

Genesis 1:27 (NRSV)

So God created humankind in his image,
in the image of God he created them;
male and female he created them.

Exodus 3:1–6, 13–15 (NRSV)

Moses was keeping the flock of his father-in-law Jethro, the priest of Midian; he led his flock beyond the wilderness, and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. ²There the angel of the LORD appeared to him in a flame of fire out of a bush; he looked, and the bush was blazing, yet it was not consumed. ³Then Moses said, "I must turn aside and look at this great sight, and see why the bush is not burned up." ⁴When the LORD saw that he had turned aside to see, God called to him out of the bush, "Moses, Moses!" And he said, "Here I am." ⁵Then he said, "Come no closer! Remove the sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground." ⁶He said further, "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God.

¹³But Moses said to God, "If I come to the Israelites and say to them, 'The God of your ancestors has sent me to you,' and they ask me, 'What is his name?' what shall I say to them?" ¹⁴God said to Moses, ". . ." He said further, "Thus you shall say to the Israelites, 'I AM has sent me to you.'" ¹⁵God also said to Moses, "Thus you shall say to the Israelites, 'The LORD, the God of your ancestors, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you':

This is my name forever,
and this my title for all generations.

John 1:18 (NRSV)

¹⁸No one has ever seen God. It is God the only Son, who is close to the Father's heart, who has made him known.

Nearly everyone on the planet plays the game of life in the light of some god, superior being, unifying force, or other sort of imagined higher power. But we all actually play the game in the presence of the LORD God, in whose image we are made.

What sort of God is this whom we worship?

Moses met God in the Sinai wilderness at a bush that was burning but was not consumed. God revealed his name to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM." But who really is this God, or better put, what sort of God is this whom Moses followed?

The Hebrew Scriptures reveal much to us about this God. He created all that is and created humans in his image. After the humans rebelled against him, God set about to rescue his creation, choosing one couple, Abraham and Sarah, through whom things would be made right. We learn that this God is devoted to freedom and is relentless in his pursuit of his

The Image of God

One of the most remarkable claims that Christians make is that we and all humans are made in the image or likeness of God. To use the old Latin phrase, we are the *imago dei!*

But what does this really mean? Certainly, it doesn't mean that we look like God, for God has no physical body. Rather, there are a couple of truths that are proclaimed here.

First, God is sovereign over his creation and as the sovereign, God has appointed humanity to exercise wise and caring dominion over what God has created. It is a bit like seeing each of us an outpost of God, charged with responsibilities over all that God has entrusted to us.

Second, to proclaim that humans are the *imago dei* is to proclaim that just as God is inherently relational, so are we. God is unity in three persons; we are created in the plural, male and female (v. 27). Humans are marked out from the rest of creation. Every single human life is to be cherished and protected, accorded dignity and respect. Every person on the planet is made in God's image – the people we love and the people we hate, those we admire and those we despise.

people. The people may be faithless, but God is always faithful and full of loving-kindness. He is merciful and kind. He is slow to anger and abounds in steadfast love (Exodus 34:6-7).

And yet there is much about God that we do not learn from the pages of the Old Testament. The Hebrew Scriptures aren't wrong, just incomplete. As John writes, it is Jesus who has made God known (John 1:18). And how has Jesus made God known on the cross.

In one of the most pivotal of all New Testament passages, Paul writes: "Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross." (Philippians 2:5-9).

The Image of God and the Dignity of all Persons

In the very first chapter of Genesis, the Bible seeks to shape our understanding of God and of ourselves. We are told that there is a God who created everything and pronounced it good. We are told that God created humans in his own image, setting them apart from the rest of God's creation. This is a staggering claim and ought to shape every aspect of our lives.

In any organization, it is easy to begin seeing people as tools, as objects to be used to accomplish some purpose. Bob becomes the spreadsheet guru only and any appreciation of Bob the husband/friend/fly fisherman is lost.

Chester Barnard was president of AT&T, New Jersey, in the 1930's and wrote about the need for organizations to protect the "whole person" and the difficulty of really doing so. I spent much of my adult life in business and I understand business realities. Still, as Christians, we proclaim that every customer, every employee, every sales person, every executive – all are the *imago dei* and are to be treated with dignity and respect.

We are to love them all, especially those who we find it most difficult to love. The cherishing of human dignity is to be reflected in our hiring practices, our sales policies, our work rules – in every aspect of modern organizational life. Do businesses ever conduct a Human Dignity Audit? I wonder.

The Cross

Stop for a few minutes and reflect on Paul's claim. That God, the creator of the cosmos, humbled himself to the point of suffering the most shameful and excruciating death the Romans could devise. This passage and its implications ought to stop us cold every time we come to it. Even more, we are called by Paul to be like Christ in this, ready to put the interests of others ahead of our own.

Obviously, this doesn't square with the way many Americans pursue their lives. With the passing of each decade, we Americans seem more and more consumed with our rights. Sometimes, I think we've about convinced ourselves that we have the inherent right to do whatever we want.

Jesus certainly enjoyed rights and privileges that you and I could not imagine. He was (and is!) God . . . existing from God's beginning . . . equal with God . . . all-knowing . . . all-Good. However, we might choose to phrase it, Jesus had it all!

But he gave it all up. He didn't cling to his inherent rights and privileges; he instead "emptied" himself, taking on the "form of a slave, born in human likeness." He gave up the privileges of God so that he might be obedient – obedient all the way to a humiliating death on a Roman cross.

Sometimes, Christians get off track with this. We get too consumed with trying to tease out the meaning of "form" or "emptying," wondering whether Paul is talking about Jesus' surrendering his omniscience or omnipotence. But this is not Paul's point.

As Morna Hooker wrote, "Christ did not cease to be in the 'form of God' when he took the form of a slave, any more than he ceased to be the 'Son of

God' when he was sent into the world. On the contrary, it is in his self-emptying and his humiliation that he reveals what God is like." God is love (1 John 4:16b). Love is selfless sacrifice. How do we know this? Because "God's love was revealed among us in this way: God sent his only Son into the world so that we might live through him" (1 John 4:9). If we

want to know what God is like, we can look to Jesus. If we want to know what love is like, we can look to the cross.

How does God respond to Jesus' "obedience to the point of death – even death on a cross"? God does so triumphantly, exalting Jesus above all others. Jesus *is* Lord. It is he to whom "every knee should bend" and "every tongue confess." Using these stirring words of worship from Isaiah (45:23), Paul points us toward Jesus as the image of the one true God, whose self-sacrifice embodies the meaning of true love. Jesus is to be worshiped. His example urges us on toward loving sacrifices of our own. We are not to cling to our rights and privileges; we are to surrender them for the sake of others. For this is what God is like and we too are made in the image of God.

The Humiliation of Christ

A baby born in a manger . . . a humiliating death on a cross. No one expected this of God. Indeed, for many in the Greco-Roman world, the sarcastic phrase, "How silly a god to get himself crucified" would have summed it up quite well.

Rome ruled the New Testament world and did so with the most rank-and-status-conscious culture ever known. Frankly, life was little more than a relentless quest to gain status and honor. Even wealth was desired only for the status it might bring.

Philippi, in Greece, had a unique history and was the most Roman city outside Italy. When Paul arrived in Philippi, we can be sure that he felt like he had stepped into another world. The Roman obsession with status and honor was every bit as evident in Philippi as it was in Rome.

Yet in Philippians, Paul calls upon two images to portray the selflessness of Jesus Christ. First, he uses "slave" (Philippians v.7) – the most dishonorable *public status* one could have, and then "cross" (v.8) – the most dishonorable *public humiliation* one could suffer. It is surely impossible for us to really grasp the shocking nature of Paul's claim that Jesus, God himself, had taken on the form of a slave, been crucified, and then exalted so that all creation might bow before him. Indeed, the average Philippian was probably less shocked than simply amused. The Roman world scoffed at the very idea.

The humiliation of Christ turns the world upside. Power is weakness. Honor is humiliation. First is last. Victory is death on a cross. And for whom did Christ turn the world upside-down? For whom was he humiliated? For you and for me. Surely, this ought to stagger us, to drive us to our knees as we throw ourselves before such a God and sing praises to his name.

The vertical and the horizontal

Jesus' cross had two beams. One upright and one a cross beam. One pointed to the heavens, the other to the horizon.

One way to understand the cross is to see its structure as revealing to us the full nature of God's relationship with us.

The *vertical* post, the upward beam, speaks to God the creator and ruler of the cosmos, the transcendent God who is wholly other, who is holy and almighty, the one to whom every knee bows. For some, this is all there is to God. A Muslim, for example, fully embraces God's transcendence, what it is that separates us from God.

The *horizontal* beam in the cross speaks to the immanence of God, the God-with-us, the God, in the person of Jesus, who was born like us, ate like us, died like us, and was resurrected, as we too will be. This incarnation of God, born to a virgin and nailed to a cross, is an absurdity to many. All but those who call themselves Christians reject this immanent God, this man Jesus, fully God and fully human.

Too many people, even many Christians, see God only as some remote deity who is not involved in the day-to-day muck of our lives, much less one who lived and died in the muck. Others see God as no more than some sort of spiritualized benevolence who asks nothing and, in truth, loves nothing. To all those, I ask, "How's that working for you?"

True life can only be lived in the presence of the one who created us, made us in his image, and gave his life for us. This is the God who Moses met at the burning bush. This is the God who was ridiculed and scorned and murdered. This is the God who endured all, so that true life can be ours.

A Few God Words

The Holiness of God

Holy is one of those bible/church words that I suspect most of us use without ever being sure exactly what we mean. In the simplest sense, holiness is what makes God, God – and makes us not God! Gerhard Vos writes, “He is holy in everything that characterizes Him and reveals Him, holy in His goodness and grace, no less in His righteousness and wrath.” Aulen writes, “Holiness is the foundation on which the whole conception of God rests. . . Every statement about God, whether in reference to his love, power, righteousness . . . ceases to be an affirmation about God when it is not projected against the background of his holiness.” In other words, God’s righteousness is his holy righteousness. His mercy is holy mercy. His wrath is holy wrath.

God is simply holy (Lev 11:45; 1 Peter 1:15-16) and the holiness of any creature, such as you or me, or any place, or any building is derived from God. Our own holiness (in which we are to grow!) has meaning only in relationship to God.

God’s Transcendence and God’s Immanence

You don’t have to do much reading about God before you’ll run into two very important words: transcendence and immanence.

To speak of God’s transcendence is to speak of what separates God from us – he is creator, we are not; he is omnipotent, we are not; he is eternal, we are not; he is God, we are not.

To speak of God’s immanence is to speak of “God with us,” caring and active, involved and personal, intimately and relentlessly pursuing us.

We make a mistake when we overemphasize either aspect of God. If we tend too much toward God’s transcendence, God can seem to be a distant, uninvolved, even scary, supreme being. For too many people, this is the image of God they hold. If we overemphasize God’s immanence, we can make God our buddy and pal, making him less than God, failing to hold God in the reverence due him.

Questions for Discussion and Reflection

1. Do you think you have ever seen God? What does God look like?
2. Share an experience where you have felt very close to God. What do you think caused that feeling?
3. The cross is the symbol of our faith. Picture the cross in your mind. It has a vertical post and a horizontal cross bar.
 - The *God of Creation* has a vertical relationship with us. Brainstorm about how you see that kind of relationship.
 - The *God of Salvation* has a horizontal relationship with us. What is it about a horizontal relationship that might speak of salvation?
4. What can I do to be more God-like?
5. What could you do to put a face on God for others to see?
6. Do you believe that you live in God’s kingdom? Can you live like it this week or the next?

Daily Bible Readings

Before reading each passage, take a few minutes to get a sense of the context. Your study bible should help. Jot down a few questions that come to mind from your reading of the passage.

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| <p>Monday, Genesis 1:1 – 2:4a The transcendent God creates.</p> | <p>Tuesday, Genesis 2:4b-25 The immanent God creates.</p> |
| <p>Wednesday, Job 40:6-41:43 The second of God's speeches. It is a vivid reminder that God is Creator and Governor of the cosmos.</p> | <p>Thursday, John 13:3-17 Jesus washes the feet of his disciples on the eve of his crucifixion.</p> |
| <p>Friday, Luke 6:32-36 Reflecting God's love in our love for others, especially those who are the hardest to love.</p> | <p>Weekly Joys and Concerns</p> |

