

Friday Bible Study - Week Four

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[0 : 0 0] Hello, my name is Brian Hart. Welcome again to Friday Bible Study. We are in week four. And so far in this course, we have considered what theology is, what doctrine is.

We've looked at who God is. We've looked at what the scriptures are. And this week, we are going to talk about what we are. We're going to talk about us. And what is the purpose of humanity?

I can assure you the answer to that question is far more sublime than most people realize. And so we're going to look to Genesis 1. And we're going to read verses 26 to 28.

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.

[1 : 0 0] 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.

And so really what we see from these passages is this wonderful idea that man is made in the image of God.

And this is known as the doctrine of Imago Dei. Which is just a way of saying the image of God. It is one of the most wonderful, most multifaceted ideas in the Bible.

And I'm excited to help you explore it a little bit over the next few minutes. Something that I am guessing will come as a surprise to many of you.

Even those of you who are familiar with your Bibles. Is that the Hebrew for the word image that we just read. When God says, let us make man in our own image. The Hebrew for that word, Selem, is the same Hebrew word that is in many other places translated as idol.

[2 : 1 4] It's a bit strange. An idol is an image of God. And so right out of the gates in Genesis 1, God speaks into the ancient world and shows just how different he is than gods of all other religions of the ancient world.

In other religions, you know, people would carve out a Selem out of wood or stone. And they would put it in a temple where it was meant to represent the God of those people.

And so when God makes us, He says that every human being is His Selem. We are not images in the sense that we are meant to be worshipped.

But we are in the sense that we represent the living God. And so this actually gives some extra meaning to the second commandment.

If you remember, the first commandment is that God says, I am the Lord, you shall have no other gods before me. The second commandment says that we shall not make or fashion any likeness of God.

[3 : 2 1] And we should not bow down to any likeness or image or idol. We're told not to worship them. But we're also told not even to make an image or idol. And the reason that it's wrong to make an image, to make a Selem, is because God has already made it in us.

It's not our job to remake what He has already made. We can't make something and say, there, you know, that thing, that now represents God.

No, you and I represent God. It's our job. It's not the job of a rock or a piece of wood. And so at a basic level, to be in the image of God really has everything to do with representation.

But there's then the question of, what does that practically mean? How do we flesh that out? And I want to admit that there are more ways than we have time to list out here.

But theologians have put the different ways that we can represent God into three categories that I think helpfully sum up most of the ways that we would bear God's image.

[4 : 28] There's essentially three ways of interpreting this idea. First is that we bear God's image in our substance. So this just has to do with the fact that we bear God's image just by virtue of the fact that we are human beings.

We are not merely biological creatures, but we also have a spirit, a soul, a consciousness. Now, there are other religions that teach that animals also have spirits and souls. Christians, however, don't believe that. We believe that that is something really distinct to humanity. And that idea in particular is actually made even more forcefully in Genesis 2.

So Genesis gives us two creation accounts, and they both emphasize different things. In Genesis 2, it says, Then the Lord God formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living creature.

Now, in Hebrew, breath and spirit are similar concepts. So this is really saying, what this is suggesting is that humans receive the divine breath or something of the divine spirit.

[5 : 41] So that fundamentally sets us apart. We're the only creature that gets that. We're not just another part of the created world. Psalm 8 verse 5 talks about how God made us just a little lower than the angels, that he has crowned us with glory and honor.

This means that the most average human being you know. Maybe you think of yourself that way. Maybe you think of yourself as totally average and easily overlooked, and you don't contribute anything really special or unique.

No, the most average human being is far more remarkable than any natural wonder of the world. Every human being is a masterpiece, according to what Genesis is saying.

And this idea that we're discussing, found first in the religion of Israel and then in Christianity, Imago Dei, it's this idea upon which the ideals of liberal democracy and even our justice system are virtually entirely based.

If we did not have this belief, then we would not feel that a servant or a slave has the same human rights as a king or a president.

[6 : 53] The reason we think that both should be treated with the same kind of dignity and given the same kind of human rights is because of the doctrine of Imago Dei. So that's the first way of interpreting the image of God.

The second way is this. We bear God's image in our interpersonal relationships. We saw a few weeks ago that God has always existed within the interpersonal relationships of the Trinity, the Father, Son, and the Spirit.

So it makes sense that in order to create mankind in the image of a relational God, God would want to create not just a single kind of being, but a being that exists in relationships with diversity and difference.

And so that's why right here in those verses in Genesis 1 that we started off with, we see that God creates man in his own image. It says male and female.

He created them. We right from the beginning get the idea that humanity is being made into two different distinct genders.

[8 : 01] And so what this suggests is that God's image is more powerfully reflected in the complementary combination of both male and female, and that in just one or other of the genders, shades of the image of God are going to be missing.

We get the whole image when we are together. This is good to remember because sometimes we talk about gender differences like they are a result of the fall, like they are a result of sin.

You know, if you're a man, you sometimes feel like women are just, especially in marriage, you can see this. Men and women can sometimes feel very frustrated at how different the other person is than them, and we can feel like, oh, this is a result of the brokenness of the world.

But actually, the differences between men and women are part of the design. Those differences were meant to be there. And in fact, one of the verses that has been most misunderstood regarding the genders is itself one of the most beautiful testaments to the idea that our gender displays the image of God.

In Genesis 2.18, it says, The Lord God said, It's not good that man should be alone. I will make a helper fit for him. And so this is the part of the story where God creates Eve, the first woman.

[9 : 16] Now, a lot of people read this verse, and man, it really sounds paternalistic, or it sounds sexist. You know, like, oh, wow, Adam needed a helper. He needed a maid. And so God created a woman to help him with his chores.

That is a total misunderstanding of what this verse is saying, which would be clear to us if we all knew Hebrew. Because the word in Hebrew being used here for helper is most other places in the Bible where that word is used.

It's used to describe God himself because God is our helper. And so this is not the kind of helper who does things we don't want to do. This is the kind of helper who helps us do things we can't do by ourselves.

It implies there are deficiencies in Adam that Eve does not have. And so one of the ways that we represent God, one of the ways we bear his image, is how we come together and help one another do things we can't do for ourselves.

So God does that for us. He helps us. And he designs us to do that for each other. And in that way, we bear the image of the interpersonal God who we worship.

[10:21] This is also why love is given such an important role in the New Testament. The father loves the son. The son loves the father. The father and the son love us. And so the greatest commandments are to love God and to love our neighbor.

We bear his image. We represent him when we are in loving relationships with God and with others. Now, the third way that we can interpret the image of God is the one that I'm most excited to share with you.

The implications for this one, I think, are stunning and highlight some of the ways that Christianity is just so distinct and beautiful. And it's this.

We bear God's image in our function. Now, I appreciate that might not sound very exciting, but I'm going to explain to you why this is so marvelous. We represent God in how we live and in what we do.

God says that we are to bear his image. And then right after that says that we are to take dominion over creation, that we're supposed to subdue the world around us. And those words probably sound a little aggressive.

[11:27] But they're not meant to be read that way. What it means to say is that God is entrusting his gracious rule of creation to us. And so if you were to plant a garden, you would have to subdue it.

It wouldn't just grow all by itself. You would have to tend to it. In that sense, you would bring it under your influence and control. And so we image God as caretakers of the world.

Now, this aspect of image bearing becomes clearer, especially when you contrast it to what other creation myths taught about the gods and also the people that the gods made.

In many other religions, creation is some kind of conflict or war that happens among the gods. And so in those religions, you will also have this language that a person could bear the image or likeness of a god.

So that idea is not unique to Genesis. There are other religions that would talk about people bearing the image or likeness of a god. But that language was generally almost always used for kings and rulers.

[12:37] Kings would image God or represent him by wielding violent power over other people and conquering them. But in Genesis, in our creation story in Genesis, there is no conflict.

If you go back to the very beginning of Genesis 1, it says that the spirit of God is hovering over the face of the waters and then God speaks. And as he talks, things are just kind of bursting into existence. It's really a very pleasant story.

There's no conflict at all. God is just kind of arranging the universe. And it seems like a very pleasant experience. And right after God says that he is going to make people in his image, the next thing that he says is that they should be fruitful and multiply and take dominion over the earth. And so God takes Adam and he puts him in the Garden of Eden. And it actually says he leaves them there to work it, to work the Garden of Eden. And one of Adam's tasks is to name the animals. Not, notice, the task is not build a city, amass power, but start putting things into order.

It actually says that God brings the animals to Adam. And I think this is a really wonderful, wonderful verse, what's said here. It doesn't say that God brings the animals to Adam to see if he could slaughter them or dominate them by exercising.

[13:53] You know, could he defeat them in some sort of, like, contest? It actually says that God brings the animals to Adam to see what Adam would call them. So God had named the heavens.

He had named the earth. And now he turns to Adam, brings in the animals just to see what Adam would name the animals. Because Adam is now representing God as he names them. So, according to other religions, kings bear God's image by the power they have been given to conquer. But according to Genesis, every human being bears God's image by the power they have been given to cultivate.

There is so much that can be drawn from this. But it suggests that you image God better in the mundane activities of your life, such as doing household chores.

Or tending to a vegetable garden. Or, you know, even just spending time with your children. You image God better doing those things than a military general does in defeating an opposing army.

[14:54] And you may say, like, well, hold on now. We also see in the Bible that God is also going to come one day and going to defeat Satan. And that is true. But when that's done, there's no reason to believe he will ever be a conqueror ever again.

That's not at the heart of who God is. Remember, at his heart, he's a father who loves his son. That's who God is. And he's a cultivator. He's a creator.

And so in our homes, in our families, even in our chores, we represent him when we tend to those things with care. The doctrine of Imago Dei infuses every single thing we do with unbelievable meaning and purpose.

Which gets to a more foundational question that people have always asked. What are we here for?

If you understand the doctrine of humanity as it's expressed in this idea of Imago Dei and all the richness that it offers, then the question of what your purpose is is not a complicated one.

It's a wonderful one. You are here to glorify God. And you do that by representing him to be an image of him for everyone to see. And you do that in so many ways.

[16:01] And I appreciate the fact that the way I'm describing it to you now sounds a little dreamy. Sounds nice. Life, however, does not feel like a sunny afternoon cultivating a cute little garden.

And the reason for that is because of what happens next in the Genesis story in chapter 3, which is the fall. And so because of the fall, because of sin, God's image in us becomes distorted.

And it becomes disfigured. After Adam and Eve sin, God says that the world's going to become cursed. It's interesting to see how the curses play out.

Because the very areas that God had said that men and women were to bear his image, they are the areas that get the attention in the curses. Humans had been told to be fruitful and to multiply.

But God tells Eve that she will have great pain in childbearing. They were told to cultivate gardens and exercise dominion over the earth and to cause the earth to become fruitful.

[17:01] But God says that actually the ground is now going to offer thorns. And it's only going to be by the sweat of Adam's brow, by great effort, that anything productive is going to happen. Also, their relationships are going to be cursed.

God tells Eve that her desire is going to be for her husband and that he is going to rule over her.

And so we see that human relationships, which are supposed to image the loving interpersonal Godhead, the Trinity, human relationships will now be marked with envy and the abuse of power.

So the result of this is that nobody, none of us, by default, turn into patient, loving cultivators of life that image God the way that we are meant to.

In fact, our default is to impatience, to anger, to become selfish, to even become tyrants in a way. You see this especially in toddlers. From a young age, it's obvious that we don't intuitively know

how to be cultivators who bring the best out of other people.

We do intuitively know. We have an instinct for demanding our own way. We have an instinct for forcing our will onto other people. And that is part of the curse.

[18:12] And what is kind of tragically ironic then is that we end up looking more like the false gods of the pagan religions than the real God. We image them more than we image him.

And the doctrine which expresses that phenomenon of our proclivity to sinfulness and selfishness is called original sin. It's a very important idea.

It means that we're not born good. And a lot of people don't understand this. It actually also means, more than that, it means we're not even born neutral. You will find that a lot of people believe, maybe you believe, that when you're born, you're neutral.

You haven't done anything wrong. When you get older, you'll be able to choose right from wrong.

But the doctrine of original sin, based off of what we see in Scripture, is that we are born inherently and intrinsically sinful.

No one is born good. Now, that does not mean that we are all as evil as we possibly could be. But it reflects that there is a kind of spiritual contamination in us from birth.

[19 : 16] Now, we are not going to spend a lot of time on the doctrine of sin today. But that is the whole point of Jesus coming, is to address the sinfulness and the brokenness. And so we're going to look at how his life, death, and resurrection address the problem of sin in a later session.

But for now, it's important to know that when Jesus arrives in the story of the Bible, he comes and he renews and recovers the image of God. Now, this idea is pretty explicitly stated in more than one place.

Colossians 1.15, Paul says that he, Jesus, is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. So he comes to do what Adam and everyone else should have done. And it helps explain why his ministry didn't start until he was 30 years old.

And maybe you've wondered about that. Why did he have to go through all that waiting? I mean, why didn't he just show up and die and come back from the grave and get it over with? Well, the first 30 years of his life were not meaningless.

Part of understanding his life is understanding the fact that he was meant to display the image of God as one of us. So he had a relationship with his heavenly father. Father, he embraced that spiritual aspect of his humanity.

[20 : 30] He was totally dependent on the Lord. He was never rebellious. Just as God would come and walk with Adam through the cool of the day, we see that Jesus would often go to remote locations just to spend time with his heavenly father. Also, in his relationships with others, he never abused anyone.

He was always serving those who were around him. He cultivated life in other people. He brought the best out of them. And he also bore the image of God in the way that he functioned throughout his entire life.

And I think this gives some flavor to the fact that Jesus was a carpenter's son. Now, I don't want to overpress this point because we actually don't know how much of the carpentry business Jesus participated in.

But we do know that he was a part of the family. He would have helped with household chores. Surely he would have helped his father on occasion. And so those are years in which he was doing what Adam and every one of us have been called to do.

Think about this. Now, that doesn't mean we all need to have that kind of skill or vocation.

[21 : 38] It's just highlighting the importance of Jesus as a template for being the image of God. It's true that the most important thing Jesus did, by far, the most important thing he did was to die on the cross.

That's the center of the gospel. But that is not all he did for us. In other words, that doesn't mean that the rest of his life is irrelevant. Everything we know about his life is a gift. We did not know how to be in the image of God.

And so Jesus came to show us. Which is why now the New Testament writers say in a whole bunch of places that we should be in the image of him. Romans 8.29 says we should be conformed to the image of the son.

2 Corinthians 3.18 says we're changed into the likeness of Jesus from one degree of glory to another. Colossians 3.10 says we're being renewed in the knowledge. Sorry, renewed in knowledge after the image of our creator.

And there's more. We only learn how to bear God's image by looking at the life and death of Jesus Christ. He is the image of God for us.

[22 : 37] And now with the help of the Holy Spirit, we're able to bear his image. And you may say, yeah, but it's just so hard. And it is. It's very hard to bear the image of God. We are, even those of us who've been following Jesus for a long time, we still find in us that there is sin, selfishness.

It's not easy. And yet we believe that one day that's going to change. One day the old ways of sin and selfishness will be totally gone.

1 John 3.2 says that when he, Jesus, appears, when he comes again, we shall be like him. Not all powerful, not all knowing, but faithfully representing God in all of our relationships and in everything that we do.

We will finally be the image bearers of God that we were called to be. So in closing, just remember God says that we should not make images of him.

And yet one of the first things that he did in the creation story was to make an image of himself. And that image is in you.

[23 : 45] You are God's masterpiece. Imago Dei, made in the image of God. It's the purpose for which you were made. It's the meaning behind practically everything you do.

And it is the hope of what is coming. Seeing God face to face as a creature who's finally fulfilling its ultimate calling. That's all for this week, guys. We'll see you next Friday.