

**Imago Dei**

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In Genesis Chapter 1 verse 26, it states “<sup>26</sup>Then God said, “Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals,<sup>[a]</sup> and over all the creatures that move along the ground” (*Niv bible* 2009). This verse is teaching us that God made us in his own image, or in the Latin terminology, *Imago Dei*. Though the term may seem straight forward, the interpretation of “In our Image” has many different interpretations and may be explained differently depending on which theologian you reference.

To understand what it means to be made in God’s image, first, it might be helpful to ask *why* God made us in his image. In Michael F. Bird’s book, *What Christians Ought to Believe* he states;

“God’s overarching purpose, then, is to glorify himself by the effusion of his holy love upon creatures that are little miniatures of himself. God creates with the sole intent of creating a bride for the Son and to unite himself with his creation. The world is the bridal chamber for the ultimate union of God with humanity to be consummated in the new creation” (Bird, 2016).

This shows that we were made to be like God, to love God, and to be His creations.

When you look up the term *Imago Dei*, the painting *The Creation of Adam* by Michelangelo pops up. It gives us the best image for what it might look like to be “Made in the image of God” and it is often interpreted that we must look like God physically. That would be difficult to prove or comprehend since we do not know what God looks like. It also doesn’t have much meaning or purpose. At the same time, we might think that it means to be like God in nature but that seems impossible because God is almighty and glorious. We as humans are

sinners and far from almighty or glorious. So, what could it mean in Genesis 1 and five other times throughout the Bible to state that we are made in God's image or "miniatures of Himself"?

According to Richard Middleton in his article *The Liberating Image? Interpreting the Imago Dei in Context*, he states "The concept of the imago Dei has been widely recognized as central to a Christian understanding of human beings, yet the paucity of biblical references has left the way open for a wide variety of philosophical and theological interpretations of this notion." (Middleton). These interpretations are not as people often think of the physical image of God but in the sense of moral likeness to God. As Middleton states that "for the vast majority of interpreters up until recent times have understood the meaning of the image in terms of metaphysical analogy or similarity between the human soul and the Being of God, in categories not likely to have occurred to the author of Genesis." (Middleton, 2005)

Two theologians that Middleton references are John Calvin and Martin Luther. He states that Luther "rejected the metaphysical interpretation and substituted instead a reading of the image as original righteousness, which Adam (and all humanity) lost through sin and which is restored through Christ." Whereas he goes on to state that Calvin's view is "much more complex". He states that Calvin has an "extra feature of an almost physical dimension, whereby the created/renewed/eschatological glory". (Middleton, 2005)

This is an extremely eye-opening perspective to the imago dei. Middleton's explanation shows that we were originally created in moral likeness of God until sin entered the world in the Garden of Eden. Our likeness to God was lost through our sinful nature until Jesus came to repair it. In Colossians 3, it mentions being in the image of God again, in which it states "Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices <sup>10</sup> and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator." (NIV Bible, 2009). This

verse shows the transformation when we accept Jesus that we put back on the image of God even though we had lost it through sin.

Later, in James 3:9, the Bible mentions the image of God again but this time giving a different perspective stating, “<sup>9</sup>With the tongue we praise our Lord and Father, and with it we curse human beings, who have been made in God’s likeness.” (NIV Bible, 2009). This verse makes us not only think that we ourselves are made in God’s image but also everyone else around us. This view of others gives us the ability to see their similarities to us. Through this we know that we are all God’s children, which gives us all inherent value and helps us to have compassion and empathy toward others.

This belief that all humans are made in the image of God can transform the way we work as counselors. According to Todd Holeman in his book *Theology for Better Counseling*, he shares that one of the top five factors that influence client change is therapist characteristics. When exploring this he states

“Building a strong therapeutic alliance begins the moment that counselor and client meet. It is essential that theologically reflective counseling includes providing a Christlike welcome to clients... Just as God welcomes us into relationship with him, counselors provide welcome to their clients. Just as self-giving love and mutuality characterize the inner life of the Three-One God and the life God extends to God’s children, so too counselors relate to clients in self-giving and mutually respectful ways. The quality of the counseling relationship is a theological and a therapeutic matter.” (Holeman, 2012).

When we are practicing from a Christian worldview, that means that we are believing that all our clients are made in the image of God. The struggles and suffering that they express to us has only entered their life through sin. Based on the belief Calvin and Luther according to Middleton on *Imago Dei*, like mentioned earlier, all of us can be healed and reconciled with God through Jesus. That thought and belief should give all of us as counselors, hope for healing and transformation of our clients.

## References

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