

Here at Elfinwild, you know me as a choir singer, elder, and Sunday School Teacher, but during the week I am the Executive Director and spokeswoman for a national non-profit organization called Presbyterians Pro-Life—a ministry for the whole Presbyterian and Reformed family of churches, that addresses the needs of those struggling with issues surrounding pregnancy, and equipping congregations for ministry at that point of need and the needs of individuals and families at the end of life. IN that context I have spent a good deal of time studying what the Scriptures teach of human life.

“Image is Everything.” Image is more than just a popular name for hair salons, it is a message you hear continually in overt and subtle ways in today’s culture. Slogans like “Dress for Success”, magazine articles giving 10 tips for looking your best, your mother’s voice in your head saying “put your best foot forward” . . . “Image is everything” pressures us from everywhere.

Businesses and even churches are bombarded by advertising messages about the importance of “packaging”, “branding”, and “marketing” your organization. Individuals seeking employment are warned first impressions are lasting: body language, dress, and even the persona you project on social media such as Facebook or Twitter can make or break your ability to land a job.

If you shed the cultural meaning of the phrase for a moment and consider the phrase in the light of scripture, you will find **it is true!** *Image is Everything*. The Bible reports that God lovingly pursues human kind. His love begins with you being created in God’s ‘image’ and that has stunning impact for the Christian church [brief pause] or especially in a society that freely aborts its children and where an increasing number of states are legalizing physician assisted suicide.

Genesis 1:26-27

26 Then God said,

“Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. 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.”

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

The teaching is clear. We are created in the *image* of God! You bear the *imago dei*. It is more than a manufacturing stamp like “made in China”. Instead it is more like “she has your eyes” or “he has your jaw” — family resemblance.

Roland and I have two grandsons, Joel Evan is almost 2 years old, and lives in the Lancaster area and Ransom Idris Jeriah Bowen, who is just one month old, lives with his parents in our home. When I saw sonogram pictures of both of these boys—months before I saw them in the flesh—I could see family characteristics in their features. For better or worse, they bear the likeness of their parents and grandparents on both sides of the family. Ransom already has long fingers and feet like his Uncle Derek and that makes us think he will be at least 6’ tall like his four great grandpas. Our toddler, Joel, exhibits a fierce independence, a voracious curiosity, a love of all things outdoors and without giving away too many family secrets, we can identify that he shares the traits and behaviors of others in our family.

Since God is the Creator of human life, all human beings belong to God. We bear the *imago dei*—the image of God—you are owned by God. We are his. Being created by God both *elevates* human beings, in that we are not accidents of history, and *humbles* us because God is gracious and sovereign over us.

The apostle Paul said this to the philosophers in Athens:

Acts 17:28

“In [God] we live and move and have our being; as even some of your own poets have said, ‘For we are indeed his offspring’”

Because humans bear the image of God you are set apart from other created beings. After the flood, God’s covenant with Noah specified that while animals may be killed for human sustenance,--human beings may not murder other human beings.

Genesis 9:6

“Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed, for God made man in his own image”

Even before homicide was forbidden by a direct command not to murder...

Exodus 20:13

13 “You shall not murder.”

... unjustifiable killing violated the special dignity vested in human beings by God himself.

These twin principals: that we are created in God’s image and that we are prohibited from taking human life, form the foundation of the doctrine of the sanctity, or sacredness, of every human life.

Not only is human life precious to God but he is an intimate part of our lives from fertilization until natural death.

[Psalm 139](#) speaks powerfully to the nature of unborn human life and God’s activity with us before we are born.

Psalm 139

“For you formed my inward parts; you knitted me together in my mother’s womb.”

David exults in that God knows everything about him and (as Bethany spoke about last Sunday) God is always present no matter where David goes—even when he was hidden in his mother’s womb ([Ps. 139:1–12](#)).

In [verse 13](#) he celebrates God's intricate involvement in his own fetal development: "For you formed my inward parts; you knitted me together in my mother's womb."

The word *kilyah* is used to refer to the "inward parts" (lit., kidneys).

In Hebrew poetry the inward parts were typically the seat of the emotions, the place where the conscience exists ([Ps. 16:7](#)), and where deep spiritual distress can be felt ([Ps. 73:21](#))

God formed David's deepest being—body, soul, and spirit. He wove him, or colorfully embroidered him, in his mother's womb, so he was "fearfully and wonderfully made" ([Ps. 139:14](#))

In [verse 16](#) the psalmist refers to his "unformed substance" being observed by God. David suggests that God's knowledge of him reached even to his earliest development *in utero*.

God has known us from the moment of our fertilization and he has also purposed the day of our death. When we choose death for another human being (be it through abortion, assisted suicide, gun violence, or the destruction of embryos in a test tube) we take something that belongs to God—a living person who bears God's own image—we take within our own hands a dominion we are not given. It is a theft and a violence against God.

We are created in the image and likeness of God. We are created to be God's children, members of his family. That truth gives us value, but it also gives us a responsibility. **We are meant to reflect God's image to the world.**

It is more than a physical resemblance because we do not all look alike on the outside—the outside is what the world means when it says "Image is everything" but scripture admonishes us that God looks on the heart and it is our inside that bears God's image—but wait—God is all-knowing and wise, God is always faithful and full of truth, God is good, merciful, loving, kind, *and holy*-- we are not at all like God on the inside so what has happened to God's image in us?

In a word, SIN—Sin mars and obscures God's image in us. God's image in us is broken and distorted and clouded by sin. For that reason Christ came—fully human and fully divine--to redeem God's image in us and to

restore us to the family as adopted sons and daughters. Conceived by the Holy Spirit in the womb of a woman, Christ's birth, life and ministry, death, and resurrection were all purposed to redeem every stage of our human development and restore God's image in us. Jesus, as the only begotten Son of God, bears His Father's exact image. We read this morning, Colossians 1: 15-20 that **"He is the image of the invisible God...in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell."**

Hebrews 1:3

He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power. . .

One of the most damaging results when a church condones abortion or is silent about it is that we **ignore the truth that Jesus came as an embryo** and that reduces our understanding of how Christ is redeeming the image of God that is marred by sin.

When God the Son, took on human flesh, He began the work of sanctifying humanity. It is significant that Jesus' conception in the womb of Mary is recorded. The church affirms in the Apostles' Creed that he was "conceived by the Holy Spirit" and "born of the Virgin Mary."

In Jesus we see both perfect God and real humanity. Like every other member of the human race, *Jesus was once a human embryo.*

Thomas Torrance, the late Oxford theologian, has written a wonderful little booklet about the being and nature of the unborn child in which he says that **"Jesus became our brother as an embryo** in the womb of Mary."

"As he [Jesus] became a human being for us, in the womb of the Virgin Mary, lived and died on the Cross and rose again for our redemption, so I believe, we must think of its importance for our understanding of and regard for the unborn child, everyone of whom has been brothered by the Lord Jesus."

He underscores the importance of this for the way we see every unborn child:

“In becoming a human being for us, he also became an embryo for the sake of all embryos, and for our Christian understanding of the being, nature and status in God’s eyes of the unborn child in his/her body and soul.”

“To take no thought or proper thought for the unborn child is to have no proper thought of Jesus himself as our Lord and Savior or to appreciate his relation as the incarnate Creator to every human being.”

That is the danger in our own Presbyterian denomination which condones abortion as a “morally acceptable” decision of a woman in certain circumstances. It closes our minds to a full understanding of our relationship with Jesus The “Incarnate Creator.”

The Incarnate Creator who was alive and at work while he was in the womb of Mary. Luke (a physician) points to the personhood of the fetus when he observes that the unborn John the Baptist “leaped for joy” in his mother’s womb when Elizabeth came into the presence of Mary, who was pregnant with Jesus at the time ([Luke 1:44](#)).

Why is understanding Jesus in the womb so important? Because without the work of Christ to redeem God’s image in us that has been distorted by sin, we cannot fulfill the purpose for which we are created. The ESV Study Bible in describing human kind says “Human beings are intended to live as God’s *created analogy* for his own glory.” Scripture underscores that purpose:

In **Isaiah 43:7** God describes the people of Israel as those “whom I created for my glory, whom I formed and made.”

In **Eph. 1:11-12** Paul writes of those who hope in Christ as being “to the praise of his glory.”

And in our Presbyterian book of confessions we declare that our primary purpose for being is “to glorify God and enjoy him forever.”

On our own we cannot reflect the image of God and we can do nothing to bring glory to God. **Romans 3:23** echoes what we know of ourselves: “For all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God.”

What then is the remedy? How can the image of God be restored in you? Paul tells us in 2 Corinthians chapter 3. If during the giving of the law to Moses there was so much glory that he had to wear a veil to cover his face so the Israelites could look on him, will there not be more glory under the ministry of the Spirit, he asks? Moses wore a veil so that the Israelites who were lawbreakers, would not see the fading glory of God. Both the veil over their hearts and the veil of our sin that mars God's image in us can only be lifted by Christ.

Paul uses vivid imagery in verse 18 as he proclaims the good news that Christ redeems God's image in humankind:

"And we all with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another."

How did he do it? **Romans 8:3** tells us,

"By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh."

Philippians 2:6-8 tells us the extremity of God's reach for us through the work of Christ:

"though he was in the form of God, [he] did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men, And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross."

This gives us a glimpse into what it means to *know* Christ, as Paul writes to the Philippians (2:12) "becoming like him in his *suffering and death*." Jesus, knowing that "image is everything" took on your image and became a human being—took on your death penalty and mine—He died so that you may take on his image and live!

Isaiah 46: 3-4

"Listen to me [you] who have been borne by me from before your birth, carried from the womb; even to your old age I am he, and to gray hairs I will carry you. I have made, and I will bear; I will carry and will save."

The same God who creates us in the womb carries us at the end of our lives. The same God who is active in forming you into his likeness in the womb of your mother, is active now forming you into the image of Christ and He will be active at the end of your life forming you to be birthed into eternity. We ought not to cut short our days on this earth, even when there is suffering, because God is doing something in us and through us in that hour—it is a sacred activity—a formation for his glory.

There is great comfort in knowing that we will spend eternity with the One who has been with us our whole lives as Creator, as Savior, —as family.

Romans 6:5

“For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his.”

And, **according to I John 3:2**, when we see Him we shall be like the One whose image we bear.

“Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is.”

“Image” —His image in you — IS *everything!*

Blessing:

In our culture the spiritual battle is fierce for the *imago dei*—the image of God in human kind. The unborn child is hidden for a time in the womb—but also sanctified *in the womb* by our Lord Jesus Christ. In a similar way Jesus is right now ‘hidden from our sight for a time’ and yet we believe in the promise of His soon coming. In the meantime we are His image bearers to a lost and hurting world and we are meant to reflect his glory, his love, his grace, *his image* to everyone we meet!

So go this week with unveiled faces and by the power of the Holy Spirit within you, reflect the glorious image of the Father and the Son.