

# THE IMAGO DEI

## Genesis 1:26–27 • Brian Brodersen

### Introduction

*“The God said, ‘let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness ...’ So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.”*

We return one more time to this great truth, that of all creation, humans alone are made in the image of God. Char did an excellent teaching on this topic a few weeks back, but it is such a profound idea that I thought it would be good to take one more look at it.

I say it is a profound idea, and it is, although many today would not know it. Believe it or not, the belief that humans are created in God’s image is the cornerstone of Western civilization. It is the only objective basis for human rights. Unless humans are made in God’s image, and therefore worthy of dignity and respect based simply on their humanness, then belief in human rights are, as historian/philosopher Yuval Noah Harari says, “fictional stories we’ve invented.”

Here’s the complete quote:

*“Most legal systems in the world today are based on belief in human rights. But what are human rights? Human rights ... like God and heaven, are just a story we’ve invented. They are not an objective reality. They are not a biological fact about homo sapiens ... The only place you find rights is in the stories that we have invented and spread ... over the last few centuries. They may be positive stories, very good stories. But they are still just fictional stories that we’ve invented.”*

If we (humans) are just the product of naturalistic processes and not created by God in his image, then there is no objective reason to value human life above any other form of life, and “might make right” and “survival of the fittest” are the law of life. We’ll circle back.

On a personal note, understanding the deep theological and practical significance of this doctrine did not come to me until later in my Christian life and ministry.

I went several years failing to see others, especially the difficult and undesirable people around me, through the lens of each and every human as an image bearer. Here’s what changed when that truth dawned on me: compassion, patience, and hope became my new attitude toward those with whom I differed. The inclination to condemn and cancel abated.

### I. Created in God’s Image

- A. Not referring primarily to physical likeness, for God does not possess a physical body, but rather to our invisible nature.

- 1. **Personality:** To have personality one must possess knowledge, feelings, and a will. This God has, and so do we.

*“We can say that animals possess a certain kind of personality. But an animal does not reason as men do; it only reacts to certain problems or stimuli. It does not create; it only conforms to certain behavior patterns, even in as elaborate a pattern as constructing a*

*nest, hive or dam. It does not love; it only reproduces. It does not worship. Personality, in the sense we are speaking of it here, is something that links man to God but does not link either man or God to the rest of creation."*

2. **Humans create:** Creativity, buildings (palaces, churches, temples), bridges, cities, cars, airplanes, space shuttles, electronic gadgets of every sort, computers, robots. Poems, and plays, and songs and paintings all demonstrate man's creative ability.

Civilization is man's creation and a proof of his being created in the intellectual image of God.

3. **Humans are moral:** The great distinction between right and wrong belongs to mankind alone.

*"I fully subscribe to the judgment of those writers who maintain that, of all the differences between man and the lower animals, the moral sense or conscience is by far the most important. This sense is summed up in the short but imperious word, 'ought', so full of high significance. It is the most noble of all the attributes of man".* Darwin

4. **Humans are Spiritual:** Although man shares a body with such forms of life as plants or flowers and a soul with animals, only he possesses a spirit. It is on the level of the spirit that he is aware of God and communes with him. Mankind alone is a worshiper! And all people in all times and places have worshiped.

## II. Deductions from being Image Bearers

### A. Every human being has intrinsic value

Not everyone believes this. Princeton bioethics professor, Peter Singer, says: "The notion that human life is sacred just because it is human life is medieval." He also said, "If a house were on fire I'd save 200 pigs before saving one human child." His friend, Richard Dawkins, said, "Any fetus is less human than an adult pig." And that guy's a biologist?

Singer, Dawkins, and thinkers like them are now justifying abortion, infanticide, and euthanasia because it's "personhood" that qualifies you to live, not merely your humanity. If your quality of life, not just for you, but for others around you, is below the standard level, that can determine whether you live or die.

1. A fetus is not a person.
2. A newborn is not a person.
3. A mentally handicapped child or adult is not a person.
4. A depressed teenager or young adult is not a person.
5. Non-persons are not fit to live.

This is where you go when you reject God's Word about reality. Remember, "Life being sacred is medieval," meaning based on revelation (Bible) rather than reason. Reason has proven to always find a reason to oppress and exploit others.

Russell Moore, in his book *Onward*, wrote:

*"The spirit of every age seeks to define human worth in terms of power and usefulness, while the gospel of the kingdom defines human dignity in strikingly different terms, as Christ himself identifies himself not with the powerful but with the vulnerable."*

B. Every human being should be treated with dignity and respect

This is a huge idea to get hold of. If we get this then racism, classism, sexism, exploitation, and a whole lot of other harmful attitudes and behaviors go away. Author and Executive Director of the Equal Justice Initiative, Bryan Stevenson, said:

*“The great evil of American slavery wasn’t the involuntary servitude; it was the fiction that black people aren’t as good as white people, and aren’t the equals of white people, and are less evolved, less human, less capable, less worthy, less deserving than white people.”*

If the church in the early American experience would have taken the Scriptures to heart, it never would have been complicit in the slave trade, and we would not be living with the repercussions of hundreds of years of racism today.

C. Rejoice and enjoy human creativity

Some Christians miss out on many of the beauties and joys of life because they fail to recognize that artists or writers or poets or musicians or filmmakers or actors, whether sinners or saints, are all using those gifts that are part of the image of God in them.

James Taylor, *Fire and Rain*

J. R. R. Tolkien, *Lord of the Rings*

Netflix, *The Beautiful Game*

### III. Image Bearers

A. We belong to God:

1. Our identity is in him.
2. Our self-worth comes from him.
3. Our purpose is found through him.

### Close

Every human being bears the image of God, albeit that image is marred because of sin. In Christ, we have the image of God renewed in us, as Paul said to the Colossians, “the new self is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator.”

### Communion

This re-creation in God’s image is possible because of the Cross. Jesus, who made us in his own image, came into the world to destroy sin, the very thing that has marred God’s image in mankind. He destroyed sin by dying and rising again from the dead, paying the debt our sins incurred through the shedding of his blood and the breaking of his body. As often as we eat this bread and drink this cup, we show the Lord’s death until he comes.