



Provided by the Church of the Lutheran Confession - Board of Missions

**A Systematic Study of Bible Teachings (Dogmatics)**  
**Lesson 4.1.1 – The Doctrine of Human Beings and Sin**

**The Image of God**

The main thing that separates human beings from the animal world is the fact that God made male and female humans in His own image. We read in Genesis 1:26-27: **“Then God said, ‘Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; ...So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.’** Thus, God made humans to be beings like Himself in some ways.

Although there have been many suggestions as to what is meant by the image of God, we are on the safest ground if we stick to the New Testament explanation of God's image, as Paul explained it in his letters to the Ephesians and Colossians. **“But you have not so learned Christ, if indeed you have heard Him and have been taught by Him...that you put off...the old man...and that you put on the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness”** (Ephesians 4:20-24). To be created according to God, or in the image of God, is to be created in true righteousness and holiness. **“Do not lie to one another, since you have put off the old man with his deeds, and have put on the new man who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him”** (Colossians 3:9-10). To be created in the image of God therefore means to have a kind of knowledge of God that is unavailable to God's other creatures. Human beings are in a class by themselves.

For this very reason God made a distinction between human beings and animals after the world-wide flood. God said to Noah and his family: **“Every moving thing that lives shall be food for you. I have given you all things, even as the green herbs”** (Genesis 9:3). Man was now given permission to kill animals and use them for food. But God considered killing a human to be very different: **“Whoever sheds man's blood, by man his blood shall be shed; for in the image of God He made man”** (Genesis 9:6). Thus, it is contrary to Bible teaching to put animals of any kind on the same level as humans, as though the lives of animals are just as precious as the lives of human beings.

James, the brother of Jesus, also placed human beings on a special level when he wrote: **“No man can tame the tongue. It is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison. With it we bless our God and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in the similitude of God”** (James 3:8-9). It is not fitting that we should use our tongues to bless God and then curse other people, who were created in the image of God.

In other words, being created in the image of God means being like God, not in outward appearance or in having identical attributes, but in being in harmony with God morally. Being in harmony with God means that we want what God wants and are eager and zealous at all times to please Him in every way.

When humans fell into sin through disobedience to God's command, the image of God was lost. Man was no longer holy and righteous like God. Man was no longer in perfect harmony with God. But God did not want that situation to continue; therefore, God immediately went into action to restore the image of God in human beings. He promised a Savior (Genesis 3:15) who would undo the damage inflicted by Satan. God sent His Son Jesus into our world to recover mankind by suffering and dying for our sins and rising from the dead in victory. Now the Holy Spirit is active through the good news of Jesus to create saving faith in Jesus in human hearts. When this happens, there is also the creation of

the new man in human hearts. This new man is in harmony with God once again, for this new man is created in the image of God, in true righteousness and holiness.

Although there are false teachers who claim that God has or had a human body (for example, Mormons), Moses told the children of Israel: **“You saw no form when the LORD spoke to you at Horeb out of the midst of the fire”** (Deuteronomy 4:15). Jesus told the Samaritan woman at the well of Jacob: **“God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth”** (John 4:24). A spirit does not have a body.

Since Jesus, God's Son, is both God and man and he lived here on earth among men, we get a good idea of what is meant by the image of God by observing Jesus in action, as He is described in the four Gospels. God wants us who believe in Jesus to be like Him, as it is written: **“For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren”** (Romans 8:29).

As the image of God is renewed in us, we become more like Christ in our thinking, saying, and doing. As Christ denied Himself and took up His cross, so Jesus tells us: **“If anyone desire to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me”** (Matthew 16:24). The apostle Paul said: **“Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus”** (Philippians 2:5). When Jesus reveals Himself in glory at His second coming, our renewal will be complete, the old man of the flesh will no longer be a part of us, and **“we shall be like Him”** (1 John 3:2).

### Questions

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1. Which are the only creatures that were made in the image of God?
2. What is the similarity between God and the human beings He made?
3. Why does the image of God not mean a similarity in bodily form?
4. What distinction did God make between man and animal after the flood?
5. What was life like in the Garden of Eden?
6. How was the image of God lost?
7. How is the image of God restored?
8. How can we get a good idea of what the image of God is like?
9. How long do we have to wait before the image of God is totally renewed in us?