

THE IMAGE OF GOD

An Exhaustive Doctrinal Bible Study

CREATION · FALL · DOMINION · IDOLATRY · CHRIST · RENEWAL · GLORY

From Adam to the Last Adam

Old Testament · New Testament · Biblical Theology · Doctrinal Questions

Prepared for Personal Bible Study

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction: Humanity as God's Living Image

1. Hebrew Foundations: Tselem and Demut

2. Genesis 1:26–28: Image, Likeness, and Dominion

3. Genesis 2: The Image in Sacred Space

4. Genesis 3: The Fall and the Distortion of the Image

5. The Image After the Fall: Noah, Murder, and Human Dignity

6. Idolatry as Image Exchange

7. Israel's Vocation: Priests, Kings, and Failed Images

8. Psalms, Wisdom, and Prophets

9. Christ: The Image of the Invisible God

10. The Last Adam and the New Humanity

11. Renewal into the Image of Christ

12. The Church as an Image-Bearing Community

13. Resurrection Glory: Bearing the Heavenly Image

14. Major Doctrinal Questions and Interpretive Models

15. Synthesis and Study Conclusions

Key Sources and Further Reading

INTRODUCTION: HUMANITY AS GOD'S LIVING IMAGE

The doctrine of the image of God is not a narrow question about which human faculty resembles God. It is Scripture's account of what humanity is, why humanity was made, what sin has corrupted, why idolatry is a betrayal of human identity, what the Son reveals, what salvation restores, and what resurrection will complete. Genesis introduces humanity as God's image at the climax of creation. The rest of Scripture traces the tragedy of images who refuse to image their Maker and the triumph of the eternal Son who is the perfect Image.

The biblical movement is therefore larger than creation–fall–restoration in the abstract. It is a movement from Adam to Christ, from a garden sanctuary to a worldwide temple, from rule under God to rebellious self-rule, from corruptible glory to incorruptible glory. The doctrine joins anthropology, Christology, salvation, ethics, worship, ecclesiology, and eschatology. To ask what the image means is ultimately to ask what God intended humanity to become in communion with Him.

Controlling thesis: Humanity was created as God's living, royal-priestly representation within creation. Sin did not erase that status, but disordered its worship, character, relationships, and rule. Christ, the true Image and Last Adam, restores His people by the Spirit and will conform them bodily to His glory in the resurrection.

The Canonical Arc

- **Creation:** God creates male and female in His image and commissions them to multiply, fill, subdue, and rule the earth (Genesis 1:26–28).
- **Fall:** The image-bearer grasps at autonomous wisdom, submits to a creature's word, and spreads death into the realm entrusted to human dominion (Genesis 3; Romans 5:12–21).
- **Idolatry:** Humans who were made as God's image manufacture images of creatures and bow before them. Worship is exchanged; humanity becomes like the lifeless objects it serves (Romans 1:23; Psalm 115:4–8).
- **Christ:** The Son is not merely made in the image. He is the image of the invisible God, the exact expression of God's nature, and the true human ruler (Colossians 1:15; Hebrews 1:3; 2:5–9).
- **Renewal:** Those united to Christ are renewed in knowledge, righteousness, holiness, and glory according to the image of their Creator (Romans 8:29; 2 Corinthians 3:18; Colossians 3:10; Ephesians 4:24).

- **Consummation:** At the resurrection, believers bear the image of the heavenly Man. The moral and spiritual renewal begun now becomes embodied, incorruptible glory (1 Corinthians 15:42–49; Philippians 3:20–21).

Method and Scope

This study proceeds canonically. It begins with the Hebrew vocabulary and the ancient context of Genesis, follows the theme through Torah, idolatry texts, kingship, Psalms, Wisdom, and Prophets, then turns to the Gospels and apostolic writings. Lexical study serves the argument of each passage; it does not replace literary and covenantal context. Where faithful interpreters differ—over the content of the image, the force of “male and female,” or the meaning of Christ as image—the principal options are stated and weighed.

SECTION 1: HEBREW FOUNDATIONS — TSELEM AND DEMUT

Tselem (תְּלֵמָה): Image, Representation, Embodied Presence

The principal noun in Genesis 1:26–27 is tselem, “image.” Elsewhere it can refer to a physical representation: the “images” of tumors and mice in 1 Samuel 6:5, the idolatrous images condemned in Numbers 33:52, and the dream-image of Daniel 2. The word therefore does not naturally mean an invisible faculty hidden inside a person. Its ordinary force is representational: an image makes someone or something present by resemblance or delegated significance.

That usage does not imply that humans are statues or that God has a creaturely body. Genesis itself forbids reducing the image to physical shape, because male and female alike bear it and because the Creator transcends created form. Yet the bodily human person cannot be excluded. God appoints the whole embodied human being to be His visible representative within the visible world. Speech, rationality, moral agency, relationship, and bodily action all belong to the way that vocation is exercised.

Demut (דְּמוּת): Likeness, Correspondence, Pattern

The second noun, demut, means “likeness” or “resemblance.” Ezekiel repeatedly uses it when visionary realities correspond to something beyond ordinary description: “the likeness of four living beings,” “the likeness of a throne,” and “the likeness of the glory of the LORD” (Ezekiel 1). The term marks real correspondence without identity. Humanity resembles God without becoming divine, sharing God’s essence, or collapsing the Creator–creature distinction.

Genesis 1:26 places the terms together: “in our image, according to our likeness.” The prepositions reinforce representation and correspondence. The text does not clearly

divide image and likeness into two different components, as though “image” named reason and “likeness” named holiness. Genesis 1:27 repeats image without likeness; Genesis 5:1 uses likeness and Genesis 5:3 reverses the order. The terms overlap and mutually interpret one another.

The Image Is Both Gift and Calling

Genesis speaks of the image as a status conferred by divine creation, not an achievement earned by mature moral performance. Adam’s descendants possess it (Genesis 5:1–3), and its continuing reality grounds the prohibition of murder after the flood (Genesis 9:6). Yet the image also carries a task: image-bearers must exercise dominion in a manner corresponding to God’s own wise, fruitful, life-giving rule. Ontological gift and vocational calling belong together.

The image is not less than human capacities, relationships, or dominion, but it is larger than any one of them. It is the God-given identity of the whole person ordered toward faithful representation of God.

SECTION 2: GENESIS 1:26–28 — IMAGE, LIKENESS, AND DOMINION

Genesis 1:26 — “Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; and let them rule...”

“Let Us Make”: The Divine Deliberation

The creation of humanity is introduced by divine deliberation rather than the impersonal command used for much of the preceding creation: “Let there be.” Major explanations include a plural of majesty, God addressing the heavenly court, an intradivine self-deliberation, and a canonical anticipation of Trinitarian revelation. Hebrew plurals of majesty do not fully explain the plural verbs, while the heavenly-court view fits Old Testament scenes such as 1 Kings 22 and Isaiah 6. Yet Genesis immediately states that God—not the council—created humanity in His own image.

A Christian canonical reading should avoid claiming that Genesis 1 alone gives a fully developed doctrine of the Trinity. Nevertheless, later revelation permits readers to see that the one Creator’s work is accomplished through the Word and Spirit (John 1:1–3; Colossians 1:16; Genesis 1:2). The plural is compatible with, and ultimately illuminated by, the personal fullness disclosed in Father, Son, and Spirit.

The Grammar of Image and Rule

The command “let them rule” follows immediately from “in our image.” The Hebrew can be read purposefully: God makes humanity as His image so that humanity may exercise dominion. Ancient kings placed images of themselves in distant territories to signify

royal authority. Genesis radically democratizes royal imagery: not one emperor but every human being, male and female, receives royal dignity under the supreme King.

Dominion is expressed by *radah*, “rule,” and *kabash*, “subdue.” These verbs can describe forceful mastery in fallen settings, but Genesis 1 defines their original exercise by God’s own ordering work and blessing. Human rule is not permission to ravage creation. It is vice-regency: extending ordered, fruitful life, governing creatures for the Creator’s purposes, and bringing the earth’s potential into cultivated service.

Male and Female He Created Them

Genesis 1:27 moves in three poetic lines: God created humanity in His image; in God’s image He created him; male and female He created them. The singular collective “humanity” opens into the plural community of man and woman. Both sexes equally bear the image; neither possesses a higher grade of humanity, dignity, or access to the Creator. The reproductive blessing of verse 28 also shows that the commission is given to them together.

The phrase does not mean that God is biologically male and female. Scripture’s Creator is not a sexed creature. Rather, differentiated human persons together display that the image is not solitary autonomy. Human communion, mutual help, generation, and shared vocation correspond analogically to the God who speaks, blesses, loves, and enters covenant. Relationality is an implication of the image without exhausting its meaning.

Blessing Before Commission

God blesses humanity before commanding fruitfulness and dominion. Vocation is sustained by gift. “Be fruitful and multiply” is not bare biological propagation; it is the appointed means by which God’s images fill the earth. The geography of sacred representation expands as the human family grows. The earth is meant to become a realm filled with worshiping representatives who carry God’s wise rule outward from Eden.

Text	Divine Act	Human Identity and Calling
Genesis 1:26	God deliberates and appoints	Humanity exists by divine intention, not cosmic accident.
Genesis 1:27	God creates male and female in His image	Equal dignity and shared human status are creational.
Genesis 1:28	God blesses and commissions	Fruitfulness and dominion extend sacred representation through the earth.
Genesis 1:29–30	God provides food	Dominion remains dependent upon divine generosity.

SECTION 3: GENESIS 2 — THE IMAGE IN SACRED SPACE

Formed from Dust, Given Divine Breath

Genesis 2 does not repeat the phrase “image of God,” but it unfolds the embodied and priestly dimensions of image-bearing. The man is formed from dust and receives the breath of life (Genesis 2:7). Human greatness and lowliness are joined: the creature is earthborn, dependent, and mortal by nature, yet animated by God and summoned into personal fellowship with Him. The image never makes humanity autonomous or self-existent.

Work and Keep: Royal-Priestly Service

Adam is placed in the garden “to cultivate it and keep it” (Genesis 2:15). The verbs *abad* and *shamar* later appear together for Levitical service and guardianship of the sanctuary (Numbers 3:7–8; 8:26; 18:5–6). This lexical correspondence supports reading Eden as primordial sanctuary and Adam as a royal priest. His vocation is not only agricultural. He must serve in sacred space, guard its holiness, and extend its ordered abundance.

The failure to guard becomes decisive in Genesis 3. A serpent enters sacred space and contradicts God’s word. Adam does not expel the unclean intruder; he follows it. The priestly guardian allows desecration, and the result is exile. Cherubim then perform the guarding task humanity abandoned (Genesis 3:24).

Naming the Animals and Discernment of Kinds

God brings the animals to the man “to see what he would call them” (Genesis 2:19). Naming is an act of discernment and delegated rule, not arbitrary domination. Adam recognizes the order God has made and speaks within it. Yet the procession also reveals that no animal corresponds to him. The image-bearer belongs to creation but is not reducible to the animal kingdom; his fitting partner must share his nature.

Woman as Corresponding Strength

The woman is called *ezer kenegdo*, a “helper corresponding to him” (Genesis 2:18). *Ezer* frequently describes God’s powerful aid and therefore does not imply inferiority. *Kenegdo* signifies one who stands “opposite” or corresponding to him—like him in humanity, distinct in sex, fitted for covenant union and shared commission. The first human community is unity without sameness and distinction without inequality.

Eden as the Starting Point, Not the Final Goal

The garden is geographically bounded, while the commission concerns the whole earth. Adam and Eve are to fill and subdue beyond Eden's original borders. Creation begins "very good" but not yet consummated. The untested image-bearers must mature in obedient sonship, extend sanctuary, and enter confirmed life. The tree of life points toward a gift to be received in God's appointed way, not seized by autonomous judgment.

SECTION 4: GENESIS 3 — THE FALL AND THE DISTORTION OF THE IMAGE

The Temptation to Define Good and Evil Autonomously

The serpent's promise—"you will be like God, knowing good and evil"—is bitterly ironic. The humans already resemble God by creation. The temptation is not to receive likeness as gift and vocation but to seize divine prerogative apart from obedient communion. "Knowing good and evil" involves moral judgment and rule; the pair grasps the right to determine reality on the creature's own terms.

Sin therefore attacks image-bearing at its center. The image is called to hear God's word and represent His judgment; fallen humanity listens to the creature and represents the creature's lie. The eyes are opened, but not into divine fullness. Shame, hiding, accusation, pain, cursed labor, and death follow. Autonomous wisdom dehumanizes the one who seeks it.

A Reversal of Dominion

The order of Genesis 1 is inverted. Humanity was to rule the animals under God. Instead, an animal rules through deception; the woman and man rebel; the ground resists; and death returns the human body to dust. Paul's account in Romans 1 follows the same downward movement: knowledge of God is suppressed, glory is exchanged for creaturely images, and human passions and thinking become disordered.

Did the Image Disappear?

Scripture never says that the fall erased the image. Genesis 5:1–3 and 9:6 continue to apply image language to post-fall humanity. James 3:9 says ordinary human beings are "made in the likeness of God." If the image were wholly lost, murder and cursing would no longer be offenses against God's represented dignity. The fall corrupts the image's faithful expression without abolishing the status grounded in God's act of creation.

A helpful distinction is between image as enduring created identity and image as moral conformity. The first remains; the second is ruined and requires renewal. Fallen humans still reason, speak, relate, create, and rule, but these powers are bent toward self-

exaltation. They still represent God objectively, but they misrepresent Him ethically and religiously.

Exile from Sacred Presence

Expulsion from Eden is both judgment and mercy. Humanity loses immediate access to the sanctuary and tree of life, lest rebellion be immortalized. Eastward exile becomes a repeated biblical pattern: Cain goes farther east, Babel rises in the east, Israel later goes eastward into exile. Restoration requires more than improved behavior; it requires a new Adam, cleansed access, and return to the presence of God.

The fall does not make human life worthless. It makes human worship false, human rule oppressive, human relationships accusatory, human labor painful, and human bodies mortal. Redemption must therefore restore the whole image-bearing vocation.

SECTION 5: THE IMAGE AFTER THE FALL — NOAH, MURDER, AND HUMAN DIGNITY

Genesis 5: Adam Begets in His Likeness

Genesis 5 deliberately recalls creation: God made humanity in His likeness, created male and female, blessed them, and named them “Adam.” Adam then fathers Seth “in his own likeness, according to his image” (Genesis 5:3). The analogy of sonship is important. Seth resembles and represents his father without being numerically identical to him. This father–son pattern helps explain image as filial representation and prepares for later descriptions of Adam as “son of God” (Luke 3:38).

Genesis 9:6 and the Logic of Retributive Justice

Genesis 9:6 — Whoever sheds human blood, by man shall his blood be shed, for God made mankind in His image.

After the flood, God grounds the unique gravity of homicide in the image. An assault upon a human being is symbolically an assault upon the King whose likeness that person bears. The victim’s social status, usefulness, intellect, strength, age, or moral achievement is not the foundation. Human worth rests in God’s creative designation.

The text also places human authority under divine judgment. Humanity may administer justice because humanity represents God, but the “for” clause prevents justice from becoming mere revenge. The magistrate is accountable to the God whose image exists in offender and victim alike. Biblical human dignity neither denies punishment nor permits dehumanization.

James 3:9: The Ethics of Speech

James applies image theology not only to murder but to speech. With the tongue people bless the Lord and curse those made according to God's likeness. The contradiction is liturgical: the mouth honors the Original while attacking His living representations. Image theology therefore governs ordinary conversation, not merely exceptional cases of violence. Contempt, slander, racial hatred, and verbal degradation are theological violations.

Universal Dignity and Unequal Roles

The image gives equal human worth but does not by itself settle every question of social office, family role, or ecclesial authority. Scripture can affirm equal image-bearing while assigning differentiated callings. Conversely, differentiated roles can never justify treating one sex, ethnicity, disability status, economic class, unborn child, elderly person, or enemy as less fully human. Functional difference and ontological dignity must not be confused.

SECTION 6: IDOLATRY AS IMAGE EXCHANGE

The Second Commandment and the Prohibition of Manufactured Presence

Israel is forbidden to make a carved image for worship (Exodus 20:4–6; Deuteronomy 4:15–19). Deuteronomy grounds the prohibition in Sinai: Israel heard a voice but saw no form. God determines how He will make Himself known. A manufactured image reverses revelation; the worshiper gives visible form to God and then attempts to control divine presence through an object.

There is also a profound anthropological logic. God has already placed His authorized living images in creation. To manufacture a divine image from wood or stone is to reject both God's transcendence and God's appointed representation. Israel must not worship an image because the living God cannot be contained, and because humanity's calling is to embody obedient representation rather than construct manageable substitutes.

Psalms 115: Worshipers Become Like Their Idols

Psalms 115 mocks idols that have mouths but cannot speak, eyes but cannot see, ears but cannot hear, hands but cannot feel, and feet but cannot walk. The climax is theological anthropology: "Those who make them will become like them." Worship is formative. The living image of the living God becomes spiritually senseless by devotion to lifeless images.

The principle works positively as well as negatively. Those who behold the Lord's glory are transformed into the same image (2 Corinthians 3:18); those who serve idols become

like idols. Humanity inevitably reflects what it worships. There is no religiously neutral self-construction. Every liturgy trains perception, desire, speech, and action toward some vision of glory.

Isaiah's Idol Polemic

Isaiah 40–48 exposes the absurdity of idolatry. The same tree warms a man, cooks his bread, and supplies wood for a god before which he bows (Isaiah 44:9–20). The idol cannot move unless carried and cannot save its bearer. By contrast, God carries Israel from the womb to old age (Isaiah 46:1–4). The contrast is between burdensome gods humans must sustain and the Creator who sustains His images.

Romans 1:23 — The Great Exchange

Romans 1:23 — They exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for an image resembling corruptible man, birds, four-footed animals, and crawling creatures.

Paul's vocabulary intentionally echoes Genesis 1. The sequence descends through humanity, birds, land animals, and creeping things—the classes over which humanity was commanded to rule. The ruler bows to the ruled. The incorruptible Creator's glory is exchanged for eikōn, an image of corruptible creation. Idolatry is thus anti-creation: it overturns the Creator–creature distinction and the proper order of dominion.

The exchange of worship produces further exchanges in human life (Romans 1:24–28). God “gives them over” to the disorder they have chosen. Paul is not listing unrelated vices after a theological preface; he is showing that distorted humanity flows from distorted worship. When the image refuses the Original, mind, body, desire, and society lose their proper orientation.

The Golden Calf and the Exchange of Glory

At Sinai, Israel exchanges the God who delivered them for a calf and says, “This is your god ... who brought you up from Egypt” (Exodus 32:4). Psalm 106:20 interprets the event: “They exchanged their glory for the image of an ox that eats grass.” Israel's “glory” is covenant communion with the living God. The exchange lowers a redeemed people beneath their vocation and anticipates Paul's language in Romans 1.

Idolatry is not merely having an excessive interest. At its deepest level, it is an image exchange: the living image refuses to reflect God, enthrones a creature, and is progressively conformed to the false glory it adores.

SECTION 7: ISRAEL'S VOCATION — PRIESTS, KINGS, AND FAILED IMAGES

A Kingdom of Priests

At Sinai, God calls Israel His treasured possession, “a kingdom of priests and a holy nation” (Exodus 19:5–6). Israel receives corporately an intensified form of humanity’s Edenic calling: dwell near God’s presence, guard holiness, mediate blessing, and display divine wisdom before the nations (Deuteronomy 4:5–8). The tabernacle’s garden imagery signals a partial return to Eden, but access remains guarded and mediated.

The High Priest as Representative Man

The high priest bears the names of Israel on his shoulders and breastpiece and wears a golden plate inscribed “Holy to the LORD” (Exodus 28). He represents the people before God and God’s holy claim before the people. Yet he is himself sinful and must offer sacrifice for his own guilt. The priestly image requires cleansing, and its repeated sacrifices testify that no Aaronic priest can perfect the worshiper.

Kingship and Royal Sonship

The Davidic king is called God’s son (2 Samuel 7:14; Psalm 2:7) and shepherds God’s people under divine authority. Royal sonship and image-bearing converge: the king is meant to represent the righteous rule of the heavenly King. Psalm 72 imagines dominion bringing justice to the poor, deliverance to the needy, peace, and worldwide blessing. Biblical dominion is measured by correspondence to God’s justice, not accumulation of coercive power.

Israel’s kings repeatedly become predatory images. Solomon’s wisdom and temple glory decline into multiplied wealth, wives, military power, and idols. Jeroboam installs calves and recasts worship for political control. Manasseh places an idol in the temple. Failed kings do not disprove the vocation; they create longing for a faithful Davidic Son whose rule perfectly reveals God.

Nebuchadnezzar’s Image and the Son of Man

Daniel 3 presents an imperial image demanding universal worship. Refusal brings the furnace. Daniel 7 answers beastly empire with “one like a son of man” who receives dominion from the Ancient of Days. Empire becomes beastlike when human rulers reject God; true humanity is restored when dominion is received rather than seized. The Son of Man and the saints share the kingdom (Daniel 7:13–14, 18, 27), anticipating Christ and His people.

SECTION 8: PSALMS, WISDOM, AND PROPHETS

Psalm 8: Crowned with Glory and Honor

Psalm 8:5–6 — You made him a little lower than the heavenly beings, crowned him with glory and honor, and made him rule over the works of Your hands.

Psalm 8 poetically expounds Genesis 1 without using the noun “image.” Humanity’s smallness beneath the heavens magnifies divine grace: God remembers the dust-creature and crowns him. Glory and honor are royal terms; dominion includes the creatures named in Genesis. The psalm celebrates the vocation but, read after the fall, also raises a question: where is this faithful, universal human ruler? Hebrews 2 answers by pointing to Jesus.

Wisdom as Creational Correspondence

Proverbs portrays wisdom as living in harmony with God’s created order. The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge; folly rejects creaturely dependence. Wisdom’s presence beside God’s creative work in Proverbs 8 later furnished Christian language for speaking of the Son, though the poetic personification should not be simplistically identified with the eternal Son at every point. The canonical connection is that true humanity images divine wisdom by hearing and obeying God.

Ezekiel 28 and the Corrupted Guardian

Ezekiel’s lament over the king of Tyre employs Edenic and cherubic imagery: beauty, precious stones, holy mountain, blamelessness followed by pride and expulsion (Ezekiel 28:12–19). Whether the oracle describes the human king poetically, a supernatural rebel behind him, or both, it presents royal glory corrupted by self-exaltation. The image-bearing ruler treats reflected splendor as self-originating glory and falls under judgment.

New Covenant Promises

The prophets promise not merely national return but anthropological renewal. God will give a new heart and new spirit, write His law within, place His Spirit in His people, and cause them to walk in His statutes (Jeremiah 31:31–34; Ezekiel 36:25–27). These promises address the failed image at the level of perception, desire, and obedience. The restoration of God’s people requires divine re-creation.

Isaiah’s Servant and the True Human Vocation

The Servant embodies Israel’s calling: He is formed from the womb, given as a covenant, brings justice to the nations, opens blind eyes, bears sin, and is exalted (Isaiah 42; 49; 52:13–53:12). Where Israel is blind and deaf, the Servant hears and obeys. His

representative suffering makes many righteous. The vocation of humanity and Israel narrows toward one obedient figure before expanding again through a renewed people.

SECTION 9: CHRIST — THE IMAGE OF THE INVISIBLE GOD

Colossians 1:15 — Eikōn of the Invisible God

Colossians 1:15 — He is the image (eikōn) of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation.

Christ is not merely one more image-bearer alongside Adam. Paul's present-tense "He is" identifies the Son as the definitive manifestation of the invisible God. In the context, all things are created in, through, and for Him; He precedes all things and holds them together (Colossians 1:16–17). "Firstborn" (prōtotokos) therefore cannot mean that the Son is the first creature. It denotes supremacy and inheritance, as in Psalm 89:27, where the Davidic king is made "firstborn, highest of the kings of the earth."

The passage joins eternal and incarnate dimensions. The One who reveals God is the agent and goal of creation, and He is also head of the body and firstborn from the dead. Creation and new creation share the same Image. The world was made through the Son and reaches its reconciled goal through the blood of His cross.

2 Corinthians 4:4–6 — The Glory of God in Christ's Face

The god of this age blinds unbelieving minds so they do not see "the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God." Paul then echoes Genesis 1: the God who commanded light to shine out of darkness shines in hearts to give the knowledge of His glory in the face of Christ. Conversion is new creation and restored sight. The true Image does what idols cannot: He reveals the living God and transforms those who behold Him.

Hebrews 1:3 — Radiance and Exact Representation

Hebrews calls the Son the "radiance" (apaugasma) of God's glory and the "exact representation" (charaktēr) of His hypostasis. Charaktēr referred to an impression corresponding to the die that produced it. The language affirms distinction without diminution: the Son is personally distinct from the Father yet perfectly expresses the divine nature. No creaturely image could bear this absolute relation to God.

John's Gospel: The Son Makes the Father Known

John does not use eikōn as a title for Christ, but its theology is pervasive. The Word who is God becomes flesh and displays glory (John 1:1, 14). The unique Son explains the unseen God (1:18). Whoever sees Jesus sees the Father, not because Father and Son are the same person, but because the Son's words and works perfectly reveal the Father (14:9–11). The incarnate Son is God's self-interpretation in human life.

The Visibility of God and the Incarnation

Calling Christ the image does not imply that God's essence has a bodily outline. The invisible God is revealed personally in the incarnate Son. Jesus' human nature is not absorbed into deity, nor is deity converted into flesh. In the one person of the Son, true God and true man are united without confusion. Thus the one who images God perfectly also fulfills humanity's created vocation from within our nature.

Adam is image by creation and commission; Christ is Image by eternal relation and incarnate revelation. He does not merely repair Adam's failure. He is the archetype according to whom creation was made and the goal to whom redeemed humanity is conformed.

SECTION 10: THE LAST ADAM AND THE NEW HUMANITY

Romans 5: Adam and Christ as Covenant Heads

Romans 5:12–21 presents Adam and Christ as representative heads whose acts determine the condition of those united to them. Through one man's disobedience, the many are constituted sinners; through the obedience of the One, the many are constituted righteous. Image restoration therefore cannot be reduced to moral imitation. Humanity needs transfer from Adamic condemnation and death into Christ's righteousness and life.

Philippians 2: The Form of God and the Obedient Servant

Christ exists in the "form of God" yet does not treat equality with God as something to exploit for selfish advantage. He takes the form of a servant and becomes obedient to death on a cross (Philippians 2:6–8). Adam grasps; Christ gives. Adam seeks exaltation through disobedience; Christ receives universal exaltation through obedience. The hymn reveals that divine likeness is displayed not in predatory power but in self-giving love.

Hebrews 2: Psalm 8 Fulfilled in Jesus

Hebrews acknowledges that the promised subjection of all things to humanity is not presently visible. "But we see Jesus," made for a little while lower than angels and crowned with glory and honor because of suffering death (Hebrews 2:8–9). Jesus enters the mortal condition, tastes death for His brothers and sisters, and leads many sons to glory. Psalm 8's human vocation is fulfilled first in Him and then in the family He sanctifies.

The Son of Man Receives Dominion

Jesus' favorite self-designation, "Son of Man," carries ordinary human resonance but also evokes Daniel 7. At His trial He announces the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power and coming with the clouds (Mark 14:62). The crucified human One receives divine-authorized dominion. Resurrection and ascension are therefore the enthronement of true humanity in the person of the Son.

The Resurrection as Vindication of the True Image

The resurrection is not escape from embodiment. God raises the obedient Messiah bodily, vindicating His identity and inaugurating new creation. Jesus' transformed body retains continuity with the crucified body—wounds, recognizability, embodied presence—while possessing new powers and incorruptible life. In Him, human nature reaches the glory intended for it without ceasing to be creaturely.

SECTION 11: RENEWAL INTO THE IMAGE OF CHRIST

Romans 8:29 — Conformed to the Image of the Son

Romans 8:29 — Those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son.

Predestination in Romans 8 has a Christ-shaped goal: conformity (symmorphos) to the Son's image. God's saving purpose is not exhausted by acquittal, though justification is indispensable. He creates a family in which Christ is "firstborn among many brothers." Election moves toward adoption, holiness, suffering with Christ, resurrection, and shared glory. Salvation restores humanity by union with the true Image.

2 Corinthians 3:18 — Beholding and Becoming

Believers, with unveiled face, behold or reflect the Lord's glory and are "being transformed" (metamorphoumetha) into the same image from glory to glory. The verb is present passive: transformation is ongoing and received. The agent is "the Lord, the Spirit." Unlike idolatrous self-fashioning, Christian transformation occurs through Spirit-given sight of Christ in the new covenant gospel.

The passage contrasts Moses' veiled ministry with enduring new-covenant glory. It does not teach that believers become divine in essence. "From glory to glory" describes increasing conformity and participation by grace. The Creator-creature distinction remains, even as communion becomes more intimate and moral likeness more radiant.

Colossians 3:9–11 — Renewed in Knowledge

The old man with his practices is put off and the new man is put on, “being renewed in knowledge according to the image of the One who created him.” The language echoes Genesis and presents sanctification as re-creation. Knowledge here is not mere data acquisition. It is covenantal recognition of God that remakes conduct and dismantles identity hierarchies used for boasting: Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free.

Ephesians 4:20–24 — Righteousness and Holiness of Truth

Ephesians describes the new self as “created according to God in righteousness and holiness of the truth.” Colossians emphasizes renewed knowledge; Ephesians emphasizes righteousness and holiness. Together these texts supplied the classic Reformed description of the moral image: true knowledge, righteousness, and holiness. This is not an exhaustive definition of image-bearing, but it accurately names central dimensions of restored conformity.

Sanctification Is Christological

Christian holiness is not generic moral improvement. The pattern is Christ, the power is the Spirit, the sphere is union with Christ, and the end is the Father’s glory. Believers learn Christ, put on Christ, imitate God as beloved children, and walk in the love Christ displayed (Ephesians 4:20–5:2). The restored image takes cruciform shape before it reaches resurrection glory.

Passage	Aspect of Renewal	Primary Emphasis
Romans 8:29	Conformity to the Son	The predestined goal of salvation
2 Corinthians 3:18	Transformation from glory to glory	Spirit-enabled beholding of Christ
Colossians 3:10	Renewal in knowledge	New humanity beyond boastful divisions
Ephesians 4:24	Created in righteousness and holiness	Ethical re-creation according to God
1 John 3:2–3	Future likeness producing present purity	Hope joins eschatology and ethics

SECTION 12: THE CHURCH AS AN IMAGE-BEARING COMMUNITY

One New Humanity

Christ creates “one new man” from Jew and Gentile through the cross (Ephesians 2:15). The church is not the erasure of peoples but reconciliation into a shared humanity whose peace is Christ Himself. Corporate image renewal matters because the first human

calling was communal: male and female were blessed to fill the earth. The new humanity displays God's wisdom before rulers and authorities as former enemies worship together.

The Body of Christ

Paul's body metaphor gives corporate form to conformity to Christ. The many members have different gifts yet belong to one body under one Head. No member can say to another, "I have no need of you" (1 Corinthians 12). Image-bearing community rejects both individual self-sufficiency and oppressive uniformity. Unity is ordered, differentiated participation in the life and mission of Christ.

Authority as Cruciform Dominion

Jesus redefines greatness against Gentile patterns of domination: rulers "lord it over" others, but greatness among His disciples takes the form of service because the Son of Man came to serve and give His life (Mark 10:42–45). This does not eliminate authority; it judges its manner and purpose. Restored dominion protects, cultivates, teaches, disciplines justly, and spends itself for the good of those entrusted to it.

Work, Culture, and Creation Care

Because image-bearing includes embodied stewardship, ordinary work can serve God's creational purposes. Farming, medicine, craftsmanship, scholarship, homemaking, governance, and art may cultivate created potential and neighborly good. Yet no vocation is religiously neutral: work can become Babel-like self-glorification or faithful service. Christian dominion is bounded by love of neighbor, care for creatures, truth, justice, and the coming judgment.

The Poor, Disabled, Unborn, and Enemy

Image dignity is clearest where societies are tempted to measure worth by productivity, autonomy, wantedness, cognition, health, or power. Scripture locates worth prior to performance. The dependent infant, cognitively disabled adult, prisoner, foreigner, elderly person, and enemy remain human neighbors. Christian ethics must neither romanticize suffering nor treat vulnerability as diminished personhood.

Worship as Rehumanization

The church gathers to behold the glory of God in Christ through Word, sacrament, prayer, and praise. Worship reorders loves and trains the body for faithful representation. It is not escapism from the human vocation but its renewal. Sent into the world, the congregation carries the character and announcement of the King while refusing the idols that deform surrounding culture.

SECTION 13: RESURRECTION GLORY — BEARING THE HEAVENLY IMAGE

1 Corinthians 15: Adam from Dust, Christ from Heaven

1 Corinthians 15:49 — Just as we have borne the image of the earthy, we will also bear the image of the heavenly.

Paul contrasts Adam, the first man from earth, with Christ, the second Man from heaven. “Spiritual body” does not mean nonphysical body; it means a body animated, empowered, and perfected by the Holy Spirit. The parallel requires embodiment: what is sown perishable is raised imperishable; what is sown in dishonor is raised in glory; what is sown in weakness is raised in power.

Believers now bear Adam’s image in mortality and will bear Christ’s heavenly image in resurrection. Some manuscripts read an exhortation, “let us bear,” but the future indicative is strongly supported and fits the context’s promise. Present moral conformity and future bodily conformity are not rival interpretations. The Spirit begins now what God completes when the dead are raised.

Philippians 3:20–21 — The Body Conformed to His Glory

The Savior will transform the body of our humiliation to be conformed (symmorphon) to the body of His glory. The same word-family used for conformity to Christ in suffering and character reaches bodily completion. Christian hope is not the abandonment of creatureliness, sexed embodiment, or material creation. It is embodied humanity liberated from corruption and fitted for unbroken communion with God.

1 John 3:2 — We Will Be Like Him

John holds together mystery and certainty: what believers will be has not yet fully appeared, but when Christ appears, “we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is.” Vision and likeness again belong together. The promise does not collapse believers into deity; it promises purified creaturely participation in Christ’s glorified life. This hope produces present purification rather than speculation detached from holiness.

Revelation 21–22: The Image in the Worldwide Sanctuary

The Bible ends with a garden-city where God dwells with humanity, the curse is removed, the tree of life is accessible, and God’s servants reign forever (Revelation 22:1–5). The divine name on their foreheads identifies possession, priesthood, and conformity. There is no temple building because God and the Lamb are its temple; the entire creation has become holy space. Adam’s unfulfilled royal-priestly commission reaches its goal in the Lamb and His people.

Glory Without Rivalry

Resurrection glory is received glory. The redeemed reign, see God's face, and shine, yet they worship the Lamb. The original temptation promised godlikeness through grasping; the gospel grants likeness through union, obedience, death, and resurrection in Christ. Creaturely dependence is not overcome but perfected as joy. The image is most glorious when it transparently reflects the Original.

The destiny of the image is not a return to Eden as though nothing happened. It is advance into confirmed holiness, incorruptible embodiment, universal sacred space, and shared reign under the Lamb.

SECTION 14: MAJOR DOCTRINAL QUESTIONS AND INTERPRETIVE MODELS

What Constitutes the Image?

Model	Central Claim	Strength and Limitation
Substantive	The image consists chiefly in capacities such as reason, morality, spirituality, or will.	Explains distinctive human capacities and classical theology; can wrongly imply that impaired capacities reduce image status.
Relational	The image is realized in relation to God and other persons.	Highlights male–female communion and covenant; relationship alone does not explain Genesis 9:6.
Functional	The image is the royal vocation to rule as God's representative.	Fits the immediate link to dominion and ancient royal context; function depends on a prior God-given identity.
Royal-priestly / integrative	The whole embodied person is appointed to represent God through filial communion, holy character, relationship, and dominion.	Best integrates the canon, while requiring care not to make the definition so broad that it loses precision.

The models are most constructive when treated as dimensions rather than mutually exclusive definitions. Humanity can perform the function because God grants a representative status and equips humans with corresponding capacities. The task is relational and priestly because it occurs in communion with God and others. The canon finally identifies Christ—not an abstract faculty—as the measure of perfected humanity.

Image and Likeness: One Reality or Two Stages?

Irenaeus and later Eastern traditions sometimes distinguished “image” as the basic created endowment from “likeness” as the mature goal attained through communion.

Many Western interpreters, including much Reformed theology, regard the Hebrew terms as overlapping synonyms and reject a firm lexical division. The grammar of Genesis favors substantial overlap, though the broader theological intuition of created gift moving toward perfected likeness is canonically sound.

The Reformed Distinction: Broader and Narrower Image

Reformed theology commonly distinguishes the image in a broader sense—human rational-moral nature, responsibility, and dominion, which remain after the fall—from the narrower moral image of knowledge, righteousness, and holiness, which is lost or radically corrupted and restored in Christ. Colossians 3:10 and Ephesians 4:24 support the renewal categories. The distinction protects both universal dignity and the necessity of regeneration.

Is Christ Called Image According to Deity or Humanity?

Colossians 1 and 2 Corinthians 4 do not permit a choice that tears Christ apart. The eternal Son perfectly reveals the Father and is the agent of creation; the incarnate Son visibly manifests God and fulfills Adamic humanity. Classical theology therefore speaks personally: the one Son is the Image. Some predicates emphasize His eternal divine relation, others His incarnate mediatorial work, but they belong to one undivided person.

Does “Image” Support Human Deification?

Eastern Christianity often describes salvation as theosis: participation in divine life by grace. Western traditions more often speak of glorification, union with Christ, and the beatific vision. Properly qualified, these need not conflict. Scripture promises participation in the divine nature (2 Peter 1:4) and astonishing likeness to Christ, while maintaining that God alone is uncreated, self-existent, and worthy of worship. Grace perfects the creature; it does not erase the boundary between Creator and creature.

Images, Art, and the Second Commandment

Christians agree that idols are forbidden but differ over religious images. The Reformed tradition generally prohibits images of the divine persons in worship, stressing God’s regulation of worship and the impossibility of depicting Christ’s divine person adequately. Lutheran, Roman Catholic, and Eastern Orthodox traditions distinguish veneration from worship and appeal to the incarnation as warrant for depicting Christ’s human appearance. The iconoclastic controversy turns on Christology, worship, and whether an image can honor without misrepresenting its prototype.

The doctrine of the image of God does not settle the controversy by itself. It does, however, insist that God's supreme revelation is the living Son, proclaimed in the gospel, and that no artifact can replace obedient communion with Him. Any use of art that becomes a controllable substitute for God's presence repeats the logic Scripture condemns.

SECTION 15: SYNTHESIS AND STUDY CONCLUSIONS

What the Canon Establishes

- **Universal status:** Every human being belongs to the one created humanity and possesses dignity grounded in God's creative act.
- **Embodied vocation:** The image concerns the whole person and includes visible, creaturely life in God's world, not an immortal "part" isolated from the body.
- **Royal-priestly calling:** Humanity is appointed to represent God's holy and life-giving rule, guarding sacred order and cultivating the earth.
- **Enduring yet corrupted:** The fall does not erase the image, but every faculty and relationship is distorted by sinful worship and Adamic death.
- **Idolatrous deformation:** People become like what they worship. False images produce spiritually blind, deaf, and disordered worshipers.
- **Christological center:** Jesus Christ is the perfect Image, true Israel, faithful priest-king, Last Adam, and head of the new humanity.
- **Spirit-worked renewal:** Sanctification is transformation into Christ's image in knowledge, righteousness, holiness, love, and cruciform service.
- **Resurrection completion:** The image reaches its destined glory when believers bear the heavenly Image in incorruptible bodies and reign in the new creation.

The Central Biblical Pattern

Genesis begins with God making an image; Romans 1 shows the image-maker making idols; the Gospels reveal God's own Image entering the ruined creation; the epistles announce sinners renewed into that Image; Revelation shows the renewed images seeing God's face and reigning forever. This movement is not a collection of loosely related doctrines. It is one story of glory given, exchanged, revealed, restored, and consummated.

The Pastoral Weight of the Doctrine

The doctrine forbids both human self-deification and human degradation. We are not gods, yet no human being is mere material, economic unit, political obstacle, or biological accident. It condemns idolatry because worship belongs to the Original; it condemns contempt because neighbors bear His image. It dignifies work while judging

exploitative dominion. It calls the church to become visibly Christlike and gives suffering bodies the hope of resurrection.

A Final Word

The deepest answer to “What is humanity?” is not discovered by looking inward at an isolated self. It is revealed by looking backward to creation, honestly at Adam’s fall, and supremely at Jesus Christ. Pilate’s words, “Behold the Man,” carried an irony greater than he understood. In the crucified and risen Son we see both God’s self-revelation and humanity’s true form: obedient, holy, self-giving, crowned through suffering, and destined for glory.

We become truly human not by inventing ourselves, grasping divine status, or reflecting the age’s idols, but by being united to Christ and transformed by the Spirit into the image of the Son.

MASTER CROSS-REFERENCE GUIDE

Theme	Primary Texts	Canonical Contribution
Creation	Genesis 1:26–28; 2:7–25	Humanity as embodied, relational, royal-priestly representation
Image after fall	Genesis 5:1–3; 9:6; James 3:9	Continuing image status grounds dignity and ethics
Idolatry	Exodus 20:4–6; Deuteronomy 4; Psalm 115; Isaiah 44; Romans 1:18–32	Image-bearers exchange glory and become like lifeless gods
Israel’s calling	Exodus 19:5–6; Deuteronomy 4:5–8; Psalm 72	Corporate priesthood and righteous royal rule
True Image	John 1:14–18; Colossians 1:15–20; 2 Corinthians 4:4–6; Hebrews 1:1–3	The Son perfectly reveals God and centers creation and reconciliation
Last Adam	Romans 5:12–21; 1 Corinthians 15:20–49; Hebrews 2:5–18	Representative obedience, resurrection, and restored dominion
Present renewal	Romans 8:29; 2 Corinthians 3:18; Ephesians 4:20–24; Colossians 3:9–11	Spirit-wrought conformity in knowledge, holiness, righteousness, and glory
Future glory	Philippians 3:20–21; 1 John 3:2; Revelation 21–22	Bodily transformation, vision of God, and everlasting reign

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