

# Male and Female Complementarity and the Image of God

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## Introduction

And God said, "Let the land produce living creatures according to their kinds: livestock, creatures that move along the ground, and wild animals, each according to its kind." And it was so. God made the wild animals according to their kinds, the livestock according to their kinds, and all the creatures that move along the ground according to their kinds. And God saw that it was good. 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." So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number; till the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground." Then God said, "I will give you every seed-bearing plant on the face of the whole earth and every tree that has fruit with seed in it. They will be yours for food. And to all the beasts of the earth and all the birds of the air and all the creatures that move on the ground-- everything that has the breath of life in it-- I will give every green plant for food." And it was so. God saw all that he had made, and it was very good. And there was evening, and there was morning--the sixth day. (Genesis 1:24-31 - NIV)

Everyone agrees: whatever being created in the image of God means, it is very, very significant! Clearly, in Genesis chapter one, the progression of creation builds throughout the six days, culminating in the final creative act, in the second part of the sixth day, to create man as male and female in the image of God. Some key internal indicators signal the special significance of man's creation: 1) As just noted, man is the pinnacle of God's creative work, only after which God *then* says of all he has made that it is "very good" (1:31). 2) The creation of man is introduced differently than all others, with the personal and deliberative expression, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness." 3) The one God who creates man as male and female deliberately uses plural references of himself (e.g., "Let Us," "Our image," "Our likeness") as the creator of singular "man" who is plural "male and female." 4) The "image of God" is stated three times in 1:26-27 in relation to man as male and female but never in relation to any other part of creation. 5) The special term for God's unique creative action, *bara*, is used three times in 1:27 for the creation of man in his image as male and female. 6) Man is given a place of rulership over all other created beings on the earth, thus indicating the higher authority and priority of man in God's created design. 7) Only the creation of man as male and female is expanded and portrayed in detail as recorded in Gen. 2.

What does it mean, though, that man as male and female has been created in the image and likeness of God? What does this tell us about the nature of manhood and womanhood as both male and female exhibit full and equal humanness as the image of God while also being distinguished as male (not

male) and female (not male)? And, what relevance do these issues have for complementarian male/female relations with God and with one another?

This article will focus on these three questions. First, attention will be given to the question of what the image of God is. Obviously, this issue must be settled with some degree of confidence if we are to proceed. Second, we will explore a particular question of what it might mean that male and female are created in the image of God, stressing both their human equality and gender distinctiveness. And third, we will suggest some ways in which this understanding makes a difference in how we understand the complementarian nature of our lives as male and female both before God and with each

## The Meaning of the Creation of Man in the Image of God

Through the history of the church, there have been many varying proposals as to what it means that man is created in God's image. While one would hope to find more agreement, this is not the case. No doubt this lack of agreement owing, in significant part, to the fact that Scripture declares does not explain clearly just what it means that man is created in God's image. While varied, the main proposals offered throughout history may be grouped under three broad findings.

### Additional Understandings of the Image of God

*Structural Views.* The prevailing kind of approach reasoned as follows: the image of God in man must relate to one way or ways in which we (humans) are like God but unlike the other created animals. After all, since humans and other animals are all created beings, those aspects which we share in *common* with them cannot constitute what *distinguishes* from them. And, since we are made in the image of *God*, this must refer to some resemblance to God in particular that God imparted to humans and is not shared by the animals. So, there must be some aspect or aspects of the *structure* and *substance* of our *human nature* that shows we are created in the image of God. Here are some examples:

1. Irenaeus (c. 130-200) distinguished the image (*zelem*) and likeness (*damut*) of God in man. He argued that the *image* of God is our reason and volition, and the *likeness* of God is our holiness and spiritual relation to God. As a result, the likeness of God is lost in the fall and regained in redemption, but all humans are image of God by their capacities of reason and will.'
2. Augustine (354-430) understood the image of God as the reflection of the triune persons of God mirrored in the distinct yet unified intellectual capacities of

memory, intellect and will. While stopping short of calling these an exact analogy of the trinity, he did suggest that the triune Godhead is what is reflected in us when we are called the image of God.'

3. Thomas Aquinas (1224-1274) locates the image of God squarely in man's reason by which we have the capacity to know and love God. Angels, says Thomas, are even more perfectly in God's image because of their more perfect understanding and love of God. While fallen men lose the added gift of the grace of God (*donum superadditum*) so they no longer know or love God as they should, they still retain this rational capacity and some natural knowledge of God and hence, they likewise retain the image of God.'

4. John Calvin (1509-1564) sees the human soul as comprising the image of God. By soul, Calvin meant both the mind and heart of man by which he could know and love God. Because fallen man has turned to deception and rebellion in regard to God, the image of God has been deformed greatly in the souls of depraved men. Yet even in fallen man there are some "remaining traces" of God's image, since man retains the distinctive human capacities of reason and will.'

*Relational Views.* Only more recently has another very prominent understanding been developed. Rather than seeing the image of God as referring to some aspect(s) of our very human nature, God's image is reflected in our relation to one another and to God. So, while it is true that God has given us reason, soul, volition, and other capacities of our nature, none of these constitutes the image of God. Rather, it is the use of these capacities in relation with God and others that reflects most clearly what it means to be created in God's image.

1. Karl Barth (1886-1968) was very critical of the entire history of the doctrine of the image of God in man. Barth complained that little attention had been given to what Scripture actually says when it speaks of man created in the image of God. In Gen. 1:26-27 (cf. 5:12), as Barth notes, God deliberately speaks of himself in the plural as creating man who is likewise plural as male and female. The image of God should best be seen as the relational or social nature of human life as God created us. That both male and female together are created in his image signals the relational meaning of the image of God in man.<sup>6</sup>
2. Emil Brunner (1889-1966) distinguished formal and material senses of the image of God. The *formal* image of God in man is his capacity to relate to God through his knowledge and love of God; the *material* image is manifest through his actually seeking and knowing and loving God. For Brunner, then, the

formal image is retained after the fall but the material image is lost altogether. While it is important for Brunner that God made us with the capacity to know and love him (i.e., the formal image), the heart of the concept of the image of God has to do with our relationship with God in which we express real longing for God, trust in him, and a desire to know and love him (i.e., the material image).'

*Functional Views.* While this view can be traced through the centuries, only recently has it been urged with increasing forcefulness. Here, it is not our inner capacities of nature, nor our human or God-ward relationality which comprise the image of God, but it is the functioning of man who is responsible to act as God's representative over creation that shows us as him images. Advocates such as Leonard Verduin' and D. J. A. Clines' have argued that the double reference in Gen 1:26-28 of man "ruling over" the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, etc., cannot be accidental. Rather, this links the concept of the image of God with the fact that God places man over the rest of earthly creation in order to rule on his behalf. Creation stewardship as God's vice-regents, then, is at the heart of what it means to be image of God.

### **Evaluation of these 1Yadditional Understandings of Image of God**

Clearly, we should affirm with Karl Barth that our understanding of the image of God should be directed as fully as possible by the text of Scripture. One of the main problems with much of the tradition (particularly with the variations of the structural view) is that these proposals were led more by speculation regarding how are men like God and unlike animals than by careful attention to indications in the text of Scripture itself as to what may constitute this likeness. While it is not wrong to ask and ponder this question, what confidence can we have that when we have answered it we have also answered the question of what the image of God in man is'? The relevant passages, particularly Gen. 1:26-28, need to be far more central and instructive than most of the tradition has allowed them to be.

A major attraction of both the relational and functional views is their care to notice features of Genesis 1:26-28 where we are instructed clearly and forcefully that man is created in God's image. The relational view rightly points to the fact that God creates male and female, not isolated and individual man. And yet, one wonders whether the point of mentioning "male and female" was to say that the image of God was *constituted* by their social relatedness, or might the point more simply be that *both man and woman* are created in God's image. Barth's proposal, in particular, runs into some difficulties. First, if relationality is constitutive of the image of God, then how do we account for the teaching of Gen. 9:6 where the murder of an individual human being is a capital offense precisely because the *one* killed was made in the image of God? Relationality has

no place in this prohibition against murder. Every individual human person is image of God and is therefore to be treated with rightful respect (i.e., in Gen. 9:3 man can kill animals for food, but in 9:6 man cannot wrongfully kill another man). Second, Jesus is "the image of the invisible God" (Col. 1:15) and yet this is said of him as an individual person. Third, all single individuals, including Jesus, John the Baptist, and Paul, are fully image of God yet they never entered into the male female union spoken of the first pair of humans in Genesis 2. I hesitate, then, to follow a strict version of the relational model, though, as will be apparent, it still contributes to a holistic understanding of man created in God's image.

The functional view also has merit biblically in that it rightly points to the double imperative in Gen. 1:26-28 of man to rule over the earthly creation. I agree with those who say that this connection cannot be accidental; it rather must play a central role in our understanding of what it means to be created in the image of God. Yet, function always and only follows essence. Put differently, what something can *do* is an expression of what it is. So, obviously to the extent that human beings as made in the image of God has to do with their *functioning* a certain way, then behind this must be truth about their *being made* a certain way, by which (and only by which) they are able to carry out their God-ordained functioning.

### **Functional Holism as the Image of God**

One of the finest recent discussions of the image of God has been done by Anthony Hoekema.<sup>10</sup> I agree fully with the implication of Hoekema's questions when he asks:

Must we think of the image of God in man as involving only what man is and not what he does, or only what he does and not what he is, or both what he is and what he does? Is "image of God" only a description of the way in which the human being functions, or is it also a description of the kind of being he or she is?"

Hoekema defends and develops a view of the image of God in which humans are seen to be made by God with certain structural capacities (to "mirror" God) in order that they might function in carrying out the kinds of responsibilities in relationship he has given them in particular to do (to "represent" God). The stress, then, is on the functional and relational responsibilities, while the structural capacities provide the created conditions necessary for that functioning to be carried out. Furthermore, Hoekema describes the relational elements of this functioning in terms of how we are to relate to God, to others, and to the world God has made. So, God has made us a particular way, and has done so in order for us to function in this threefold arena of relationality, and this together constitutes what it means to be created in the image of God. Hoekema summarizes his view as follows:

The image of God, we found, describes not just something that man has, but something man is. It means that human beings both mirror and represent God. Thus, there is a sense in which the image includes the physical body. The image of God, we found further, includes both a structural and a functional aspect (sometimes called the broader and narrower image), though we must remember that in the biblical view structure is secondary, while function is primary. The image must be seen in man's threefold relationship: toward God, toward others, and toward nature."

Another treatment of the image of God has contributed much to the discussion and supports this same holistic understanding, with a particular stress on the functional responsibilities man has as created in God's image." D. J. A. Clines considered Gen. 1:26-28 in light of the Ancient Near Eastern (ANE) usage of "image of God." Clines notes that the concept of image of God was used widely in ANE literature. Many times inanimate objects (e.g., stones, trees, crafted idols) were considered images of the gods, and when this was the case, they were seen as possessing some divine substance that gave them certain powers. But also often (and more important to the background of Gen. 1:26-28), the image of the god was a king or other royal official. When this was the case, Clines noted three characteristics. First, the god would put into the king some divine substance (e.g., some fluid or wind or breath) that would give the king extraordinary powers thus making him like the god, to some degree, and able to represent the god to the people. Second, the king was to function as the representative of the god and rule as a vice-regent of the god, acting as the god would in his place. Third, it was only the king or other high official who was the image of the god; ordinary people were never the image of the god.

When applied to Genesis 1-2, it appears reasonable that the author may have had this background in mind. At least, one must wonder why the author does not define "image of God" when it is apparent to all that this is a term of extraordinary importance. Perhaps the meaning was widely understood. If so, as Clines suggests, "image of God" in Genesis 1-2 contains three elements which are parallel yet not identical to the three characteristics of the ANE understanding of image of god. First, man was created with such a nature that divine enablement was given him to be that he must be in order to do what God would require him to do. Clines points to the "breathing" into Adam the breath of life in Gen. 2:7 as indication that his formation included this divine empowerment requisite to function as God's image. Second, immediately upon his being created in Genesis 2, God puts man to work, stewarding and ruling in the world that is God's own creation. Man is given responsibility to cultivate the garden, and man is called upon to name the animals. So, while the garden in which man dwells is God's, God gives to man the responsibility

to steward it. And, importantly, while the animals are God's, God gives to man the right and responsibility to name them (note especially the statement in Gen. 2:19 that whatever the man called the living creature, that was its name). By this, man shows his God-derived authority over creation, for to cultivate the garden and especially to name the animals is to manifest his rightful yet derived rulership over the rest of creation. Third, the place where Genesis 1:26-28 departs from the pattern of the ANE usage is that *both* male and female are created in God's image. While the ANE king or royal official only is image of the god, in the creation of man, all men, *both* male and *female*, are fully the image of God. Man and woman, then, both are fully the image of God and together share the responsibility to steward the earthly creation God has made.

Hoekema's and Clines' proposals are complementary insofar as they both stress that the structural, relational and functional elements need to be brought together to understand what it means in Genesis 1:26-28 to be made in the image of God. Yet, while all three are needed, the *structural* serves the purpose of the *functional* being carried out in relationship. One might think of this proposal, then, as advocating a "functional holism" view of the image of God. That is, while all three aspects are involved, priority is given to the God-ordained functioning of human beings in carrying out the purposes he has for them to do. Perhaps our summary statement of what it means to be made in God's image could employ this language:

The image of God in man as functional holism means that God made human beings, both male and female, to be created and finite representations (images of God) of God's own nature, that in relationship with him and each other, they might be his *representatives* (imaging God) in carrying out the *responsibilities* he has given to them. In this sense, we are images of God in order to image God and his purposes in the ordering of our lives and carrying out of our God-given responsibilities.

Our Lord Jesus surely exhibited this expression of the image of God in his own human, earthly life. Made fully human and filled with the Holy Spirit, he was a fully faithful representation of God through his human and finite nature (as he was, of course, intrinsically and perfectly in his infinite divine nature). In relationship with God and others, he then sought fully and only to carry out the will of the Father who sent him into the world." More than any other man, Jesus exhibited this as his uniform and constant desire. He represented God in word, attitude, thought, and action throughout the whole of his life and ministry. So, the responsibilities God gave him, he executed fully. Clearly, a functional holism was at work in Jesus as the image of God. As such, Jesus was in human nature the representation of God so that, in relation to God and others, he might represent God in fulfilling his God-given responsibilities as he functioned, always and only, to do the will of his Father.

# Male and Female as the Image of God

## Male and Female Equality as Image of God

Complementarians and egalitarians have agreed that the creation of male and female as the image of God indicates the equal value of women with men as being fully human, with equal dignity, worth and importance. While Genesis 1:26-27 speaks of God creating "man" in his image, the passage deliberately broadens at the end of verse 27 to say, "male and female he created them." Hear again these central verses:

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." So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.

Clearly the intention of the text is to say both that the man and the woman share a common humanity and equal worth before God (hence, both are "man"), and yet they do so not as identicals (hence, they are distinctly "male and female").

Genesis 5:1-2 only confirms and reinforces this understanding. Here, we read: "This is the written account of Adam's line. When God created man, he made him in the likeness of God. He created them male and female and blessed them. And when they were created, he called them 'man.'" As with Genesis 1:26-27, we see the common identity of male and female, both named "man," and yet the male and the female is each a distinct expression of this common and equally possessed nature of "man." As is often observed, since this was written in a patriarchal cultural context, it is remarkable that the biblical writer chose to identify the female along with the male as of the exact same name and nature as "man." Male and female are equal in essence and so equal in dignity, worth, and importance.

Another clear biblical testimony to this equality is seen in the position of redeemed men and women in Christ. Galatians 3:28 ("There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus") makes clear that gender distinctions (along with race and class distinctions, as well) are irrelevant in relation to the standing and benefits we have in Christ." As Paul has said in the previous verse, all who are baptized into Christ have been clothed with Christ (3:27). So, men and women alike, who by faith are sons of God (Gal. 3:26), enter fully into the promise of Christ and all that entails (3:29). This same idea is echoed by Peter when he instructs believing husbands to show their believing wives honor as fellow heirs with them of the grace of life in Christ (1 Peter 3:7). Christian wives and husbands stand on exactly equal footing in Christ: both saved by faith, both

fully united with Christ, and both fully heirs of all the riches of Christ. These New Testament passages reflect the Bible's clear teaching that as male and female are equal in their humanity (Gen. 1:26-27), so they are equal in their participation of the fullness of Christ in their redemption (Gal. 3:28).

## Male and Female Differentiation as the Image of God

After affirming the complete essential equality of men and women as created in the image of God, an obvious observation must be made that has important implications: while male is fully human, male is also *male*, not female; and while female is fully human, female is also *female*, not male. That is, while God did intend to create male and female as *equal* in their essential nature as human, he also intended to make them *different expressions* of that essential nature, as male and female reflect different ways, as it were, of being human. Now, the question before us is whether any of these male/female differences relate to the question of what it means for men and women to be created in the image of God.

Some might reason that since Gen. 1:26-27 and 5:1-2 speak of both male and female created fully in the image of God, any male/female *differences* one might point to cannot bear any relationship to the *united* sense in which they possess, equally and fully, the image of God. That they both are the image of God equally and fully manifests not their *differences* but their *commonality* and *equality*. Yes, male and female are different, but they are not different, some might argue, in any sense as being the images of God; we have to look elsewhere to locate the basis for their differences.

Let me suggest that this distinction may not reflect the whole of biblical teaching. I will here propose that it may be best to understand the original creation of male and female as one in which the male was made image of God first, in an unmediated fashion, as God formed him from the dust of the ground, while the female was made image of God second, in a mediated fashion, as God chose, not more earth, but the very rib of Adam by which he would create the woman fully and equally the image of God. So, while both are **fully** image of God, and both are *equally* the image of God, it may be the case that both are not constituted as the image of God in the identical way. Scripture gives some clues that there is a God-intended temporal priority" bestowed upon the man as the original image of God, through whom the woman, as image of God formed from the male, comes to be.

Consider the following biblical indicators of a male priority in male and female as God's images. First, does it not stand to reason that the *method* by which God fashions first the man, and then the woman, is meant to communicate something important about their respective identities? Surely this is the case with the simple observation that Adam was created first. Some might think that the creation of the male prior to the female is

significant in itself, and surely irrelevant for deriving any biological conclusions; whether God created the woman first, or man first, might be thought of as nothing more than a sort of flipping of a divine coin. But as we know, the apostle Paul knew differently. In 1 Timothy 2:13 and 1 Cor. 11:8," Paul demonstrates that the very ordering of the creative acts of God in the formation of male, then female, has significant theological meaning. Male headship is rooted, in part, on what might otherwise seem to have been an optional or even arbitrary temporal ordering of the formation of man and woman.

Given the significance of the mere temporal ordering of the creation of man as male and female, ought we not also consider it significant that while God formed Adam from dust, he intentionally formed the woman from Adam's rib? Surely, if God intended to convey an absolute and unequivocal identity in how man and woman respectively are constituted as human beings in the image of God, he surely could have created each in the same manner. That is, after fashioning the man from the dust of the ground as his image bearer (Gen. 2:7), God then could have taken more of the same dust to form the woman, who would then come to be also his image bearer in the identically same fashion as the man had come into existence. But this is not what occurred. Instead, God intentionally took, not more dust, but Adam's rib, as the material out of which he would fashion the woman. The biology of this is clear. As the man himself puts it in Gen. 2:23, "her identity is as bone of *his* bones and flesh of *his* flesh; she is called woman (*isha*) because she was *taken out of man (ish)*. In the very formation of the woman, it was to be clear that her life, her constitution, her nature, was rooted in and derived from the life, constitution, and nature of the man. Now, surely God could have created a female human being from the dust, to parallel in her formation the male human being he had made from the dust. He surely had he done so, they would be seen as equally human. But if God wanted to convey *two theological truths* (not just one) in the formation of the woman from the rib of Adam: since the woman was taken out of the man, 1) she is *fully and equally man* since she has come from his bones and his flesh, and 2) her very human nature is constituted, not in parallel fashion to his, but both formed from the same earth, but as *derived from his nature so* showing a God-chosen dependence upon him for her origination.

This understanding seems confirmed by the wording Paul uses in 1 Cor. 11:8 in particular to describe the creation of the woman ("For man did not come from woman, but woman from man"). Here he says that the woman comes "from" or "out of" (*ek*) the man, and not merely that man was created prior to the woman. Of course, this more basic truth (i.e., that man was created before the woman) is entailed by what Paul says in this verse. But his primary point concerns the very derivation of the woman's own existence and nature as "from man." So, notice here that whereas 1 Tim. 2:13 ("For Adam was formed first, then Eve") states the more basic and simple

truth that the man was created first (indicating temporal priority strictly), 1 Cor. 11:8 indicates more fully a God-intended derivation of her very being as "from" the man. It seems clear, then, that Genesis 2 intends for us to understand the formation of the woman as both fully *like the man in his humanity*, while attributing the *derivation* of her very nature to God's formation of her, not from common dust of the ground, but specifically from the rib of Adam, and so *from the man*.

Second, in Gen. 5:2, God chooses to name *both* male and female with a name that functions as a masculine generic (i.e., the Hebrew *tenu'adam* is a masculine term that can be used exclusively for a man, especially in Gen. 1-4, but here is used as a generic term in reference to male and female together). In Gen. 5:2, we read that God created man in the likeness of God, as male and female, and "when they were created he called *them 'man'*" (emphasis added). It appears that God intends the identity of *both* to contain an element of priority given to the male, since God chooses as their *common* name a name that is purposely *masculine* (i.e., a name that can be used also of the man alone, as distinct altogether from the woman, but never of the woman alone, as distinct altogether from the man). As God has so chosen to create man as male and female, by God's design her identity as female is inextricably tied to and rooted in the prior identity of the male."

God's naming male and female 'man' indicates simultaneously, then, the *distinctiveness* of female from male, and the *unity* of the female's nature as it is identified with the prior nature of the first-created man, from which she now has come. Since this is so, we should resist the movement today in Bible translation that would customarily render instances of 'Adam with the fully non-gender specific term 'human being'." This misses the God-intended implication conveyed by the masculine generic 'man,' viz., that woman possesses her common human nature only through the prior nature of the man. Put differently, she is woman as God's image by sharing in the man who is himself previously God's image. A male priority is indicated, then, along with full male-female equality, when God names male and female 'man.'

Third, consider the difficult statement of Paul in 1 Cor. 11:7. Here, he writes, "A man ought not to cover his head, since he is the image and glory of God; but the woman is the glory of man." Notice two contextual factors that relate to the interpretation of this verse. First, 11:7 is followed by two explanatory statements, each beginning with *gar* ("for") in verses 8 and 9 (although the N1 V fails to translate the *gar* that begins verse 9) which give the reason for Paul's assertion and admonition in 11:7. In 1 Cor. 11:8-9, Paul writes, "For man did not come from woman, but woman from man; [for] neither was man created for woman, but woman for man." One thing that is clear from verses 8 and 9 is that Paul is arguing for the headship of man over woman (cf., 1 Cor. 11:3). Man is not to cover his head while the woman should *because* the woman

came from man, not the reverse (11:8), and because the woman was created for the man, not the reverse (11:9). These two explanations, both beginning with *gar*, indicate Paul's reasoning for his admonition in 11:7. Second, notice that both explanatory statements have to do with the origination of the man and the woman respectively. 1 Cor. 11:8 points specifically to the fact that the man was created first and the woman second, as she was crafted out of man's own being (see Gen. 2:21-23, and the discussion under the second point above), and 11:9 indicates that the purpose of woman's creation was to provide a fitting service and help to the man (see Gen. 2:18 and 20). So, it is evident that Paul is thinking specifically about the woman's origination vis-à-vis the man's, and he reflects here on the importance of the man's prior creation, out of whose being, and for whose purpose, the woman's life now comes.

Given the case he makes from 11:8-9, it appears that Paul's assertion in 11:7 (that the man is the image and glory of God and the woman the glory of the man) must be speaking about relative differences in the origination of man and woman respectively. His point, I believe, is this: because man was created by God in his image first, man alone was created in a direct and *unmediated* fashion as the image of God, manifesting, then, the glory of God. But in regard to the woman, taken as she was, from or out of man and made for the purpose of being a helper suitable to him, her created glory is a reflection of the man <sup>15. 21</sup>. Just as the man, created directly by God is the image and glory of God, so the woman, created out of the man, has her glory through the man. Now, what Paul does not also here explicitly say but does seem to imply is this: in being created as the glory of the man, the woman likewise, in being formed through the man, is thereby created in the image and glory of God. At least this much is clear: as God chose to create her, the woman was not formed to be the human that she is apart from the man but only *through* the man. Does it not stand to reason, then, that her humanity, including her being the image of God, occurs as God forms her from the man as "the glory of the man"?

To see it this way harmonizes what otherwise might appear contradictory, viz., that Gen. 1:26-27 and 5:1-2 teach the woman was created in the image of God but 1 Cor. 11:7 says only that she is 'the glory of the man.' Paul's point, I believe, is that her glory comes through the man, and as such (implied in 1 Cor. 11:7) she too possesses her full, yet derivative, human nature. But of course, since her human nature comes to be "from the man," so does her being the image of God likewise come only as God forms her from Adam, whose glory she now is. So there is no contradiction between Gen. 1:27 and 1 Cor. 11:7. Woman with man is created in the image of God (Gen. 1:27), but woman through man has her true human nature and hence her glory (1 Cor. 11:7b), the glory of the man who himself is the image and glory of God (1 Cor. 11:7a).

Fourth, consider another passage that helps in our consideration of this issue. Genesis 5:3 makes the interesting observation that Adam, at 130 years of age, "had a son in his own likeness, in his own image; and he named him Seth." The language here is unmistakably that of Gen. 1:26. While the order of "image" and "likeness" is reversed, it appears that what is said earlier of man being created in the image and likeness of God (Gen. 1:26) is said here as Seth is brought forth in the likeness and image of Adam (Gen. 5:3). Notice two things. First, since the author of Genesis had just been speaking, as we saw, of both male and female (5:2 - "He created them male and female and blessed them. And when they were created, he called them 'man.'"), it would have been natural to speak of Seth as being born in the likeness and image of Adam and Eve. But instead, the author specifically states that Seth is in the likeness and image of Adam (only). Second, the parallel nature of this language with Gen. 1:26 likely has the effect of indicating that Seth is born in the image of Adam, who is himself the image of God, so that Seth, by being in the image of Adam, is likewise in the image of God. At least we know this: man after Adam and Eve continues to be made in the image of God. When Gen. 9:6 forbids murder, the basis for this prohibition is that the one murdered is created in the image of God. So, it appears that those born become the image of God because they are born through those who are the image of God. But Gen. 5:3 would lead us to speak with more precision. Seth was born the image of God, it would appear, because he was born through the fatherhood of Adam (specifically Adam is mentioned and not Eve). So, as Seth is born in the likeness and image of Adam, he is born in the image and likeness of God.

Understood this way, we see a conceptual parallel between Gen. 5:3 and 1 Cor. 11:7. What is we in both texts, of Seth's and the woman's formation respectively, is that they derive their human natures, as Scripture specifically indicates, *through* the man. Another parallel is clear and is significant: both Seth and Eve are fully and equally the image of God when compared to Adam, who is image of God. So, the present discussion reaffirms and reinforces our earlier declaration that all human beings, women as well as men, children as well as parents, are fully and equally the image of God. But having said this, Scripture indicates in addition to this important point another: God's design regarding how the woman and how a child become the image of God seems to involve inextricably and intentionally the role of the man's prior existence as the image of God.

It appears, then, that just as Seth becomes the image of God through his origination from his father, being born in the likeness and image of Adam (Gen. 5:3), so too does the woman become the image of God that she surely is (Gen. 1:27) through (and by God's intentional design, only through) her origination from the man and as the glory of the man (Gen. 2:21-23 and 1 Cor. 11:7-9). What this suggests, then, is that the concept of male-headship is relevant not only to the question of how men and women are to relate and work together, but it seems also

ie that male-headship is a part of the very constitution of the man being created in the image of God. Man is a human being made in the image of God first; woman becomes a human being bearing the image of God only through the man. While both are fully and equally the image of God, there is a built-in priority given to the male that reflects God's design of male-headship in the created order.

### **Male and Female Complementarity as the Image of God**

Thus far we have observed three central ideas. First, we have seen that the image of God in man involves God's creation of two diverse representations (images of God) who, in relationship with each other, function to represent God (imaging God) in carrying out God's designated responsibilities. Second, we observed that Scripture clearly teaches the full human and essential equality of man and woman as created in the image of God. And third, we saw that while male and female are equally the image of God, there is a priority given to the male as the one through whom the female is herself constituted as the image of God, for she is created as the glory of the man who is, himself, the image and glory of God. Now it is time for us to ask how these three elements of male and female complementarity as the image of God may be employed in living as the images God created us to be. Consider five aspects of this complementarian vision.

First, since priority in the concept of the image of God must go to our *functioning* as God's representatives who carry out our God-given responsibilities, we must see that it is essential that man and woman learn to work in a unified manner together to achieve what God has given them to do. There can be no competition, no fundamental conflict of purpose if we are to function as the image of God. Adversarial posturing simply has no place between the man and woman who are *both* image of God. The reason for this is simple: both man and woman, as image of God, are called to carry out the unified set of responsibilities God has given. Since both share in the same responsibilities, both must seek to be unified in their accomplishment.

Surely this is implied in the narrative of Genesis 2. When it is discovered that there is no helper suitable for the man, God puts the man to sleep, takes a rib from his side, and creates the woman who is to help him shoulder his load. Man responds by saying of her that she is bone of his bones and flesh of his flesh, and the inspired commentary says of their-joining that they are now "one flesh" (Gen. 2:22-24). The implication is clear: as one flesh, she now joined to him, they seek to carry out together what God had previously called the man to do. The helper suitable for Adam is now here, so the common work of fulfilling God's purposes might be advanced, together.

Second, since our functioning as the image of God (in representing God) is a reflection and extension of our natures (as

representations of God), it follows that where our natures are misshapened so our functioning likewise will be misdirected. True functioning as the image of God must give priority to reshaping of our lives. Only as we seek, by God's grace, to be more like Christ in our *inner* lives, will we increasingly live outwardly in a manner that is more reflective of him. Dallas Willard is surely right. In his *The Spirit of the Disciplines*, he argues the thesis that we can only live like Jesus when we have disciplined ourselves to think and feel and value like Jesus." We can only live like him to the extent that we are re-made to be like him. Male/female functioning as the image of God, a functioning that must exhibit a unity of vision and commonality of effort, must then be based on men and women seeking with earnestness that God would work to re-make us incrementally and increasingly into Christ's image that we may reflect that image in our carrying out our common God-given work.

Third, the full essential and human equality of male and female in the image of God means there can never rightly be a disparaging of women by men or men by women. Concepts of inferiority or superiority have no place in the God-ordained nature of male and female in the image of God. As mentioned earlier, I Peter 3:7 makes this point in relation to the believing husband's attitude toward his believing wife. He is to grant her honor as a fellow-heir of the grace of life. And, as the verse concludes, God feels so strongly about a husband's honoring of his wife as fully equal and fellow inheritor of Christ's riches that he warns that any husband who violates this principle will not be heard by God in prayer. Nowhere in Scripture is the differentiation between male and female a basis for the male's supposed superiority in value or importance, or for female exploitation. All such attitudes and actions are sinful violations of the very nature of our common humanity as males and females fully and equally created in the image of God.

Fourth, while unified in our essential human equality and our common responsibility to do the will of God, the temporal priority of the image of God in the man, through whom the woman is formed as a human bearer of God's image, supports the principle of male-headship in functioning as the image of God: both men and women are. This is precisely Paul's point in 1 Cor. 11. The reason he is concerned about head coverings is that he knows that God has designed women and men to function so that each respects the other's God-ordained roles. Women are to honor and men are to embrace the special responsibility that God has given men in the spiritual leadership in the home and believing community. Where male-headship is not acknowledged, our functioning as the image of God is hampered and diminished. This puts Paul's instruction in Ephesians 5 in a new light. What we realize is that when wives submit to their husbands as the church submits to Christ (5:22-24), and when husbands love their wives as Christ loves the church (5:25-27), they exhibit their God-ordained roles as bearers of the image of God. It is not only in their equality that they are image of God. They also bear and

express God's image as they function in a manner that acknowledges the headship of the male in the bestowing of image of God (1 Cor. 11:7-9).

Fifth, how does this complementarian vision of male and female in the image of God relate to singles? As a preface to this question, let us be clear about one thing. While Scripture commends marriage as ordained of God and good (1 Tim. 4:35), it also commends singleness as a life of extraordinary purpose and contribution, never speaking of any fundamental loss but only extolling the potential gain of the single life, devoted to God (1 Cor. 7:25-35). Since human marriage is the shadow of the reality of the union of Christ and the church (Eph. 5:32), no believing single will miss out on the *reality* of marriage even if God calls him or her to live without the *shadow*.

With this realization that God commends singleness, and that some of the Bible's most honored individuals were single (Jesus, John the Baptist, Paul), how can male and female singles function as the image of God? First, let's start with the fundamental notion that the image of God is, at heart, God's making us his representations (images of God) in order that we might represent him (imaging God) in carrying out his will. At this level, singles and married people have really only one common task. All of us need to seek to become more like Christ so that we will better be able to fulfill the responsibilities God gives each of us to do. This is part of what it means to be created and to live as images of God. To be what (by God's grace) we should *be*, in order to do what (by God's grace) we should *do* is God's task for all of us, married and single, and this reflects our being made in the image of God.

But second, recall that we are to live out our responsibilities in relationship with God and others. For those who are married, there is a covenant relationship that forms the context for much of the living out of the image of God in a union that looks to the man for leadership and direction. What of singles? I find great help here in looking at the examples of Jesus and Paul for their vision of living out their calling to be representations of God who represent him in carrying out their responsibilities. What we find as we look at these key individuals is that they both sought meaningful relationships as a source of strength and companionship in fulfilling their God-ordained tasks. For example, when Jesus was facing the reality of certain and near crucifixion, he went apart to pray. It is instructive that he asked his closest disciples to pray with him for strength to face this calling. That his friends failed him by falling asleep does not change the fact that Jesus expressed a true and deep need for others to come along side and help in the completion of his mission. Or consider how often Paul speaks of the encouragement others have been in his preaching of the gospel. The point is simple. God's call to be single is never a call to isolation. God created us to need one another and to help one another. The body of Christ principle makes this abundantly clear. Singles should seek to know and do

God's will for their lives, and in seeking this they should also seek strength, help, comfort, encouragement, and resource from others so that in relationship with these they may seek to fulfill their calling.

There is one more question singles may rightly ask. How is the headship of the male who is created first in the image of God to be honored by single women and men? I begin with a comment on what the priority of the male does not mean. Biblical male-headship does *not* entail the authority of *all men over all women*. Just a moment's thought will reveal that this is not true for married people either. Ephesians 5:22 says, "Wives, submit to your *husbands* as to the Lord." My wife is not under the authority of all men. She stands under the authority of me, her husband, and of the elders of our church. But this is a restricted sense of male-headship, and it fits what Scripture clearly teaches.

So, in what sense is the headship of the male relevant for singles? I believe it means two things. First, it means that all single women and men need to be members of a local church where they may be involved in the authority structure of that church. Qualified male elders are responsible for the spiritual welfare of their membership, and so single women, in particular, may find a source of spiritual counsel and guidance from these male elders in the absence of a husband who might otherwise offer such help. (Note: wives of unbelieving husbands might likewise avail themselves of the counsel of their male eldership to fill the spiritual void that is lacking in their married relationship.) Second, the temporal priority of the male in the image of God means that in general, within male-female relationships among singles, there should be a deference offered to the men by the women of the group, which acknowledges the woman's reception of her human nature in the image of God through the man, but which also stops short of a full and general submission of women to men. Deference, respect, and honor should be showed to men, but never should there be an expectation that all the women must submit to the men's wishes. And for single men, there should be a gentle and respectful leadership exerted within a mixed group, while this also falls short of the special authority that husbands and fathers have in their homes, or that elders have in the assembly. Because all are in the image of God, and because women generally are image of God through the man, some expression of this male-headship principle ought to be exhibited generally among women and men, while reserving the particular full relationships of authority to those specified in Scripture, [viz. in](#) the home and the believing community.

## Conclusion

That we are male and female in the image of God says much about God's purposes with us, his human creatures. We are created to reflect his own nature so that we may represent

in our dealings with others and over the world he has made. Our goal is to fulfill his will and obey his word. Yet, to accomplish this he has established a framework of relationship. Male and female, while equally equal as the image of God, are nonetheless distinct in the manner of their possession of the image of God. The female's becoming the image of God through the male indicates a God-tended sense of her reliance upon him, as particularly manifest in the home and community of faith. And yet, all of us should seek through our relationships to work together in accomplishing the purposes God gives us to do. We face in this doctrine the dual truths that we are called to *be* both individually and in relationship what God intends us to be, so that we may do what honors him and fulfills his will. Divine representations who, in relationship with God and others, represent God and carry out their God-appointed responsibilities - this, in the end, is the vision that must be sought by male and female in the image of God if they are to fulfill their created purpose. May we see God's good and wise design of manhood and womanhood understood and lived out more fully so that God's purposes in and through us, his created images, might be accomplished - for our good, by his grace, and for his glory.

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Anthony A. Hoekema, *Created in God's Image* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986).

*ibid.*, 69. <sup>2</sup>*ibid.*, 95. "Clines, "Image of God in Man."

Over thirty times in John's Gospel are we told that Jesus was sent into this world to carry out the will of the Father who sent him. See, e.g., John 4:34; 5:23, 30, 37; 6:37-38, 57; and 12:49.

See Rick Hove, *Equality in Christ: Galatians 3:28 and the Gender Debate* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1999).

When I speak in this section of the "priority" of the male in God's creation of male and female equally as his image bearers, readers

should understand that I do not intend to communicate any sense of greater value, dignity, worth, human personhood, or sharing in the image of God that the male possesses over the female; in fact, the preceding section should make clear that I believe Scripture clearly teaches the complete equality of female with male as being bearers of the image of God. As will become clear, just as children become fully and equally image of God through the God-ordained reproductive expression of their parents, so the woman who becomes the image of God second, and she does so fully and equally to the image of God in Adam, although she is deliberately formed by God as the image of God from Adam's rib, not from the dust of the ground as was Adam. "As will be seen below, while both of these texts stress the temporal priority of the creation of the male, they are not identical in how they state this historical reality, and an interesting difference can be noted in the wording used in these verses, respectively.

"This is not to say that, in principle, God could not have created female differently, perhaps independently from the male, and perhaps even as created first and existing (for a time, anyway) without the male. But the point is that this is not how God actually did create woman. Rather, he formed her as she is *from* the man (Gen. 2:23; 1 Cor. 11:8), and this is signified by the use of the masculine generic term '**adam**' in Gen. 5:2.

"See Vem S. Poythress and Wayne A. Grudem, *The Gender-Neutral Bible Controversy: Muting the Masculinity of God's Words* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 2000).

<sup>2</sup>See Hans Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians: a Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians*, trans. J. W. Leitch, Hermeneia Series (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975).

<sup>2</sup>Dallas Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1988).