

The Image of God

***“God created man
in his own image,
in the image of God
created he him;
male and female
created he them.”***

—Genesis 1:27

Philosophers tell us that

man, as he exists today, is far more brilliant and advanced than he ever was before in history. Their claim is that evolution has brought us to this point. The contention

that each generation is much brighter than the preceding one, has been reached because scientists have ascertained from their calculations that man has existed on earth for millions of years, improving with each generation. With each generation having become more advanced, they conclude that man has now reached a very high level. Is this philosophy correct?

How glad we are that the great Creator of the universe has provided us with a source of information from which we can discover what is truth and what is mere philosophy. He has extended an invitation to us, saying, “Let us go into the house of the Lord,” and by entering his house of learning we will come to find God’s own testimony regarding man.—Ps. 122:1

We learn from this source, the Bible, that man is “of the earth,” and that God formed him from the

“dust of the ground.” (I Cor. 15:47; Gen. 2:7) By breathing, or infusing into him, the “breath of life, ... man became a living soul.” In this succinct description of the creation of man, there is not even a slight suggestion of one form of life evolving from another, or of a less complex variety becoming a more complex being. God created each species as a separate and distinct variety of life, as we read in chapter one of Genesis. After each step taken to prepare the earth to support life, and after each separate creation of plants, fish, birds, and earth creatures, God declared that “it was good.”—Gen. 1:10,21,25,31

In Genesis 1:26,27 we read that “God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness.” We notice in God’s statement that he suggested a plural thought: “Let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, ... and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth.” From this declaration it is evident that when God created man in his own image, “male and female created he them,” he meant that both Adam and Eve would be quite similar to himself in various ways.

The words “image” and “likeness,” in the Hebrew language mean resemblance or model. Man was made to model God. How was the perfect man, Adam, a model of God? It was surely not as far as his body was concerned. Our Creator is a far superior being—a spirit being—and man is only a fleshly creature, of the earth. However, our Creator did make man as a reflection of his image in some respects. In part, this resemblance, or image, lay in man’s ability to reason, to remember, to perceive abstract as well as straightforward ideas, to make

moral judgments, and to possess intellectual and aesthetic qualities.

The perfect man, Adam, was given a God-like quality of conscience, which enabled him to distinguish between right and wrong. He was given a free will so that he possessed full exercise of his powers of choice. Were this not so mankind would be mere machines, and our actions would be controlled by someone else. However, this is not the case. If it were, there would be no exercising of abilities or talents, and no chance of developing individual characters. This freedom of choice, of course, can be good or bad, depending upon how it is utilized.

Adam Chose Sin

Adam, that glorious, first-created human being, was endowed with every physical and mental blessing. All of his surroundings had been prepared to maintain his well-being. The Creator very clearly instructed Adam that if he would obey the righteous law of God he would live; if he disobeyed God's just command he would die. (Gen. 2:15-17) The Creator's instructions were very simple. The responsibility of Adam's worthiness to live forever in the Edenic paradise depended upon his own freedom of choice. Sadly, he was led to choosing sin through disobedience. As a result of his fall from perfection, the entire race that Adam and Eve brought forth were born in sin, and under the penalty of death through inheritance.—Ps. 51:5; Rom. 5:12

The reign of sin and death has continued, and will continue, until God's purpose for permitting it has been served, and the due time for it to end

arrives. In his love God did provide a redeemer, a ransomer, even his own beloved Son, Jesus Christ, who would “taste death” for every man. (Heb. 2:9) This provision for the salvation of man from his righteous sentence of death was a “gift” of free grace.—Rom. 5:15-18

As a result of our first parents’ fall into sin, and over the many centuries since, those qualities which from the beginning identified man as being in his Creator’s image have been found in only a relatively small portion of the entire human family to any marked degree. Indeed, some noble beings have sought to cultivate such graces of God’s majestic character; while there are others who have merely put on a veneer of godlikeness. This veneer can result in a pleasant outward demeanor, but little of the genuine purity of character with which God created our first parents may be truly in their hearts.

Since God cannot work with those lacking in the true graces, he has diligently sought out those of the human family who have shown the qualities of mercy and love from the very core of their beings. These he has favored throughout the ages, to accomplish the outworking of his plan. Let us consider one of these favored ones, who during a major portion of his life displayed some of these finer qualities. This was David’s son, Solomon.

Lessons from Solomon

Solomon’s freedom of choice in later years led him to fall victim to the demands of his many wives, and as a result he displeased God very much. Yet in his youth he was highly favored of God. Solomon seemed to inherit from his father the qualities of

thoughtfulness, the ability to rule, appreciation for the goodness of the Lord, which David had earlier learned at the feet of Nathan, the holy prophet.

When David became aged and too feeble to rule, his son Solomon, at the youthful age of twenty, took the heavy responsibility of ruling Israel. We can well appreciate the prayer David uttered on behalf of his dear son. Those who are fathers with sons can readily appreciate David's concern for Solomon. We share this same feeling toward our sons, that they might find grace in the sight of God, and that they might walk with him uprightly.

In I Chronicles 28:9,10, the words that David spoke to his son are recorded: "Thou, Solomon my son, know thou the God of thy father, and serve him with a perfect heart and with a willing mind: for the Lord searcheth all hearts, and understandeth all the imaginations of the thoughts: if thou seek him, he will be found of thee; but if thou forsake him, he will cast thee off for ever. Take heed now; for the Lord hath chosen thee to build an house for the sanctuary: be strong, and do it."

The Lord had chosen Solomon for the building of a sanctuary, which had been David's lifelong dream. Helped and advised by God's faithful prophet, Nathan, and with the favor of God, Solomon entered quickly into the spirit of his father's plan for building the Temple. He knew that the welfare of Israel rested in their adherence to the Law of God, and their worship of Jehovah.

Solomon Asks for Wisdom

In Solomon's great love for God he offered a thousand burnt offerings at Gibeon. He wanted so much

to please God that he prepared this great offering to his Creator. While he was at Gibeon the new young king had a dream in which the Lord appeared to him. (I Kings 3:5) God said unto Solomon, “Ask what I shall give thee,” and Solomon’s answer was a beautiful one—one which could only come from a loving heart. Solomon said, “I am but a little child: I know not how to go out or come in. ... Give therefore thy servant an understanding heart to judge thy people, that I may discern between good and bad: for who is able to judge this thy so great a people?”—vss. 7-9

God appreciated the genuine expression of Solomon’s heart. He answered his request in a wonderful way, giving Solomon a “wise and understanding heart.” None with an ability to judge so wisely as Solomon was ever found again among imperfect men. (vss. 10,12) Because of his unselfish request, God also promised, “I have also given thee that which thou hast not asked, both riches, and honour: so that there shall not be any among the kings like unto thee all thy days. And if thou wilt walk in my ways, to keep my statutes and my commandments, as thy father David did walk, then I will lengthen thy days.”—vss. 13,14

As Solomon awoke from his dream, he enjoyed the realization that he had been pleasing to God in his request. He came to Jerusalem and offered peace offerings and burnt offerings before the Ark of the Covenant. (vs. 15) Shortly thereafter he undertook the great task of building Israel’s Temple, as instructed by the Lord.

Building the Temple

We recall how all the stones and the timbers for the Temple were prepared, shaped, and marked for

their particular places, and only when ready were they brought to the site. Every part fitted perfectly, and each came together with the next without the sound of a hammer, without the sound of an ax, or a tool of iron. (I Kings 6:7) Although each section of this great Temple had been prepared in different locations, when they were brought to the place destined for its erection, nothing had to be changed.

What a lesson this is for the Christian! We must not think for a moment that we can bide our time carelessly, and that when we come to the end of our lives, all of a sudden, miraculously, we will be fit for our place in the royal Temple. This is the time of preparation. We have to be shaped, chiseled, polished, and numbered now for the special place the Lord has in mind for us in his spiritual Temple.

We realize that Solomon's Temple pictured a greater structure. "Ye are the temple of the living God," Paul said. (II Cor. 6:16) The time for shaping and the time for laboring in the preparation of God's spiritual Temple is now. (I Cor. 3:9; Eph. 2:10; Phil. 1:6; 2:12,13) When all the pieces, or members, have been made ready during the course of their Christian lives—prepared in the midst of this "crooked and perverse" world—they will be fitted into their proper place in the symbolic heavenly Temple.—Phil. 2:15

There was much joyous celebration connected with the dedication of Solomon's Temple. (I Kings 8:65,66) There will be great joy in heaven and on earth when the Christ, the spiritual Temple of God, is complete, assembled, and when God's glory enters into it. All the earth will benefit from the completion of that Temple and will be blessed, even as natural

Israel reached the zenith of its prosperity under Solomon's reign.—Eph. 2:19-22; Rev. 3:12; 21:22-26

Our Day

Leaving the wise King Solomon at this point in his life, we return to a consideration of our day. We find that the Heavenly Father's invitation is still going forth to those in whom he finds a measure of man's original likeness to himself. Those who possess the original qualities of love and obedience to God respond to an even greater invitation and service than that of Solomon or other noble characters of past ages. The very fact that we still see some dedicating their lives to God in consecration to him, to follow in the footsteps of his only begotten Son, is evidence to us that this calling-out work and the related polishing, chiseling, and shaping, is still going on. We realize that this is indeed the method for working out the plan of salvation proposed long ago by the Heavenly Father. We further know that all things are working together for good to those that love God, those he has called according to his purpose, "For whom he foreknew, he also foreordained to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren."—Rom. 8:28,29, *Revised Version*

This Scripture informs us that a predetermined class—the church—must be copies, images, of God's Son, who is also a copy and image of the Father. As Christians, none of us in this life can become perfect as Jesus was, try as hard and long as we may. We also cannot take this honor upon ourselves by our own choice. If we have been invited to become a footstep follower of Jesus, this

honor was extended to us by God.—I Thess. 2:12; Heb. 5:4

This throws light upon the matter, for when we look at our fellow Christians, realizing they received the same invitation that we received, we will treasure their fellowship correspondingly. We have accepted the Father's invitation with thankful hearts—his gracious provision of Jesus' sacrifice making it possible for us to enter this relationship. By so doing, and by putting on the robe of our Savior's righteousness to cover our imperfections, making us acceptable to God by the merit of the ransom sacrifice of Jesus, we gladly consecrate our all to begin to do those things which are pleasing to our Heavenly Father, even at great cost to ourselves.—Isa. 61:10; Rom. 12:1; Eph. 1:5-7

Before taking this important step, we must have considered prayerfully what it means to follow in the footsteps of Jesus, and to become a copy of him. Our affections must be set on things above. (Col. 3:2) The new will, the new mind, must develop the fruits and graces of the Spirit. To become a copy of Jesus one must strive at all times to develop and to exhibit these character qualities. (Gal. 5:22,23; II Pet. 1:5-7) All sentiments that are pleasing to God and in harmony with the Spirit of the Lord must be striven after, although this will take a lifetime of development under the shaping influences of the Heavenly Father.

Not only must love for the Lord, the Truth, and the brethren be demonstrated, but there must also be a loving, sympathetic concern for the world. To be in the likeness of the Lord Jesus, we must have a deep regard for the groaning creation—

even for our enemies, those who would despitefully use us.—Matt. 22:37-39; John 13:34,35; Luke 6:27,28

Heart Obedience

Proverbs 4:23 states: “Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life.” In the case of the footstep followers of Jesus, our right to be a part of God’s spiritual Temple will be determined upon how we develop our hearts now. We have this “treasure in earthen vessels,” and the burdens of the world and our weaknesses of the flesh will attempt to draw us away from our goal. (II Cor. 4:7) However, as with Father Adam, King Solomon, and even our Lord Jesus, we also have free choice in the matter of deciding to whom we shall render our heart obedience. We have not been coerced into serving the Lord, the Truth, or the brethren. It is our free choice. With our eyes fixed on Jesus, we can become like him. Our desire to walk the way Jesus walked, is a lofty one. Our goal is to fill the place in the Temple for which the Father has so graciously invited us, and it can only be reached by becoming conformed to the image of his dear Son.—Rom. 8:29; II Cor. 3:18

Perhaps we have wondered what the experience will be like, if faithful, of being resurrected as a spirit being, when blessed with the marvelous privilege of hearing the words, “Well done, thou good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord.” (Matt. 25:21) The Scriptures provide us with certain information in this regard.

Beyond the Veil

The Apostle Paul tells us, "If we have been planted together in the likeness of [Jesus'] death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection." (Rom. 6:5) What is our Lord's "likeness" since his resurrection? Hebrews 1:3 tells us that Jesus is the "express image," or exact copy, of God! Those who follow faithfully in Jesus' footsteps of sacrifice and service, and who through "patient continuance in well doing seek for glory and honour and immortality," will be made like their Lord and Head—all members of God's divine family.—Rom. 2:7

There is a further thought with regard to the expression "express image." It is true that our Lord had been in the likeness of the Father in his pre-human existence as the Logos. Even when he came to earth as a human being he was in the likeness of God, because his character was always in complete harmony with that of his Father. However, the Apostle Paul tells us that Jesus has now "sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high," having been obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Because of this, God highly exalted him and gave him a name that is above every name. Jesus is now, even more completely, in the "express image" of the invisible God, sharing the divine nature.—Heb. 1:3; Phil. 2:8,9; Col. 1:15

We read also, "Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God: therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not. Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear [Greek: become manifest], we shall be like

him; for we shall see him as he is. And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure.”—I John 3:1-3

Thus we see that our Lord Jesus now is in the exact image and likeness of God, although our Heavenly Father has been and always will be greater than all. (John 10:29; 14:28; I Cor. 15:24-28) Jesus has been given this reward because of his faithful service. He never wavered in his submission to do his Father’s will, despite the cost. God has highly exalted him, and he is pleased to do the same for the “called, and chosen, and faithful” members of the church, Jesus’ bride, his body. (Rev. 17:14; 19:7,8; 21:2; I Cor. 12:12,27) These will be resurrected in the likeness of the Lord Jesus. This is a magnificent promise which we can, and will, inherit, if we are obedient and faithful, even unto death! (Rev. 2:10) Paul stated it this way, “Ye have put off the old man with his deeds; And have put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him.” “As we have borne the image of the earthy [Adam], we shall also bear the image of the heavenly [the likeness of God].”—Col. 3:9,10; I Cor. 15:49 ■