CREATED IN THE IMAGE OF GOD: THE EFFECT OF THE FALL

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Introduction

According to the United States Census Bureau, 2,473,000 deaths occurred in America in 2008. The Mayo Clinic identifies no less than seven different medications used in the mitigation of pain during the process of childbirth, from narcotics to spinal injections. In 2012, the average employed person worked 1,381 hours in the Netherlands and 2,226 hours in Mexico. The mortality of humans, the pain associated with childbirth, and the toil associated with work are just a few of the implications that have been associated with the sin committed by both Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, commonly known as the Fall of Man. This paper will examine the accuracy of these assumptions, assess the presence of other effects of the Fall, and evaluate their effect on the image of God in which man was created.

The Image of God

In order to properly examine the effects of the Fall on the image of God, this image must first be defined. Views on the image of God in which man was created are


varied, as the topic has been one of debate throughout history. No single attribute has consistently been offered as the all-encompassing definition for this image. The likeness in which man was created after God is almost always defined as a composite of multiple characteristics that God molded into man at his inception. Martin Luther speaks of this image as both “body and soul” and “without sin”, but subsequent theologians have sought to further augment this definition. W.A. Elwell considers God’s favor on man as one of these attributes, as Adam enjoyed His good pleasure in the Garden of Eden after his creation. Life in Eden featured the benevolence of a loving Creator towards his favored creation. But most theologians argue that attributes forming the image of God are more distinguishable than mere favor of the Creator, with some discounting favor as part of the definition altogether. No other creation was imparted with the gift of speech, and is able to employ it to respond to its Creator. Just as the logos is the Word, mankind has the ability to speak to the One that made Him, and speech itself is considered by some to be a component of the image of God. However, speech alone is not widely agreed upon as a part of this image, as relational vernacular alone is not sufficient to link


8. Bayer, 80.
man to his Creator. Another characteristic offered for consideration is the suggestion that man is the physical representative of God on the earth, and acts as His designate in all matters thereon. But this position is not widely supported as stated, with a majority of theologians noting a more logical characteristic supported by scripture: dominion.

**Dominion**

In Genesis 1:26, God gave man dominion over all creatures on the earth, and as such he was able to live in harmony with nature in Eden. Man sat alone atop the apex of all creation, as he was “created a little lower than the angels”. Further, in Genesis 2:19, God gave Adam the authority to name all of the animals, entrusting him to label all that He had previously called “good”. This indicates that man was not merely a reactionary creation, but one that could reason, and think logically. Dominion was not limited to Adam only, but is extended to mankind in perpetuity, so that even those made in the image of Adam share in this authority. Though power and authority over


15. Calvin, 5.
creation is a trait that God infused into the image, dominion is not sufficient in itself to describe the image as a whole. Man’s ability to engage in and maintain relationships is the second component that makes up the image in which he was created.16

**Relational Ability**

Throughout the creation account, God commanded His works into being, until it came to man. He approached the pinnacle of His creation in an environment of deliberation, as within the personal relationship between the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.17 In addition to this, Genesis 1:27 refers to God’s creation of both male and female, intimating that relationships between humans would reflect that of His own personhood.18 This point is further emphasized by God’s commandment to Adam and Eve to “be fruitful and multiply”, as the male and female would be drawn closer together through sexual relations.19 But the fact that woman was created at all speaks to man’s need to have a relationship beyond that with dominion over the animals.20 Finally, the relational attribute is seen in the fact that those made in God’s image are able to perpetuate their own likeness in children of their own.21 The image itself has no authority


17. Calvin, continuously paged.


19. Towner, 342.

or power, but derives it from its relationship with its Creator, as in mankind the principle of sonship is observed.  

Resemblance

There is a third characteristic of being created in the image of God that serves to explain the various ways in which man is like God. The first of these areas of resemblance is in the matter of form, or corporeal shape, of the human body. The acceptability of this trait centers on the interpretation of the Hebrew words for image (tselem) and likeness (demuth) as used in Genesis 1:26. In surveying the use of the word tselem in both Genesis and throughout the Old Testament, the connotation is by far one visible to the eye, and one of outward appearance. The word demuth is similarly used, but more frequently in the context of being substitutionary. It’s meaning is not as rigid as tselem, as it may also refer to the inner qualities of man as well. However, God is Spirit, and cannot be limited by human form. If this element is to be included in the image of God, it may be found in the exercise of man’s dominion over creation; for in this man needs a body to exercise this commission of his Creator. But if the external man does not accurately reflect the image of God, the inner qualities more easily lend


22. Bayer, 79.


25. Reiss, 184.
themselves to comparison. Man has been given the ability to acquire knowledge and through intelligence engage in rational thought. It is this rational element that separates man from the animals and gives him the ability to reason. And, when mankind is able to reason, it is also able to develop the capacity for morality as well. Man has been given the ability to distinguish between right and wrong, and as such may be held accountable for his actions. But, in order to be responsible for the outcome of his decisions, man must possess the free exercise of his will in the choices he makes. This is evident in Adam in the fact that he had liberty to refrain from sinning, but chose to disobey God anyway. Mankind’s freewill is not limited to earthly decisions only, but extends to man’s relationship to God as well. A combination of these qualities forms the composite resemblance attribute that, when combined with dominion and the ability to form relationships, accurately reflects the image of God in which man was created.


29. McCasland, 89.

30. Clark, 218.


32. Overstreet, 58.
The Fall of Man’s Effect on the Image

The effect of the Fall (Genesis 3) on the image of God has been debated by theologians from Tertullian to Millard Erickson. Tertullian believed that the image of God in man was completely lost because of the sin of Adam and Eve in Eden. Others argue that the image has not been affected at all, as if it had been, man would not only act like an animal, he would be an animal as well. The author of the book of James in the Bible condemns those who use the tongue to utter both blessing to God and curses to men who are “made in the likeness of God” (James 3:9). Clearly James believes the image to still be in place at the time of the penning of his letter. The consensus on the overall effect of the Fall on the image of God in man is that the likeness is not lost, but merely marred.

Dominion Weakened

Mankind retained the authority to subdue and rule over all creation given it in Genesis 3:17, but the environment in which he exercised this dominion changed. In Genesis 3:24, Adam and Eve were driven from the Garden of Eden, thereby forever altering mankind’s relationship with nature. Man would now be “subject to hardships and frustrations” and the soil of the earth would no longer produce in abundance for

33. Overstreet, 45.
34. Bray, 224.
35. Merrill, 300.
him. In order to live the brief time he is given, he would now have to work hard to extract the fruits necessary to survive. In this man is struck in the most sensitive area of his worth: the ability to work and provide for his family. What had before been a source of pleasure to man would now be a venue of pain, as the ground would only yield a return as the result of his strenuous labor. The affliction of toil upon this area of man’s valuation reveals the effects of the Fall on the dignity of man itself. In addition to this, the aspect of exercising dominion over the earth through procreation was also affected by the sin in Eden. What had been an area of God’s blessing was now to be an event of perpetual pain for women, as childbirth would be marked with both danger and suffering. The joy of bringing forth one to nurture would only be achieved through the endurance of debilitating labor.

Relational Ability Diminished

Perhaps the greatest effect of the Fall on the image is the alienation of man from God. In Genesis 3:10, Adam hid in fear from the One who created him and who, to that

40. Calvin, 17.
41. Collins, 37.
44. Merrill, 303.
point, had been in loving communication with him. This indicated a break in the intimate relationship once shared between man and God, a friendship between Creator and creation. The result was mankind’s spiritual death, as it severed his relation from the only true source of life, God. Adam and Eve once had daily communication with God, but because of their disobedience they lost the counsel of their sovereign and benevolent Creator. The fact that they were now hiding from God, where once they welcomed His presence marks a change in the way man saw himself before God. Eating of the fruit did not bring about the desired result, as now the two found themselves flush with both guilt and shame. Before eating the fruit, both Adam and Eve acknowledged one another as a man and woman who were naked, but they were not ashamed (Genesis 2:25). Their disobedience resulted in self-awareness through an improper action, and the outcome was shame before God. But the effect of sin was not limited to man’s relationship with God; it also permeated his relationship with others as well. In Genesis 3:12, Adam placed the blame for his sin on Eve, his closest companion. It was the start of what would be ages of rivalry between men and women, as God decreed that the


46. Collins, 23.

47. Wood, 1.


50. Philip E. Johnson, “Evolution: Fact or Fantasy?” *The Apologetics Study*
woman’s desire would be towards her husband. The connotation of this desire is the urge to “overcome or gain the upper hand” on her husband.\textsuperscript{51} From this point forward, strife will be present as a fight for control in the relationship will exist where harmony once existed.\textsuperscript{52} Further, though enduring pain to produce children who soothe the heart of her nurturing nature, women would now be profoundly drawn to their husbands, in whom they still are not fulfilled.\textsuperscript{53} The only fulfillment for each may be found in a renewed relationship with God.

**Resemblance Marred**

The most visible effect of the Fall on the image is that apparent on the body of man. Though this paper has argued that the corporeal attribute should be considered a part of man’s ability to keep the commission of dominion, its evaluation was performed under the auspices of resemblance. Therefore, the effect of the sin of Adam and Eve on the body will be presented here as well. The original connotation was that death was not a certainty for mankind,\textsuperscript{54} but now God blocked the way to the tree of life, which would have provided immortality to those who had proven to be faithful.\textsuperscript{55} Neither Adam nor


\textsuperscript{51} Longman, 3.

\textsuperscript{52} Collins, 37.

\textsuperscript{53} Wojciech, 281.

\textsuperscript{54} McClear, 178.

Eve died physically immediately following their sin, but the result of their disobedience is a now natural process that returns both them and their descendants to the ground from which they were made. It is for this reason that Paul states in 1 Corinthians 15:22 that “in Adam all die,” recognizing the effect the Fall has made on all mankind. But, not only will mankind suffer the pain of death, but its thought processes will be forever affected by the events of Eden. Immoral decisions will now be the result of flawed logic influenced by errors in thinking. All humans will now bear the marks of this decision in their nature from birth, as they will have a proclivity to choose the path that serves self rather than others. Human nature is unmistakably corrupted, as man will now struggle with morality as he continually seeks pleasure over righteousness until his mortal body succumbs to the further penalties of the Fall in death. A tendency toward sin and corrupt behavior will now be prevalent in all men at birth, as “sin came into the world through one man and death through sin” (Romans 5:12). Paul indicates that everyone throughout history is guilty of sin (Romans 3:23) and that the effect of this sin is the sting of death imparted on the image at Eden (Romans 6:23). An ironic, though

56. Johnson, 2.
58. Calvin, 4.
59. Clark, 218.
60. Collins, 35.
justifiable twist is that now the very act that man could not control now maintains
dominion over him. Sin is now the master of his physical body (Romans 6:12) and is a
constant foe in every decision he makes (Romans 7:15). These effects on the image of
God leave man with the need of restoration, but only a supernatural remedy could supply
the cure.

**Correction of the Image**

For the sake of His creation, God prepared a Redeemer who would arrive through
the seed of Mary and defeat the curse that has been applied to mankind. Jesus Christ
became the Second Adam by exhibiting the true image of God (εἰκὼν) as was intended
for the original Adam. Paul alluded to Jesus filling this role in Romans 5:14 as “the
figure of him that was to come.” Through His perfect sacrifice, Jesus restores the
dominion attribute by overcoming death itself and imparting eternal life to those who
believe on Him (John 3:16). No longer must mankind fear the effect of grave on his
mortal body, as death perfects the image of God in him. Christ restores the relational
ability to mankind by dying in its place, thereby providing a pathway for men to come
back to the Father (John 14:6). He leaves man with the commandment to mirror His
relationship with the Father and love one another (John 13:34). Christ also reinstates the
resemblance trait by doing nothing of His own initiative, but following the direction of
the Father in humble submission (John 5:30). He further exemplifies this aspect by

63. Collins, 34.


65. Schweitzer, 43.
refusing to bow to the temptation of Satan, exercising His freewill instead to obey the
commands of His Father (Matthew 4). Christ restored each of these attributes, though
none independent of the other. And, just as man marred the image through an exercise of
his freewill, the only path to restoration was both provided by and may only be received
through a free and willing decision. Jesus freely chose to give His life to provide
atonement for the sin of mankind, and all who come to Him may freely choose to do so.

**Conclusion**

Man was created in the image of God, but used an attribute of that image to
mar God’s creation. God, in His omniscience, knew that man would fall; yet He created
him in His image anyway. The conferring of authority on man was an act of kindness by
a loving Creator who would allow His creation to decide for himself who he would serve.
God is Holy and deserving of praise, but He did not force it of His creation. He formed
man with the propensity to form relationships and the desire to bond with others, yet He
did not compel him to worship Him. Out of all of creation, special deliberation was made
in the creation of Adam, meticulously forming him into the resemblance of God. He
gave him the ability to accumulate knowledge and intellect, and then use that information
to reason. God allowed man to use the image in which he was made to make a free will
decision regarding allegiance to Him. Knowing that man would fall, God prepared His
Son as a Second Adam to restore the image that man would corrupt. Just as through one
man, Adam, sin entered the world and was transferred throughout all generations, the
atonement for sin entered through the incarnation of Jesus Christ. But the cure will not
be forced upon the dying. The image was marred by an exercise of free will; and its
restoration may only be accomplished by the humble acceptation of the atonement of
Jesus Christ.
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