

What does the Bible say about Self-Image?

Genesis 1:26-28; 2:4-7



[It was 3:00 in the afternoon in Gadsden, AL when I got a call from the Mother of a freshman co-ed attending Auburn University. This Mother was greatly disturbed because her daughter -- attractive & part of the most popular sorority in the university -- was found in her room cutting her hand & wrist with a pair of scissors.]

[On another occasion, a lady who attended the church in Gadsden -- a middle-aged lady who had never been married -- came into my office, told me that she had decided to commit suicide & the only question that remained in her mind was "Am I

going to put the barrel of the gun in my mouth or stick the barrel of the gun to my temple?" The lady then asked me "Can you give me any good reason why I should NOT commit suicide?"]

[Later that day when I returned home & read the *Birmingham Post* newspaper, I read an article about a famous self-help guru who was leading a self-esteem seminar in Birmingham. The article reported that at the end of the seminar, this man had the crowd excited & shouting "I am god! I am god!" Three people, two extremes. On the one extreme, here are a couple of ladies deeply depressed about themselves. On the other extreme, here is a man overly *impressed* with himself. Some people are pitiful. Some people are pompous.

Why? [Almost 10 years ago, I read something that Dr. Ray Burwick wrote. Ray Burwick lives in Birmingham, AL. He is a Christian psychologist, a counselor, & his basic belief about human behavior is at the same time both simple & profound. Here's what Dr. Burwick says: "In my years of counseling, every personality disorder my clients have boils down to two basic, underlying problems: (1) a problem with *anger*; and (2) a problem with *self-image*."]]

Friends, that's it. Self-image -- that lens through which you see yourself -- that mental picture you carry around in the wallet of your mind -- is something that greatly affects the way you live. Some people have pitiful self-images: "ugly, undesirable", "I am nothing." ["Nobody loves me, everybody hates me, I think I'll go out in the garden & eat worms & die."]

On the other hand, some people have pompous self-images: "wonderful, great, indispensable to the well-being of the world." If these people wrote a book, *10 Famous People Who've Met Me or My Great Humility & How I Achieved It*. Pitiful or pompous, ALL people act according to their self-image. That's why your self-image is such a major issue in your life.

Self-image always HAS been a major issue of life. [In the days when Moses wrote Genesis, the Egyptians believed that their rulers called Pharaohs were divine -- gods. On the other hand, those who ruled Egypt believed that the common people & the Israelites were basically pitiful property to be exploited & used as slaves.

People in biblical days, just like people today, act according to the way they see themselves & the way they see other people. Now, since the way we see ourselves & the way we see other people is a MAJOR issue in our lives, & since we tend to go to extremes when it comes to seeing ourselves & others,

We need to develop a biblically-balanced view of who we are.

What we have open before us in Genesis 1 is a label of identity -- a label that God wants all of us to read & to understand -- a label from the LORD designed to lead us towards a balanced self image: Vs

27 The label? **We are the IMAGE OF GOD.** Now, if we are going to be balanced in the way we see ourselves, we need to look @ this label of identity we have in 2 ways. Let's make this personal...

1. I need to see myself as the IMAGE of God.

By giving us the label "the IMAGE of God", the LORD is emphasizing our HUMILITY. Notice here that we are NOT God. We are NOT equal to God. We do NOT have a spark of divinity within us. We will never slide up some "scale of being" & graduate into godhood. We are the IMAGE of God. You know what an image is... [This represents Carol, but this is NOT Carol.] The picture is NOT the real thing; and we are NOT the real thing, either. We are the IMAGE of God.

Our humility becomes even more evident when we see here what kind of material our Creator-God used to make us. When God formed Adam, did God use silver? Gold? Diamonds? Rubies? 2:7... [A little girl ran into the kitchen, all excited, & asked her Mother this question: "Mom, is it true that we are made from dust & when we die we go back to dust?" "Yes, that's true." "Then come look under my bed, because there's somebody either coming or going!"]

[Scientists have researched the elements in a human body. Here's what we know: We know that the human body contains: enough sulphur to rid a dog of fleas; enough lime to whitewash a chicken coop; enough fat for six bars of soap (for some of us, enough for a dozen bars!); enough iron for a few dozen nails; enough phosphorus for 20 boxes of matches; enough magnesium for a dose of magnesia; enough sugar for 10 cups of coffee; enough potassium to explode a toy cannon; & enough salt for 20 spoonful.] Now friends, that's the "stuff" we are made of. In the last analysis, we are dust.

Gen 3...Psalm 90:3-6; James 4:13, 14... Dust & Vapor. That's what we are. [...dust in the wind; all we are is dust in the wind...]. From the greatest to the least, every person on the face of this earth is, in the final analysis, dust. Every 1 of us is made from the same elements -- the same "stuff" -- & nobody's "stuff" is any better than anyone else's "stuff."

So why do we exalt ourselves? Why are we so filled with a sense of our own importance? Why do some people think they are better than other people? And why do we evaluate people based on their income? Education? Where they live? Accomplishments? [pay police \$30,000 to protect our lives pay pro baseball players 3 million & they go on strike for more money...] Talents? Looks? Clothes they wear? We may have our own reasons for exalting one group of people & looking down our noses at another group of people. But the basic reason is this: We have forgotten that all of us are, in the final analysis, humble dust.

This problem of pride is a social disease that infects everyone, *including Christians*. [...seminary prof, "Every church I visit has a few members who think they are a cut above the rest." It's not just members, either. Perhaps you heard about the minister who refused to retire from the ministry until there's a vacancy in the Trinity. In much too many churches, we see wealthy Christians who would rule the church with their money. Some Christian theologians & their disciples are arrogant enough to insist that everyone must agree with their views and if you don't, you're somehow less of a Christian than they are...]

When you consider the troubles in most CHRISTIAN families, you find a common thread: Someone in the family -- may be the husband, wife, 1 of the children -- has the audacity to believe that "It's MY way or it's NO way!" In our pride, we just will NOT admit that we are humble dust.

Friends, if we are going to develop a balanced self-image, we must begin right here in Genesis. We must accept the fact of our humble condition before God. If you have a problem with pride, if you think you are important & indispensable, you need to go back to the Bible & let God tell you what you are. You are limited. You are finite. You are a humble IMAGE of God, made from the dust of the earth.

2. I need to see myself as the image of GOD.

By giving us the label “the image of GOD”, the LORD is emphasizing our uniqueness -- our honored status -- value -- dignity. Notice here that God’s design for us is that we would be unique -- different. Please understand that we are NOT the end product of what scientists refer to as “the evolutionary process.”

The word used here in Genesis 1:27 is a word that refers to bringing something into existence -- something that was *Unlike* anything that already existed. These verses rule out even the *possibility* of evolution! People -- both male & female people -- were originated by a direct, special creative act of the LORD God.

Friends, one of the major problems with evolution is that evolution destroys the uniqueness, the dignity, & the value of people. You see, IF we are just animals, & IF the principle of natural selection IS true so that “only the pure & the strong survive”, then you have a scientific justification for what happened in Germany. After all, kata evolutionary reasoning of the 3rd Reich, the Aryan race was superior to the Jewish race, & since “only the strong survive”, why NOT kill off the Jews? So you have the Holocaust.

In Russia, under Josef Stalin, you see another example of the end product of the belief that people are basically animals. [On one occasion, when Stalin was giving a motivational speech to some of his henchmen, he called for a live chicken. With great force, Stalin clutched the chicken in one hand, while with the other hand he proceeded to pluck out every feather on that chicken until the bird was completely stripped bare of all its feathers.

Then Josef Stalin said, “Now you watch.” Then he placed the chicken on the floor & walked away with some bread crumbs in his hand. It was incredible, but the fear-crazed chicken hobbled toward Stalin & clung to the legs of his trousers. Stalin threw a handful of grain to the bird, & the bird began to follow him around the room. Then, Stalin turned to his colleagues who were looking on in amazement & said, “This is the way to rule the people. Did you see how that chicken followed me for food, even though I had caused it such torture? People are like that chicken. If you inflict massive pain on them, they will follow you for food the rest of their lives.”]

With that view of people, Josef Stalin reduced humanity to the level of animals and ruthlessly tortured and exterminated over 15 million of his own people. Such is the end-product of the kind of thinking that sees people as nothing more than animals to be conditioned, manipulated, controlled, and if need be exterminated.

History demonstrates over & over that a low view of human life leads to breathtaking wickedness against humanity. The holocaust in Germany, the extermination of Russians under Stalin, the executions & cannibalism in modern China, & the abortion industry here in America that kills an unborn child every 21 seconds -- over 1 million murdered every year -- ALL these atrocities against

members of the human race are the logical application of the theory of evolution.

Friends, Christians need to be against abortion because from the moment of conception, ALL PEOPLE are the image of God. Every baby, born or unborn, has been given a special status as the image of God. At every stage, every baby needs to be protected cared for and valued.

If you claim to be a Bible-believing Christian, you need to value & respect EVERYBODY; because rich or poor, educated or uneducated, attractive or unattractive, EVERY PERSON is the image of GOD. Not just SOME people, but ALL people are the image of God!

Turn to James 3... Now, let me ask you something. [When you drive down the road and someone pulls out in front of you, what do you say to yourself about that person as you slam on the brakes? Does your response reflect that you see that person as the image of God? Or perhaps you are sitting in an airplane & the Mother in front of you cannot stop her baby from screaming. What do you think? I know. You think, "Oh, look at that wonderful image of God. He's making a joyful noise!"] EVERYBODY is the image of God. Do you HONOR God's images?

[Several years ago at Harvard University, some students poured lime green paint all over the statue of John Harvard. When the head of campus security was interviewed regarding this incident, he made this remark: "These kids haven't got any respect for the school. No respect at all."]

What the officer was saying was that as far as he was concerned, the attack on the image of John Harvard was an attack on the school the image represented. In much the same way, since people are visible symbols of God in the world, when we attack people, we are attacking God.

James 3:9-10... Friends, we need to realize that when we parents provoke or attack our children -- verbally or otherwise -- we are attacking God. When you children show disrespect to your parents, you are showing disrespect to God. Husbands, wives: When we mistreat each other -- when we don't treat each other with dignity and when we fail to speak to each other with respect, we are dishonoring God.

As the image of God, the LORD gives us a special status. God also gives us something else: Genesis 1:28... Notice here that God speaks directly to the 1st couple... What we discover here is that being in the image of God means that God communicates & communes w/us in a way not possible for the rest of creation. What an opportunity! We can communicate & commune & relate to God in a *personal* way!

By the way, how do YOU relate to God? Before mankind sinned, the man & the woman could relate *directly* to God. Now, because of sin, there is only *one way* we can relate to God, & that way is *through God's Son Jesus Christ*. If you come to God through faith & trust in Christ, you can be part of God's forever family; & you can relate to God in a *personal way as your Heavenly Father!* Through His life & through His death, Jesus offers you a vital, personal relationship with God.

Once when I was in the 5th grade, I got up from the barber's chair, & I put on the wrong eyeglasses by mistake. When I looked into the mirror, the image I saw was distorted. Let me ask you, when you look at yourself, what do you see? Is the image distorted? If you are like most people, your self-image is to some degree distorted -- out of balance.

God wants you to have a clear, balanced view of who you are. You are a **humble IMAGE of God**; But you are also special & unique because you are **the image of GOD**. This is the biblical balance. Humility & dignity -- to the glory of God!