

Imagio dei

"Then God said, 'Let us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; and let them rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over the cattle and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.'"

Genesis 1:26,27

Many have pondered over what it mean to be made in the image of God? In what way, if any, are we different from other animals?

To answer this question, we need to look at both the Old and New Testaments. The answer is profound.

PART 1 : The meaning of "image of God" in the Old Testament

IMAGE is tselem in the Hebrew, eikōn in the Greek.

TSELEM : is **the shadow of a figure, the shadow-outline, a copy, reproduction, duplicate**. Tselem denotes **the visible form of an external object**.

EIKON : denotes **similarity in looks**, like the head of the emperor on a coin (Matthew 22:20; Mark 12:16; Luke 20:24). The coin is not of the same material as the emperor, but the shape of the head is the same. Eikōn presupposes **an original form from which there is derivation**.

Apart from the "image of God" passages, the word "image" occurs 12 times in the Old Testament. 10 times it refers to **a physical representation of something** – i.e., golden images of mice and tumors (1 Samuel 6:5,11); images of Baal (2 Kings 11:18); pictures of Babylonians painted on the walls (Ezekiel 23:14).¹ In Romans 1:23 fallen man exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for "an image (eikōn) in the form of (homoiōma) corruptible man ...", and then "image in the form of" is used of idols made in the form of birds, animals, and reptiles. Again it appears that eikōn refers to **a "figure" or a "shape."**

LIKENESS is demuth in the Hebrew, homoiōsis in the Greek.

DEMUTH : means **a copy, an imitation, resemblance, similarity**. It is used at 2 Chronicles 4:3 for the **"shape"** ("figures" NASB) of the oxen which supported the laver in Solomon's temple. It is used of the **"likeness"** of a sound at Isaiah 13:4. It is used in Ezekiel 8:2 where one with the **"appearance"** ("likeness" NASB) of a man caught Ezekiel away. A similar usage is found in Daniel 10:16,18. It is used at 2 Kings 16:10 of the **plans or copy or model** of an altar Ahaz saw in Damascus and sent to Uriah the priest so that he might design one just like it. The word is used in Isaiah 40:18,25, and Psalm 50:21 where God chides men for attempting to make an image of Him, saying there is no one "comparable" to Him.

HOMOIOSIS : denotes **"the same kind," or "like"** (but not "equal"), **"of like disposition," of holding possessions "in common," or "similar" in shape** (from geometry). While there is no connotation of derivation, homoiōsis denotes likeness, just as one egg resembles another, or there may be similarity between two men who are in no way related. Its usage elsewhere in Scripture helps us to grasp its meaning. In the creation, each species was to bring forth **"after its kind."** Jesus, when incarnate, was in the **"likeness of the flesh of sin"** (Romans 8:3 NASB mg.). In all points He was made **"like"**

(homoiōthēnai) his brethren (Hebrews 2:14-17). Paul uses the root word to say that since we humans are the offspring of God, God is not like the animal figures pagans set up as images (Acts 17: 28ff). At Revelation 1:13 (NASB mg.), one "like the Son of Man" was seen among the candlesticks. At Matthew 22:39 we find the word means "**of equal value**" ("a second [commandment] is just like it"). The word occurs at Galatians 5:21 ("and things like these") to designate works of flesh similar to those already specifically named.

[The "Image" and "Likeness" of God \(James 3\) – Reese Commentaries](#)

Purpose of Life

"Image of God" means having the likeness of God. We were made to be like God. This has a profound implication. We were made to have godliness – to imitate God – to follow and obey God – and model ourselves on Him. If we were made to imitate God, then we will find our fulfilment and purpose and greatest happiness in imitating, copying, following God.

We are to follow our Godly nature rather than our animal nature. All the other animals were made to be like animals, and only have that capacity. In comparison, each of us has the capacity and potential to be much more. We were made to represent and be like God – it is our defining purpose.

PART 2 : The meaning of "image of God" in the New Testament

"You ... have been taught (verse 21) that ... you lay aside your old self (verse 22) ... corrupted in accordance with the lusts of deceit, and that you are being renewed in the spirit of your mind (verse 23), and put on the new self, which in the likeness of God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth (verse 24)."

Ephesians 4 : 22

Paul is highlighting the continual challenge a believer has to bring his or her thoughts more into line with God's revealed will, parallel to Romans 12:2 where the mind is said to be renewed and thus behavior is transformed. Perhaps "spirit" here has reference to "attitude." The renewal takes place in the "spirit" (dative of reference) which controls the mind (subjective genitive). In Titus 3:5 it is the Holy Spirit who is the agent doing the renewing. The present tense infinitive and the passive voice suggest the continuous nature of the renewal and that it takes place as believers allow themselves to be renewed in their thinking. 2 Corinthians 4:16 speaks of a "day by day" or "every day" repeated renewal (anakainountai) of the inner man.

"Stop lying (mg.) to one another, since you laid aside the old self with its evil practices, and have put on the new self who is being renewed to a full knowledge according to the image of the One who created him – a renewal in which there is no distinction between Greek or Jew"

Colossians 3 v 9

The new self is constantly being renewed (kainos); it is in the process of being renewed. The same verb form here translated "renewed" is used at 2 Corinthians 4:16, "our inner man is being renewed day by day." The participle is passive in form.

Christ (who is the image of the invisible God, Colossians 1:15; 2 Corinthians 4:4) serves as the model or archetype for the new man. Paul tells us in Colossians 1:15 that Christ is "the image of the invisible God."

The passage says that the Christian's continual, daily renewal in full knowledge makes him what the Creator intended him to be.

God's plan, made back in eternity before He created, was that believers might be conformed to the image of Christ.

"For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the first-born among many brethren"

Romans 8:29

Conclusion

So, it appears that we were made to be in the image of God – to be like Christ. That is the most central purpose of our existence – the reason why we were made. The purpose of life is to follow, imitate and obey God's will and in doing so become transformed into the likeness of God.

When the Bible says that man was made in the image of God, it differentiates humans from animals by giving human life a divine purpose. We are called to more than just an animal existence. We are called to imitate God.

Animalism vs Divine Image

A cultural war is being played out. On one side, people are portrayed as just another animal – needing to compete, exploit and consume. On the other side, people are viewed as having a much greater potential – the potential to imitate the divine. This war is played out in Israel's history – most prominently during the conquest of Canaan when the Israelites were called to overcome the polytheistic nature worship and animalism of the Canaanites with the ethical monotheism of Israel. See [Book of Judges](#)

In Genesis 9, it is a capital offence to murder a human being **because** each of us is created to be like God – it's our innate purpose, our potential and our destiny.. So murder doesn't just take a life – it takes away the possibility of a divine manifestation in human form.

The impact of realising this purpose, can be seen in the impact Christ has had – he was an “image of the invisible God” – and the ripples created by his life have had an effect for thousands of years.