

SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY

Video Lecture Series

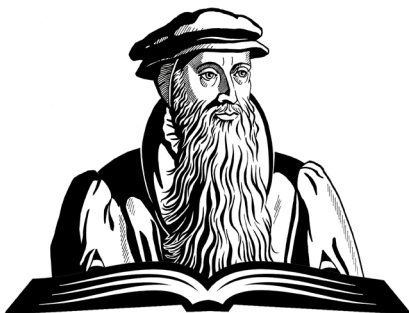
by Robert D. McCurley, ThM

Module 3:

ANTHROPOLOGY— THE DOCTRINE OF MAN

Lecture 3

MAN AS THE IMAGE OF GOD



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Module 3 ~ Lecture 3

Man as the Image of God

What if I were to ask you the question, What makes a rock different from a fruit tree? Well, you might think to yourself, Well, a rock is something that doesn't move—it's hard, it stays the same, whereas, a fruit tree grows. You see it come up out of the ground, it grows to maturity, it has leaves, it drops those leaves in the winter, and then eventually, after a few years, it begins to bear fruit, and so on. Well, true enough. Well then, what makes the difference between a tree and a fly—like a housefly. What makes the difference between those? And you'd say, Well, a fly is more animated. It has movement, it has more complexity. So it has eyes that can see, and patterns through which it moves, and its lifespan is obviously shorter, and so on. And that's true as well. Well then, what makes the difference between a fly and a dog. Here again, we have some similarities, in this case, they're both animated—they're active creatures. But a dog has more capabilities, doesn't it? It can do all sorts of things that a fly can't do, and it has a relationship with people, and so, you can have a pet dog and train it tricks, and so on. Well, what is the difference between a dog and a person? In other words, what exactly makes a person a person? And you can't say that they're animated, right? They both run, they both eat, they both feel pain, they can even have a capacity for companionship, and so on. Dogs even communicate—they communicate to one another, and there is some measure of communication between people and dogs. So what is it? I mean, you can train a dog to do all sorts of things, and you can train a person to do all sorts of things. What exactly makes a person a person? This is an important question. It's important, of course, in terms of society at large—how people think about the difference between animals and human beings. But it's also important for us Biblically, to understand the mind of God, and His design that He has given to the world as a whole.

Well, in this lecture, we're going to seek to get to the nub, to the core of the answer. What makes a person a person. This series of lectures in this third module on Systematic Theology is devoted, as you know, to the study of the Doctrine of Man. And so, our purpose is to explore what the Bible teaches about man, both before and after the fall, and the entrance of sin into the world. And so now, in this third lecture, we are going to turn and explore what it is for man to be made in the image of God—Man as the Image of God. And so we'll begin, first of all, by looking briefly at a passage of Scripture to open up the consideration of man as the image of God, following the same pattern we've used throughout these courses.

So I'll direct your attention to Genesis, chapter 1, verses 26 to 28, because there we read these words: "And 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 fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth. So God created man in his own image,

in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them. And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth.” So as you know, in Genesis 1, God provides us with the historical account of the creation of the universe during the very first week of history. And on the sixth day, God made man. He made man as the apex, as the pinnacle of His creation. And we see in this that man is truly, and inherently special—that he’s distinguished by God from all else that is in creation. And specifically, we’re told that God created man in the image, or likeness, of God. Now those two words—the word “image” and the word “likeness”—are synonymous and interchangeable. There are times, as the Scriptures continue to unfold, where this will be referred to as the image, and other times when it will be referred to as the likeness of God, and we’ll see some of that. But both the words image and likeness tell us some important things. They tell us, first of all, that man is distinct from God. So he’s not God—it’s not as if God duplicated Himself—he’s distinct from Him. But he also represents Him. A likeness of God, is a representation of God. And so we have, between God and man, this unparalleled relationship. God has entered into a unique relationship with mankind that is different from the relationship He has with everything else in creation. He remains the Creator of the world, and of the rocks that we spoke about, and the fly, and the fruit tree, and the dog, and so on, and, yes, He’s Creator of mankind as well. But none of those other things are made in His image, none of them are made in His likeness, none of them represent God in the way that man does. Nor do they have the ability to have a relationship with God in the way that man does. Now this description of man being made in the image of God is something that applies to all men—not, just Adam, but all of his posterity, all men, in all place, at all times. And it doesn’t matter what part of the world they come from, or what language they speak, or what tribe that they derive from, and so on. Likewise, it applies to both men and women. He created them, male and female, both made in the image of God, as image-bearers of God. And the last thing that we see in this section of Genesis, chapter 1, is that, as the image of God, man is given dominion. He’s given dominion over all the creatures, and over all the world. That dominion expresses authority above all creation. So here too, you see something unique about man that is not shared with anything else in creation. He alone is given dominion over all else. That brings with it stewardship, and it brings with it responsibility, and both of those bring with them accountability with God, to exercise authority under God, in the service of God. And so we see, at the very beginning, indeed the opening chapter of Genesis, that man is made in the image of God.

But then, secondly, let’s consider some of the doctrinal details related to man, as being in the image of God. As we saw in the last lecture, Westminster Confession of Faith, chapter 4, paragraph 2 begins with these words: “After God had made all other creatures, he created man, male and female, with reasonable and immortal souls, endued with knowledge, righteousness and true holiness, after his own image, having the law of God written in their hearts.” And in the previous lecture, we considered some of the other components in that definition, and here we are focusing especially on the words, “after his own image.” So having considered the nature of man more generally in the last lecture, we’ll turn our attention to what it means for man to be created in the image of God.

First of all, when speaking about these matters, it is more accurate to say that man *is* the image of God, or, alternatively, man *is made in* the image of God, rather than speaking of the image of God *in* man. The image is not something *in* man. Rather, *man is* the image of God. Well, why might this distinction be significant? Why stress these words? Well, because the image constitutes

the essence of man. So it's inseparable from what makes man actually man—what he is—and distinguishes him from the rest of creation.

Secondly, so the question is, of what does the image consist? So how do we define it? What is included in this idea of being the image of God? And to answer this, we need to know how the entrance of sin affected the image. In other words, is man still the image of God after the fall? Or is there any difference before and after the fall, as it relates to man as the image of God? Well, in consulting the whole of Scripture, like we do in Systematic Theology, we discover that there is both a *broad* aspect and a *narrow* aspect to man as the image of God. So let's consider those.

The broad aspect of what it means for man to be the image of God. So we open our Bibles, and we learn that after the fall, we read, in Genesis, chapter 9, verse 6, these words: "Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed: for in the image of God made he man." So this is speaking about murder, obviously, the shedding of a man's blood, and this is the first instance in the Bible of God requiring the death penalty for murder. But what I want to especially highlight here is that the words say, "for in the image of God made he man." So it's giving us the reason—it's giving us purpose. Why is it that someone who murders another person should be executed? The Lord says the reason is because the person that he has murdered is the image of God—"in the image of God made he man." And so this is underlining the fact that well, here we are in Genesis 9, after the fall, and God, in the context of sin, even sin as grievous as murder, God is saying that man is still considered the image of God. Well, to give you another example, we can fast-forward to the New Testament. We come to James, chapter 3, and in James 3, as you'll remember, the Lord is dealing with our tongue, he's speaking about our mouth, our speech and its significance, and the importance of having godly speech. And in the course of that chapter, we read, in verse 9, "There-with bless we God, even the Father; and therewith"—that is, our mouth—"curse we men, which are made after the similitude of God." So here we have something very similar, it's parallel to Genesis, chapter 9. But now it's speaking about what we do with our mouth, not with our hand. We curse men, and we're attacking them. So we're not actually killing them, but we're cursing them, and the Lord uses the same reasoning in both places. He says, it is inappropriate to murder or take the life of an innocent person, because you're attacking the image of God; and here in James 3, He says, it is sinful and wrong to curse men, because they're made after the similitude or likeness, in the image of God. In James 3, we see that God considers man, after the fall, to still be the image of God. A similar passage would also be 1 Corinthians 11, verse 7. And so clearly, from this, we see that man still remains the image of God after the fall. And what does that entail? What does that include? Well, it's reinforcing the fact that man is still, after the fall, an immortal, spiritual being. He was when God created him, he still is after the fall. Likewise, man retains his faculties as a moral, rational creature. That's not lost in the fall. He's still has a moral nature. He still has rational capabilities. He still has the function of intellect and will, and so on.

So we learn from this, in our study of Scripture, that when God says that man is the image of God, made in the image of God, it includes, first of all, this broad aspect. That he is that image means that he is an immortal spiritual being, that he has the faculties of being a moral, rational creature, with the functions of intellect and will, and so on. So that would be the broad aspect of the image of God.

But then, we also need to consider the narrow aspect. Because, as we continue to study our Bibles, we come across passages like this—in Colossians 3, verse 10, we read: "And have put on"—speaking of the believer—"and have put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him." Interesting. So we're being told that the believer, who's

come under the power of the gospel, is actually being renewed, or regaining something that had been lost. And that something, in this case—it's spoken of as knowledge, or spiritual knowledge—that that is defined in terms of being part of the image of God that created him. Again, similarly, in Ephesians 4, verse 24, speaking of the believer, it says, "And that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness." So what is this? What we're learning is that there's something was lost in the fall, and that it is that something that can only be regained or renewed in conversion. So there's an aspect of the image being lost at the fall, and regained in Christ. And this, of course, has to be connected to the Lord Jesus Christ. Think of the language that's used in reference to Jesus, in 2 Corinthians 4, verse 4, where it says, "In whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them." So here we have, in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ, we have the preeminent, perfect, beautiful display and model of what it is to be the image of God. And so Christ is set before us as the standard, and the believer is being transformed. So that same book, 2 Corinthians 3, verse 18, says, "But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord." So God is describing something. He's saying that the believer is being transformed; they're being renewed; they're being changed into the image of the Lord Jesus Christ, from glory to glory, through the ministry of the Holy Spirit. Indeed, this is an important part of what salvation entails. And in our study of the Doctrine of Salvation in a future course, we'll explore this in detail. But you see it Romans 8, verse 29, when it says, "For whom he"—that is, God—"did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren." And so here is God's purpose. He's predestinated a people unto salvation, in order that they would be conformed to the image of the Lord Jesus Christ. And so here we're learning that there's also this narrow aspect of the image of God, that the image also included spiritual knowledge—we saw that in Colossians—and righteousness, and holiness. And this spiritual knowledge, righteousness, and holiness was lost at the fall, and it is regained through the gospel, in conformity to the Lord Jesus Christ. So if you think back to that passage we noted in Westminster Confession, chapter 2, paragraph 4, this language is actually woven into that paragraph, isn't it? When it's speaking about man being made in the image of God, it also uses the language of "knowledge, righteousness, and holiness,"—that's language lifted out of Colossians and Ephesians. And so, what constitutes the image of God? Well, there's a broad aspect—man is a spiritual, immortal being, with rational and moral faculties, but also, he was created with true spiritual knowledge, righteousness, and holiness.

But we also have to note that He speaks of dominion—dominion over the creatures. He uses it almost in the same breath, in that passage, in Genesis 1:26—"And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea," and so on. And so dominion is connected to this image. Dominion is describing a function. So man, created in the image of God, is created with a capacity for the responsibility of dominion. So man is to serve as deputy under God. He's to serve as God's vice-regent, as the image-bearer of God, exercising this function of dominion over the world. Now we sing about this in Psalm 8, in verse 4 and following, it says, "What is man, that thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that thou visitest him? For thou hast made him a little lower than the angels, and hast crowned him with glory and honour. Thou madest him to have dominion over the works of thy hands; thou hast put all things under his feet." And so, man being the image of God, and called to exercise dominion, is part of God crowning him with glory and with honor. God's put all things under the feet of men.

You say to yourself, Well, it doesn't feel like that, it doesn't seem like that. It doesn't seem as if man has all things put under his feet, that he actually exercises rightly and comprehensively over all the works of God's hands, and so on. What about that? Why is that the case? How is that the case? Well, the answer is given to us in the New Testament. In Hebrews, chapter 2, verses 8 and 9, you have the author to the Hebrews quotes this Psalm—Psalm 8—and he says, “Thou hast put all things in subjection under his feet. For in that he put all in subjection under him, he left nothing that is not put under him. But now we see not yet all things put under him.” So there you have that same question that we're asking ourselves: “But now we see not yet all things put under him.” Well, the passage continues: “But now we see not yet all things put under him. But we see Jesus.” So here is the One, the God-man, who comes with perfect humanity, and He occupies that supreme place, and He actually brings about the fulfillment, as the One who is the image of God. He brings about the fulfillment of that original call to exercise dominion. And here is Jesus bringing that to pass. He is actually causing dominion to unfold. And so, you sing in Psalm 72 about how His dominion—Christ's—is from sea to sea, and that the Lord Jesus is given all power and authority in heaven and on earth, and in Psalm 110, that all of His enemies, even, will be put under His feet, and so on. So these things are regained. The capability for dominion is secured in the person of Christ.

I'll also mentioned, just in passing, from Genesis, that man is in the image of God, given the responsibility of dominion, that comes in the context of what we call the creation ordinances, as well. So there are four creation ordinances. There is, first of all, marriage. You see that in Genesis 2, verses 23 and 24. And there is procreation, Genesis 1:28. Right after he tells them to have dominion, he says, “Be fruitful and multiply.” You have the creation ordinance of labor, in Genesis 2, verses 15, 19, and 20, where a man has to serve the Lord in the world through his labor. And the fourth creation ordinance is Sabbath observance—the opening verses of Genesis, chapter 2, verses 2 and 3. And that too, all of these is a part of this and connected to this concept of serving God as His image-bearers.

So in summary, we learned that there's a narrow aspect to the image of God, that's spiritual knowledge, righteousness, and holiness, which was lost at the fall, and regained in conversion; and there's a broad aspect that refers to man's rational, moral nature, which is maintained after the fall, and that, as such—as the image of God—man exercises dominion over creation.

Well next, we must consider some errors that arise related to man as God's image-bearer. And first of all, I want to highlight, within historical theology, some diverse views, from what we've gleaned from Scripture.

So during the Reformation era, there was a group called the Socinians, and they were heretics; they denied that Jesus was God; they denied the substitutionary atonement, and other things. They said that the image of God consisted entirely in man's dominion over the creatures—that that's all that it was. And so therefore, the image of God was not lost at the fall. So they're wrong, because the image of God is not equivalent to man's dominion, and they're wrong, because the image was not entirely retained after the fall.

But then we have the Roman Catholics. The Roman Catholics say that the image consists in man's rational, moral nature—what we were calling the broad aspect—and that the image is not at all lost at the fall. So similar to the Socinians, they would say it's not lost at the fall, because it's just his moral, rational nature. And they would speak about a superadded spiritual gift that was given to Adam in righteousness and holiness, and so on. And those, of course, are lost at the fall, but they're not part of the image. And so you can see the problem there, they have the broad aspect, but not the narrow aspect.

The Lutherans actually go the other direction. They would say that the image consists only in spiritual knowledge, righteousness and holiness, and therefore, the image was completely lost at the fall, and so man is not the image of God anymore after the fall, and that it is only regained at conversion. So they have the narrow aspect but not the broad aspect.

And so, placing what we've learned—the Biblical and Reformed position on the image of God—you can set it against the backdrop and see how people have gone off one direction or the other.

Secondly, to deal with a contemporary issue, we should acknowledge that evolution eliminates the concept of man as the image of God altogether. How so? Well, they would say that there isn't a fundamental difference between people and animals, that they're all on the same plain, that people are just more highly evolved animals. Well the implications of this are tragic, aren't they? Because we've noted that God has crowned man with glory and honor, that man has inherent dignity, as those made in the image of God. And so, if you deny that, man loses his inherent value, his worth, and his dignity. Think about the impact upon ethics. When a lion eats a gazelle on the plains of Africa, no one cries out that something morally reprehensible has happened. You just have one animal doing to another animal what's natural to them; they're acting according to their instincts, and so on. There's no moral implication in it. But if man is not the image of God, with value, and dignity, and so on; if man is only an animal, then what one person does to another person is of no moral consequence. It's just one animal doing to another animal what's in keeping with their instincts. And, of course, we say, absolutely not! Indeed, even the evolutionists would cringe at this thought, to say that well, murder, and rape, and kidnapping, and all of these other things are not morally wrong. Everyone knows, everyone has a sense that there is something different, there is something distinct, there is something special, there is something valuable about human life, that human life is precious, that people do have dignity. And so there's a sense of that. But their ideas—the idea of evolution—completely guts that, completely undermines that, and we need to make that clear to those who are walking in unbelief. The Bible provides us with the reason. What is it that constitutes the essence of man? The fact that he's made in the image of God, and therefore, all of the matters of dignity and value flow from that.

Fourthly, we can now draw some practical applications, some brief applications for ourselves. You know, what is man's glory? Well, ultimately man's glory has to be attached to likeness to God, because God Himself is the One who is glory. He is the definition of glory, and of honor, and of majesty, and so on. And any glory that man has is derived from God, as those made in His image. Well this underlines the importance of why, therefore, we shouldn't be content just with being moral, rational creatures, but we desperately need, as fallen sinners who have defaced the image by our sin, and the loss of knowledge, righteousness and holiness, and things that are associated with that—it shows us our great need for the Holy Spirit. It shows us our great need for a saving work to take place in our souls. We need to be converted, we need a heart of stone taken out and a heart of flesh to be put in. We need a new nature. We need the principle of grace planted within us. We need to be indwelt by the Holy Spirit. We need restoration. We need the Holy Spirit to come and renew and recreate us into the likeness of the Lord Jesus Christ. There is glory. When we speak about the Christian going to heaven, they're glorified—they go into glory. What's happening? Well, you have the completion of salvation—body and soul perfectly resurrected, sinless, and perfectly conformed to the likeness of Jesus Christ. The believer has glory, will have glory in heaven, unlike any glory seen before. But it comes as a consequence of the saving work of the Holy Spirit.

Secondly, we see the preciousness of Christ. Christ is the image of God, and He reveals true

glory to us. And so we're blind, and we're ignorant, and we're deaf without the Lord Jesus Christ. We need the knowledge of Him, we need to see Him, we need to see Him by faith as He's revealed in the Scriptures. We need to see Him truly and accurately, as the Bible portrays Him to us. We need to learn from Him, we need to study Him, because Christ is the model, if you will, who sets before us what it is to be the image of God. You see here how the study of the Doctrine of Man is actually providing us with some foundation stones, isn't it, for what we're going to study later in the Doctrine of Salvation. We'll come to the Doctrine of Sanctification, where we study the work of the Spirit in killing sin within the believer, and causing them to grow in righteousness, and all the while, conforming them into the likeness of the Lord Jesus Christ. Well, to understand all that we're going to explore in the Doctrines of Salvation, you have to have some knowledge of the Doctrine of Man, and specifically to our point, what it means for man to be made in the image of God. I want you to see the way in which all of these things are interconnected.

And then lastly, as I've already noted, we need, as Christians, we need to make loud and clear to the world the inherent value of people. For people have inherent value, as those made in the image of God. And that means people shouldn't be treated like objects. You know, we can use people for ourselves, we can use them for our own ends and purposes, reducing them to something like an object. No, the believer recognizes a person is one made in the image of God, and they're to be treated with dignity, and with all of the appropriate responses to what that entails. And that's important for us as Christians, it's important for our witness as well.

Well, in this lecture, we have explored Man as the Image of God, and this another important building block to add to what we've seen about the general nature of mankind. In the next lecture, we're going to turn our consideration to the Biblical doctrine of man's freedom of will, so the Freedom of Man's Will. And we're going to consider that from creation to consummation, so what was the nature of the Freedom of Man's Will before the fall, after the fall, in conversion, and in glory.