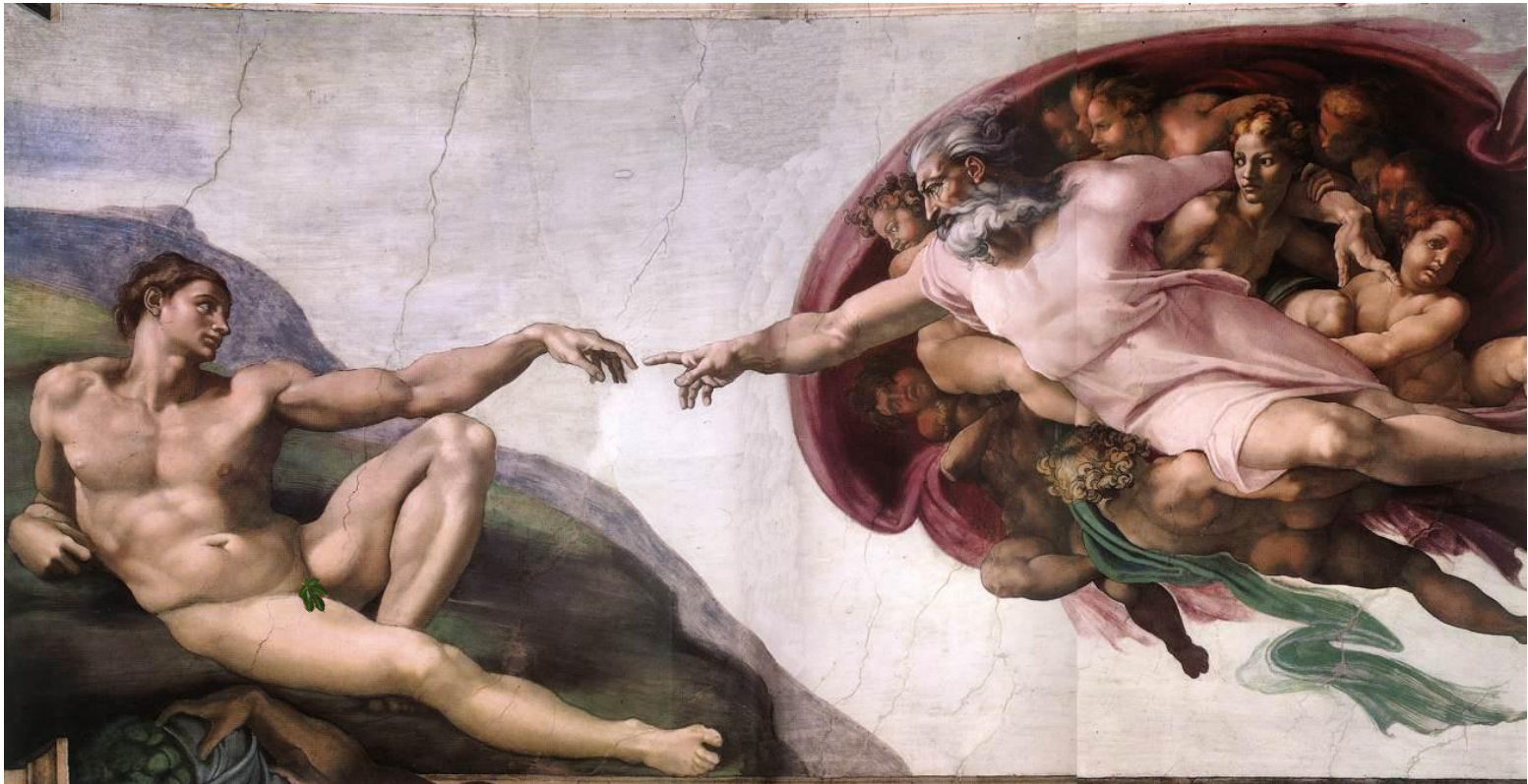


In His Image

Genesis 1:26-27



by: Dick Jones

Introduction

In this study, the use of the word *image* in Genesis 1:26-27 will be examined. In particular, the exegetical and theological implications of the Hebrew term for *image*, *tselem*, will be surveyed.

Translation - King James Version

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 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.*
27. *So God created man in His own image, in the image of God he him; male and female created He them.*

Translation - New International Version

26. *Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground."*

27. *So God created man in His own image in the image of God created him; male and female He created them.*

Contextual Consideration

Chapter one of Genesis describes chronologically the divine act and order of creation. The two verses being considered in this study (verses 26 and 27) fall toward the end of the chapter. The two preceding verses (verses 24 and 25) declare the creation of "land...creatures...livestock, creatures that move along the ground and wild animals." (NIV) In verse 26, the divine intent to create man "in our image" (NIV) is stated in conjunction with reference to man's preeminence and authority over God's lower created order.

Verse 27 declares the act of the creation of man and reiterates the truth that man is created in "the image of God." (NIV) The final four verses of chapter one elaborate on man's dominion over creation, briefly explain the food chain of the pre-fall eco-system, and conclude the sixth day of creation with God's

pronouncement that "it was very good." (NIV)

Exegetical Treatment

In Genesis 1:26-27, the Hebrew term for *image* is *tselem*. This term is used sixteen times in the Old Testament. It is used five times "of man as created in the *image* of God" ¹ The term *tselem* means "an object similar to or a representation of something else."²

Examples of instances in which the Hebrew term *tselem* is used in the Old Testament follow:

"ye shall make *images* of your emerods, and images of your mice"

I Samuel 6:5

"the mice of gold and the *image* of their emerods" I Samuel 6:11

"men portrayed upon the wall, the *images* of the Chaldeans"

Ezekiel 23:14

"hour of Ba'al...his altars and his *images*" II Kings 11:18

"and madest to thyself *images* of men." Ezekiel 16:17

(Each of the verses above are taken from the King James Version)

of the Bible)

Whether speaking of statues and replicas of tumors and mice, or wall paintings of soldiers, or of statues of the various pagan deities, the use of *tselem* conveys the same idea, i.e., *an object or thing which is a representation of something else.*⁽³⁾

The Hebrew root of *tselem* means "...to carve or to cut. It could be used to describe a carved likeness of an animal or a person." The use of the term *tselem* in Genesis 1 clearly conveys that man images God or is a representation of God.⁴ Yet, it must be recognized that the concept of *image* in Genesis 1:26-27 "does not consist in a participation of the divine essence (as if the nature of man was a shadow [*aposkiasmation*] of the divine and certain particle of the divine breath, as the Gentiles hold)." Only Christ Himself bears the image in divine essence. (Colossians 1:15)⁵ Further light is shone on the meaning of *tselem* when one considers that it was normally translated *eikon* in the Septuagint. From the Greek word *eikon* comes the English word icon.⁶ An icon is a two dimensional image, often carved, which is used for the purpose of representing religious objects. It is perspicuous that an icon is merely a representation of something else, and not actually the object it represents. Likewise, while man in his original state was a true representation of God, he was not God.

A further consideration in understanding the meaning of the word *tselem* in Genesis 1 is the use of the word *likeness* in verse 26. The Hebrew term for *likeness* is *demut*. Most scholars agree that the words *tselem* and *demut* are used interchangeably and may be considered synonyms. According to one noted theologian, the use of the word *likeness* following *image* was a means to express the idea that "the *image* was perfect." He explains, "The idea is that by creation that which was archetypal in God became ectypal in man. God was the original of which man became a copy."⁷

In the Hebrew, there is no conjunction between the phrases containing *image* and *likeness*. The text says "let us make man in our *image*, after our *likeness*." In both the Septuagint and the Vulgate, *and* is inserted between the two phrases, which could give the impression that *image* and *likeness* are referring to different things. It seems clear that "after our *likeness*" is merely intended to convey the same idea as "in our *image*," or perhaps to reiterate the connotation of *image*. If one considers the use of the words in two other verses in Genesis, this position is borne out.

"In Genesis 1:26, both *image* and *likeness* are used; in 1:27 only *image* is used, while in 5:1 only the word *likeness* is used. In 5:3 the two words are used again but this time in a different order -- 'in His own likeness,

after His image.' And again in 9:6 only the word *image* is used. They are used interchange-ably."⁸

Matthew Henry states it succinctly in his popular commentary, -- "the two words *image* and *likeness* denote the likest image, the nearest resemblance of any of the visible creatures."⁹

Theological Treatment

Scholars differ on the theological implications of man being created in the *image* of God. Noted theologian John Murray writes regarding the question of what the *image* of God entails, "much difference has arisen and still continues."¹⁰ Another commentator states that it is very difficult to decide of what exactly the *image* of God consists.¹¹

"The early Church Fathers were quite agreed that the image of God in man consisted primarily of man's rational and moral characteristics, and in his capacity for holiness; but some were inclined to include also bodily traits,"¹² write Louis Berkhof. Pelagius posited the view that the *image* of God consisted of man's

being endowed with a reasonable nature so that he could know God, with a free will so that he was able to choose and do good and with the requisite authority to rule the lower creatures.¹³ Thomas Aquinas promoted the notion that the image of God was "primarily in man's intellect or reason."¹⁴ John Calvin wrote in his Institutes of the Christian Religion, "For although God's glory shines forth in the outer man, yet there is no doubt that the proper seat of His (God's) image is the soul." For Calvin the image of God consisted essentially in man's original righteousness, i.e., true knowledge, righteousness, and holiness.¹⁵

Matthew Henry describes the *image of God* in man this way.

"God's image upon man consists of three things: 1. In His nature and constitution, not those of His body (for God has not a body) but those of His soul...the soul is a spirit, an intelligent immortal spirit, an influencing active spirit, herein resembling God, the Father of spirits, and the soul of the world... The soul of man considered in its three noble faculties, understanding, will, and active power; is...the brightest looking-glass in nature, wherein to see God. 2. In His place and authority -- he is God's representative or viceroy upon earth. 3. In His purity and rectitude -- God's image upon man consists in knowledge, righteousness and true holiness."¹⁶

He further explains the original righteousness cited above.

"...he had an habitual conformity of all his natural powers to the whole will of God. His understanding saw divine things clearly and truly, and there were no errors nor mistakes in his knowledge...he complied readily...with the will of God...his affections were regular...his thoughts were easily, brought and fixed to the best of subjects."¹⁷

Wayne Grudem notes in his work, Biblical Doctrine, the Church throughout history has held one or more of three basic views concerning the *image* of God in man. The first view he calls the substantitive view. Those holding this view identify a specific quality of man such as reason or spirituality, and identify it as the *image* of God in man. He cites Luther and Calvin as examples of this view. The second view is relational. Those holding this view see the image of God in man as pertaining to the various aspects of interpersonal relationships. The third view is called the functional view. It embraces the notion that the image of God has to do with a particular function(s) man carries out.¹⁸

Anthony Hoekema states that the image of God in man may best be understood by drawing a distinction between the structural and functional aspects of man. In other words, *what man is* (which

is structural) or *what man does* (which is functional), or both. He explains:

Early theologians said the "*image* of God was to be found in structural capacities such as his possession of reason, morality and the like, whereas his functioning was thought of as a kind of appendix to his structure. Recent theologians have affirmed that the function of man (his worshipping, serving, loving, ruling, etc.) constitutes the essence of the image of God in man"¹⁹

Louis Berkhof provides a comprehensive list of characteristics which make up the *image* of God in man in his work, Systematic Theology. They are *original righteousness* (defined above); three elements which may be grouped together under the label *natural constitution* -- intellectual power, natural affections, and moral freedom; *spirituality; immortality; dominion;* and to a significantly lesser extent, *man's physical body*. Any balanced definition of *tselem* which includes the theological implications of the *image* of God in man, should include the list above.

A final consideration is the question of what impact the fall had on the *image* of God in man. Murray states that even fallen man retains the image of God. Of Genesis 9:6 he writes "...it is

precisely his being made in the image of God that is given as the reason for the penalty and, by implication, for the gravity of the offense. The thought is that an assault upon the life of man is a particularly horrendous offense because it is an assault upon the image of God."²⁰ It was fallen man who is still regarded in the Scripture (Genesis 9:6) to be created in the *image* of God.

The *image* of God in fallen man is distorted, perverted and shattered. Every part of man is infected with sin and affected by the consequences of the fall. The consequence of the fall which may be called depravity, is viewed with all the more gravity and seriousness because of "our conceptions of man in his intrinsic essence," that is, the shattered *image* of God.²¹ Regarding this, Francis Turretin said, "it is not absurd to say that the *image* should be said to be partly lost and partly conserved, and that in the same subject there is the image of God and of the devil in different respects."²²

John Calvin said that we judge finally what the *image* of God in man was before the fall, by "its restoration...as Paul says, we are transformed into the *image* of God by the gospel...spiritual regeneration is nothing else than the restoration of the same

image."²³ (Colossians 3:10; Ephesians 4:23)

End Notes

(1) Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament, edited by Harris, R. Laird; Archer, Gleason R. Jr.; and Bruce K. (Chicago, Illinois: The Moody Bible Institute, 1981), p. 767.

(2) Wayne Grudem, Systematic Theology - An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1994), p. 442.

(3) Ibid.

(4) Anthony A. Hoekema, Created in God's Image, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans Publishing Company) p. 13.

(5) Francis Turretin, Institutes of Elenctic Theology, translated by George Musgrave Giger and James T. Dennison, Jr., Phillipsburg, Volume 1. (New Jersey: P & R Publishing, 1992), p. 465.

(6) Victor P. Hamilton, The New International Commentary On The Old Testament - The Book of Genesis, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1990), p. 134.

(7) Louis Berkhof, Systematic Theology, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1984), p. 203.

(8) Hoekema, p. 13.

(9) Matthew Henry, Matthew Henry's Commentary on The Whole Bible, Volume 1, (Old Tappan, New Jersey: Fleming H. Revell Company), p. 10.

(10) John Murray, Collected Writings of John Murray, Volumes 1 through 4, (Carlisle, Pennsylvania: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1984), p. 34.

(11) C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, Commentary On The Old Testament - The Pentateuch, Ten Volumes, (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 1989), p. 63.

(12) Berkhof, p. 202.

(13) Ibid.

(14) Hoekema, p. 36.

(15) Ibid, p. 42.

(16) Henry, p. 10.

(17) Ibid.

(18) Grudem, p. 442.

(19) Hoekema, p. 69.

(20) Murray, p. 36.

(21) Ibid.

(22) Turretin, p. 466.

(23) John Calvin, Genesis, translated and edited by John King, 2 Volumes in 1, (Carlisle, Pennsylvania: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1992), p. 941.

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