



Question: "What does it mean that humanity is made in the image of God (imago dei)?"

Answer: On the last day of creation, God said, "Let us make man in our image, in our likeness" (Genesis 1:26). Thus, He finished His work with a "personal touch." God formed Adam from the dust and gave him life by sharing His own breath (Genesis 2:7). Accordingly, humanity is unique among all God's creations, having both a material body and an immaterial soul/spirit.

Having the "image" or "likeness" of God means, in the simplest terms, that we were made to resemble God. Adam did not resemble God in the sense of God's having flesh and blood. Scripture says that "God is spirit" (John 4:24) and therefore exists without a body. However, Adam's body did mirror the life of God insofar as it was created in perfect health and was not subject to death.

The image of God (Latin: *imago dei*) refers to the immaterial part of humanity. It sets human beings apart from the animal world, fits them for the dominion God intended them to have over the earth (Genesis 1:28), and enables them to commune with their Maker. It is a likeness mentally, morally, and socially.

Mentally, humanity was created as a rational, volitional agent. In other words, human beings can reason and choose. This is a reflection of God's intellect and freedom. Anytime someone invents a machine, writes a book, paints a landscape, enjoys a symphony, calculates a sum, or names a pet, he or she is proclaiming the fact that we are made in God's image.

Morally, humanity was created in righteousness and perfect innocence, a reflection of God's holiness. God saw all He had made (humanity included) and called it "very good" (Genesis 1:31). Our conscience or "moral compass" is a vestige of that original state. Whenever someone writes a law, recoils from evil, praises good behavior, or feels guilty, he or she is confirming the fact that we are made in God's own image.

Socially, humanity was created for fellowship. This reflects God's triune nature and His love. In Eden, humanity's primary relationship was with God (Genesis 3:8 implies fellowship with God), and God made the first woman because "it is not good for the man to be alone" (Genesis 2:18). Every time someone marries, makes a friend, hugs a child, or attends church, he or she is demonstrating the fact that we are made in the likeness of God.

Part of being made in God's image is that Adam had the capacity to make free choices. Although they were given a righteous nature, Adam and Eve made an evil choice to rebel against their Creator. In so doing, they marred the image of God within themselves, and passed that damaged likeness on to all of their descendants (Romans 5:12). Today, we still bear the image of God (James 3:9), but we also bear the scars of sin. Mentally, morally, socially, and physically, we show the effects of sin.

The good news is that when God redeems an individual, He begins to restore the original image of God, creating a "new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness" (Ephesians 4:24). That redemption is only available by God's grace through faith in Jesus Christ as our Savior from the sin that separates us from God (Ephesians 2:8-9). Through Christ, we are made new

creations in the likeness of God (2 Corinthians 5:17).

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Question: "What does it mean when God said, "Let Us make man in Our image" (Genesis 1:26)?"

Answer: Genesis 1 details the creation account of the all-knowing, all-powerful, sovereign God. When God reaches His crowning creative act—the formation of human life—His wording changes from the impersonal “let there be” to the deliberate and intimate expression, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness.” God’s plan for humans included giving them responsibilities on the earth: “And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth” (Genesis 1:26, ESV).

Human beings—both men and women—are made in God’s image (Genesis 1:27; 5:1–3; 9:6; James 3:9). “Let us make human beings in our image, to be like us,” says Genesis 1:26 in the NLT. We did not evolve from other lower forms of life. We were created directly by God to represent Him on the earth and have dominion over every other creation in His name (Genesis 1:26–28).

Having God’s image means we are fashioned to resemble and represent God on the earth. Some Christians like to say we are “imagers of God.” Our likeness with God is not a physical resemblance. Instead, God’s likeness denotes our capacity to rule over creation and be in relationship with God and other humans and to exercise reason, intelligence, speech, moral consciousness, creativity, rationality, and choice. Since the beginning of time, God has desired to bless us and enjoy close fellowship with us, and for this reason He made us like Himself.

Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is the preeminent and perfect image of God: “The Son radiates God’s own glory and expresses the very character of God” (Hebrews 1:3, NLT; see also 2 Corinthians 4:4; Colossians 1:15). To see Jesus is to see the Father (John 14:9). To know Christ is to know God. Jesus Christ shows us what God meant when He said, “Let Us make man in Our image.”

The original Hebrew word for “God” in Genesis 1 is the plural masculine noun *Elohim*. God, our Creator, chose to introduce Himself to us with a *plural* title. In Genesis 1:26—the first time in the Bible that God speaks about Himself—He uses the plural pronouns *Us* and *Our*. This passage is not the only instance in which God refers to Himself in plural terms (see Genesis 3:22; 11:7; and Isaiah 6:8). We find the plural *Elohim* more than 2,550 times in the Bible.

We know from Scripture that there is only one God, there is no other God, and He is one (Deuteronomy 6:4; Isaiah 45:5, 6, 18; Mark 12:32; Galatians 3:20; 1 Timothy 2:5). So how can we understand the plurality of His name *Elohim* together with His statement, “Let Us make man in Our image?”

Bible scholars present several possible explanations:

Some believe that in Genesis 1:26 God refers to Himself and includes the heavenly assembly of angels, as in Job 1:6; 1 Kings 22:19–20; and Psalm 89:5. However, this theory falls apart because nowhere in Scripture does God say that the angels are made in His image or likeness. Another hypothesis suggests that the plural form is used to convey dignity and splendor, a language device

called “plural of majesty.” Others chalk up the plural language to a technique known as “plural of deliberation,” used when a speaker consults with himself as the Lord does in Isaiah 6:8: “Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, ‘Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?’”

The conviction of the early church fathers was that Elohim’s statement, “Let Us make man in Our image,” communicates a complex and unified expression of the Trinity. The doctrine of the Trinity holds that God is One in three Persons: God the Father; God the Son, Jesus Christ our Savior; and God the Holy Spirit. Here in Genesis 1:26, the “Us” and “Our” indicate God the Father speaking in the fullness of His divine creative power to the Son and the Holy Spirit. A similar conversation among the Godhead is seen in Genesis 3:22: “And the LORD God said, ‘The man has now become like one of us, knowing good and evil.’”

Only humans are uniquely created in the image and likeness of God, distinguishing them from all other earthly beings. We were made like Him so that we could be in relationship with Him—the one and only triune God.

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