

There are a number of goals I hope to achieve through this series of sermons. The title, "In His Image" is taken from Genesis 1:26, "**Then God said, 'Let us make man in our image, according to our likeness.'**" The overall theme is based on this verse and this should be regarded as God's mission or purpose statement. Everything that subsequently transpires in the biblical account is devoted to God's purpose of creating human beings in His image. Rather than regarding the first humans, as already in God's image, I will argue this is a process that unfolds over the centuries with the critical role of achieving God's purpose being carried out by God Himself. It is His desire to not only make us in His image, but also to share the same type of eternal existence that Father, Son and Holy Spirit enjoy with one another. It is, at times, a painful yet fascinating story, not only for humanity, but also for God.

Another goal I hope to achieve is to change one's impression of God. It's popular in today's world for God to get a bad rap. Questions about a supposedly good God who allows horrifying evil is a common question that has puzzled both theologians and philosophers for centuries. We will at least look at this difficult question although we may not get a completely satisfactory answer.

Another misconception of God is the unfortunate way some Christians have come to portray God. He has come to be regarded as the great arbitrary judge somewhere off in heaven that determines our eternal existence based on our "good" or "bad" works. In this scenario, the good go "up" and the bad go "down." The fear of hell is used as the motivating factor in shaping behaviour. Some Reformation theologians didn't help matters either with their theory of predestination. This theory divided humanity into two groups, those predestined by God to go to heaven, while the second group, also predestined by God, go to hell. Neither group had any say in how this was determined and they could live their lives as they chose as God Himself had predestined this decision. Of course this theory didn't portray God's nature in the most flattering terms either, but has led to Him being regarded as an arbitrary and capricious tyrant. Again, these theories have done great damage to God's reputation as well as to Christianity in general. However, as we shall see, the nature of the true God of Christians, rather than wanting to dispense any to hell, has gone to extreme measures to include all in His grand purpose of sharing His heavenly existence with all. God may well be our judge, but He is also our Savior, a Savior who didn't confine Himself to save us from the safety of heaven, but chose instead to join us in our fallen state here on earth.

Well meaning Christians have not helped themselves either when they try to aggressively impose their beliefs on non-Christians, especially when they lead with frightening scenarios of eternal hellfire. Jesus Himself said, "**For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him**"(John 3:17). Society might hold Christians in higher regard if we followed Jesus' approach and let them know they have a Savior who is hell-bent on saving them rather than condemning them to eternal hellfire (if there is such a thing).

Back to God's mission of making us in His image. The question of our human existence is another one of those philosophical questions that have challenged mankind since the beginning of human consciousness. Theories abound as to "why" we are here. Is this life all there is, or as Emil Brunner put it, "*Are we more than just carbon based parasites infesting the surface of the globe hemmed in by birth and death?*" Or do we dare listen to that hope buried deep in our souls that there has to be a higher purpose for this earthly experience? Do we really live in an uncaring universe or as Sam asked Frodo on their trek to Mordor, "I wonder what sort of tale we've fallen into?" Christians dare to believe there is a higher purpose even though at times we too are consumed with doubt and confusion especially in the midst of life's difficulties. This belief goes back to God's statement, "Let us make man in our image!" Any theory to address this difficult question of our existence has to take into account the complex and perplexing environment we earthlings find ourselves in, and present plausible answers that satisfy the criteria. We will make the bold statement: the Christian perspective provides the best answers to these big questions of life. It presents answers to both the "Who" and the "Why." We do live in a caring universe and all the joys and sorrows, pain and pleasure, good and evil, living and dying we experience count for something they will not be wasted. God will see to that. There is a purpose to it all.

My hope is by the end of this series that we will have a more accurate and positive concept of God's true nature rather than the negative impression one gets as a result of the misconceptions mentioned above. Far from being the God who is far removed from us, or one to be held in dread, we will find He is a loving God who is intimately involved in the life of every human being. So determined is He to share eternity with each of us, He willingly left His glory in heaven, entered humanity and offered Himself in the place of sinful humanity to satisfy the justice of God. The result of this act of grace means the death penalty for our sins has already been paid. God no longer holds us guilty, but pardoned sinners. That ought to be good news for us all, and that is what the word "gospel" means, "good news." My hope is that you will also come to regard the Christian story as "good news."

As we all approach a subject from our own unique perspective, I should mention a number of points that have shaped my approach to the subject.

1. Reading the Bible from beginning to end can be a daunting project especially when we run into lengthy sections that don't seem to contribute too much to the overall scheme of things. My hope is this series will provide a context that will draw the various aspects of the biblical story together and in the process give us a better understanding of *the tale we have fallen into*.
2. I have chosen to use a chronological approach for the sake of simplicity. The story of salvation begins long before the Garden of Eden, and these developments are crucial to understanding the context in which we humans find ourselves. So the story begins with God and traces the steps He has initiated in carrying out His purpose of creating us in His image. The story ends with humanity joining God in eternity, although by that stage we will have a completely different and vastly improved nature to the one we presently have.
3. There was a special emphasis on the Old and New Covenants as I grew up in a church community that had a distorted perspective of God and His Law. This led to a performance mentality similar to the one mentioned above where the good go "up" and the bad go "down" depending on their deeds. As we work through the material, we will replace this performance mentality with the refreshing and liberating truth that God accepts us not on our performance, but rather on Christ's performance on our behalf. This simple statement completely changes our distorted impressions of God and His true nature. This truth is what it means to receive God's grace.
4. As expected, this series of sermons is based on what Christians believe to be the inspired word of God, the Holy Bible. Quotes are extensive and come from the New International Version unless otherwise noted.
5. Other source material for this project has come from respected Christian scholars as well as university professors who teach for the Great Courses and Recorded Books programs. For those who wish to pursue a deeper study of the various subjects mentioned in this work, I highly recommend these sources. I also gratefully acknowledge their significant contributions to this project. The source list follows.

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