creatures and the birds of the air, and (6) the land animals and man.

On day six, after God had created the land animals, God was finished preparing the earth in which man would live. Man was the object of all of God's creative work, the crown of creation. God had created a whole world for man to see the wonderful creative genius of the mind of God so that God could demonstrate His beauty and His order. Prior to the creation of man, God had never identified personally with anything that He had made. However, when He created man, God said "Let us (Gen 1:26)." This highlights a very important difference. God gets very personal here because now He is creating those who are eternal. Man is the apex of creation.

Going back to our original question, "Where did man get his self-image?" we see the answer in Gen 1:26 in the statement, "Let us make man in our image, according to our likeness." Image and likeness are synonyms. Together they say that man was made "in the VERY image of God." The root word for the word image means "to carve or to cut off."<sup>iii</sup> Both words carry the

ideas of shape and form. So, man was a chip off of God, somehow shaped like God. This means that God created man according to a divine, eternal pattern. God is the original and man is the copy. When you look at man, the copy, you should know something about the original, God. This characterization is not true of anything else that was created. At this point, God's revelation invalidates the term "self-image" when discussing man. We can only discuss man in reference to the image of God.

Now, what are the contents of the image of God? First, the image of God, in which man was created, includes true knowledge of God, true righteousness, and holiness (Gen. 1:31; Eccl. 7:29). Second, the image of God includes those things which belong to the natural constitution of man, including such things as reasoning, affections and morality. Third, the image of God includes man's ability to experience relationships. This relational aspect can be manifest in a relationship with God or in a relationship with other men. It is significant that the thrust of God's will for humans pertains to their relationship to God and to other people (Ex. 20; Matt. 22:36-40). Fourth, man's spirituality is part of the inborn image of God. From the very moment he was created, Adam had spiritual fellowship with God, who is Spirit. Fifth, and finally, the image of God includes man's immortality. Amongst all of his creatures, God endowed only man with immortality.

When Adam sinned in the Garden of Eden, he lost much of the original image of God. Even though man still possesses the image of God (Gen. 9:6; 1 Cor. 11:7; Jas. 3:9), sin has degraded or distorted almost every aspect of the image of God in him and has even destroyed some aspects. However, God can restore the image of God which He gave to man at creation (Col. 3:10; Eph. 4:24). This process begins when a person gives his life back to God by accepting the free gift of eternal life given by His Son, Jesus Christ (Rom. 6:23; Eph. 2:8-10).

This free gift is God's way of restoring that which was lost between God and man when Adam sinned in the Garden of Eden. This process will be complete when, at the end of time, Jesus Christ makes all of His followers into His image.

There are individual implications to the fact that man is made in the image of God. Understanding, accepting, and implementing these implications is the only path by which man can find his true meaning and his true image. First, since God created us and gave us His image, we belong to Him (Mark 12:13-17). God created man much higher than the rest of the creation (Matt. 10:31; 12:12) and, so, treats man differently in both His providential care and in His expectations of man. God expects man to acknowledge that he has been fearfully and wonderfully made by God (Ps. 139:4). God desires that we pattern ourselves after Jesus Christ (Rom. 8:29), His Son, who is the exact representation of His image (Col. 1:15; Heb 1:3). The only way we can pattern ourselves after Jesus is by becoming a follower of Christ. When a person becomes a follower, that is, a disciple of Jesus Christ, God gives that person a new nature. With this step the Holy Spirit begins the restoration process of the image of God. If we do not do these things we dishonor God, our Creator, and the penalty is eternal death which is eternal separation from God and punishment by Him.

To say that image is everything for mankind is a true statement! The real question is, "Whose image is everything?" The answer is "God's image is everything!" God gave mankind His image at creation. Mankind lost that image through sin. Mankind's only hope for restoration of that image is Jesus Christ. The most important endeavor that a man can undertake is to seek to have the image of God in him restored to its original state.

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<sup>i</sup> Paul Tournier, *Guilt and Grace* (New York: Harper and Row, 1959), 159-160.

<sup>ii</sup> Charles Lee Feinberg, "The Image of God," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 129, no. 515 (July 1972): 236.

<sup>iii</sup> Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner, eds., *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, vol. 3, revised by Walter Baumgartner, et al, translated and edited by M. E. J. Richardson, et al (Leiden, The Netherlands: E. J. Brill, 1996), 1028.