

Conformed to the image of Christ

"For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of His Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren" (Romans 8:29).

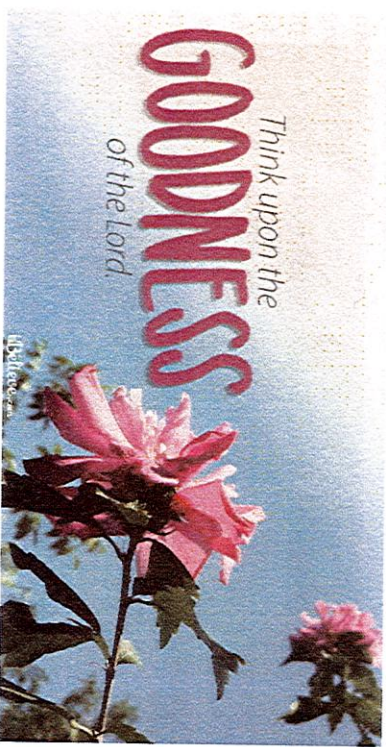
GOD HAS A PLAN. THROUGH JESUS CHRIST, GOD IS COMPLETING the forming of His image in us. Our sins and barriers to God are removed through forgiveness as a result of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. We can then stand clean and be made just (justified) before God and He can give us His Holy Spirit. This could not happen before our sins had been removed and forgiven. This is why the Holy Spirit could only be given after Jesus Christ's sacrificial death (John 16:7).

In the Old Testament period God let people experience life without His Holy Spirit. This made clear that we need God's help and Spirit to overcome sin and live at peace with each other. We should *"not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God"* (Romans 12:2).

How are you
serving
others?

We are to have the same mind as Jesus (Philippians 2:5) and love others as He did. Do towards them what is the best for them in the long run. Give them hope and encouragement. This is the new commandment (John 13:34-35): that it is not enough to love your neighbor as yourself, but to love your neighbor as Jesus loves. This is very different from the Old Testament command.

Jesus came for a number of reasons, but one was to show us how to be the image of God. He was our example in being God's image. □



Be perfect as God is perfect

This verse has caused problems for many, because we all recognize that we are not perfect. In Romans chapter 7 Paul describes the internal war in our minds and bodies between what we want to do and what we know we should do.

THE GREEK WORD TRANSLATED "PERFECT" IN MATTHEW 6:48 IS "teleios", which has many meanings. "Perfect" is one of them but "complete" is another that fits the context better. We are all on a journey where God is shaping and forming our character to become more like that of Jesus Christ (Colossians 3:10).

Since mankind is the image of God, man is holy as He is holy. It is a part of our calling to be holy. The Hebrew and Greek words for "holy" originate from a word meaning "clean, pure". We are to be undefiled, free of idolatry and other unclean and profane things. In 1. Peter 1:15-16, God tells us: "But just as He who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written, Be holy; because I am holy." This is a quote from Leviticus 11:44. You are to be holy (clean and pure). The other understanding for holy is to be separated for a specific purpose. God's holiness expresses His divine perfection.

Adam was not created complete. He did not have the Holy Spirit of God. He decided to go his own way and experience

*Show a little kindness
every single day.
Always give help to
others, who seem to
have lost their way.
Just a little show of*

*kindness may be enough
to get them through. For
that person that is lost,
one day might be you.*

John F. Connor

the difference between good and evil. We have seen the result of this decision ever since, in the form of human suffering, throughout history. It is not until God's Holy Spirit has molded and formed our character to be like His, that we can truly be the image of God. Man was created incomplete and the history of man is a record of his journey to become God's image.

Man was created for a special purpose, to develop the character of God and be given eternal life, living and ruling with God in His eternal kingdom. This life is the training ground for the development of God's character and learning the difference between good and evil. The whole Creation is waiting for God's eternal sons and daughters to be revealed (Romans 8:22). The Creation, including mankind, was made for this purpose only: to prepare the image of God—the children of God—for their eternal responsibilities. □



The image of God does not have eternal life—yet

When God created Man in His image He gave Man the breath of life (Genesis 2:7). Some scholars say that it wasn't just physical life that God breathed into Adam, but also God's eternal Spirit, giving Adam an immortal soul.

THIS IS NOT CONSISTENT WITH GENESIS 3:22-23, WHERE GOD SAVES to the angelic court that He had to tempt Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden after they had sinned, or else they could take of the tree of Life, symbolizing the Holy Spirit, and thereby have eternal life. Adam was created incomplete, lacking God's Holy Spirit. In Ephesians 1:14, the Holy Spirit is called God's guarantee (Greek "first down payment") of eternal life. It is first when we have repented and accepted Jesus as our Savior and surrendered our lives to God and His will, that God will give us His Holy Spirit, a part of His own Life. The rest He will give us after our resurrection from the dead.

But God did give Adam a spirit which the Bible calls the "spirit in man" (Job 32:8; 1 Corinthians 2:11) and which some call a "soul". But the correct meaning of the word "soul" is a living being and even animals have souls since they are called living beings (Genesis 1:20, 24).

Man being the image of God also describes his eternal destiny, being God's eternal image in God's eternal kingdom. But this eternal life was not given at creation, because Adam did not take of the Tree of Life that God offered. Eternal life is a gift (Rom. 6:23). No human has in himself an immortal soul, but will be given eternal life as a gift if he believes in and accepts the name of Jesus (Romans 6:23, John 1:12; 3:16). □



*... but the gift of God
is eternal life in Christ
Jesus our Lord.*

Romans 6:23

*Yet to all who did receive him,
to those who believed in his
name, he gave the right to
become children of God.*

John 1:12

*For God so loved the world
that he gave his one and only
Son, that whoever believes in
him shall not perish but have
everlasting life.*

John 3:16

The image of Christ by Dietrich Bonhoeffer



The German Lutheran theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1906-1945) was willing to serve his people in Germany during the Nazi rule, even though his friends pleaded with him to either come to the United States or go to England. He was imprisoned in 1943 and executed just days before the end of the war in April 1945.

DIETRICH BONHOEFFER WROTE SEVERAL BOOKS; AMONG THESE IS *The Cost of Discipleship*, written in 1937, where he discusses the image of Christ. The following are excerpts from this book.

"Whom he foreknew, he also foreordained to be conformed to the image of His Son" (Romans 8:29). Here is a promise which passes all understanding. Those who follow Christ are destined to bear His image and become brethren of the

firstborn Son of God. Their goal is to become "as Christ". Christ's followers always have His image before their eyes; it penetrates into the depths of their being, fills them and makes them more and more like their Master.

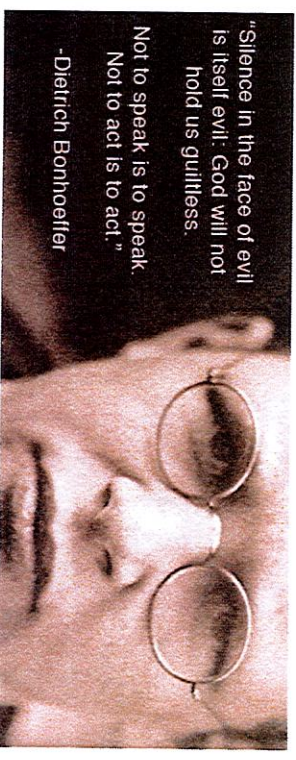
"God created Adam in His own image, the climax of creation. He desired to have the joy of beholding in Adam the reflection of Himself. This is the paradox of man; he is created and yet destined to be like his Creator. But Satan persuaded Adam that he must do something himself to become like God, that he must achieve that likeness by deciding and acting for himself. This misshapen form, modeled after the "god" man has invented for himself, grows more and more like the image of Satan, though mankind is unaware of it.

"Since fallen mankind cannot rediscover and assimilate the form of God, the only way is for God to take the form of man and come to him. The divine image which had existed from eternity with God, assumes the image of fallen, sinful man. God sends His Son in the likeness of sinful flesh (Romans 8:2) and herein lies the only remedy. The image of God has entered our midst, in the form of our fallen life, in the likeness of sinful flesh. In the teachings and acts of Christ, in His life and His death, the image of God is revealed. In Him, the divine image has been recreated on earth. The incarnation, the words and acts of Jesus, His death on the cross, are all indispensable parts of that image. He has become like a man, so that men should be like him. We cannot transform ourselves into His image (only God can transform us through His Holy Spirit)." □

"Silence in the face of evil is itself evil: God will not hold us guiltless.

Not to speak is to speak. Not to act is to act."

-Dietrich Bonhoeffer



Salvation and a reward

Man was the crown of God's creation and made in His image. Man was to be God's reflection and His representative, to take care of life on earth.

GOD HAD A PLAN AND ETERNAL PURPOSE FOR MANKIND. GOD allowed the angel rebellion and evil to come into the universe for a purpose, so that Man could see the difference between good and evil. Angels were created in an eternal relationship with God. They had not known or experienced evil prior to being given eternal life, while we have in this physical and temporary existence. Man was created with free will and was to learn the difference between good and evil. Man was to develop character in his battle with evil and then to acknowledge that God's ways are best

**"Live in harmony with one another.
Do not be proud but enjoy the
company of the lowly.**

Romans 12:16



and to surrender to God and be transformed in the image of Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit.
The whole creation is groaning for the day the children of God will be revealed in their eternal glory (Romans 8:22). Man is offered salvation, eternal life, as a gift. There is nothing we can do to earn such a great gift. In our eternal life, our role as the image of God will be completely fulfilled.

But there is also a reward to be given to the eternal children of God. Several parables of Jesus help us to understand the difference between salvation as a gift and the reward. The reward is based on how faithful we are in using the Holy Spirit and doing God's will. We should not serve others looking for a reward, we are to express God's love to our fellow man because we love God and our fellow man. This attitude and practice will be the basis for our reward, not our desire for a reward or for power. If we are faithful with what God has given us now, His reward will be so much more as a reward in eternity.

God's plan for mankind is that we should have eternal life with Jesus Christ. But we can never hold the same position as Jesus Christ, since He is the elder brother. God's plan is that man will be God's special children and have a different role than the angels in His eternal kingdom (Hebrews 2:5), since Man—unlike them—had to go through a life of testing and development of Godlike character. God's plan and precious promise is that man might finally be the complete image of God and partakers of the divine nature in eternal life (2 Peter 1:4). Jesus Christ is preparing a place and responsibilities for you at this very moment (John 14:1). □



The perfection of the image of God

Creating Man in the image of God, not only defined Man's identity at the creation, but also after he received the Holy Spirit, even for eternity. "The image of God is not only a definition of humanity, but also a description of its destiny" (Henriksen). God created man incomplete. Our character has to develop with the help of the Holy Spirit through life's experiences and gradually become the image of God.

IN 2 PETER 1:3-11 GOD GIVES US PRECIOUS PROMISES, THAT WE MIGHT partake in the divine nature and truly be the image of God: "His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by His own glory and goodness. Through these He has given us His very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires.

For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness, and to goodness, knowledge, and to knowledge, self-control, and to self-control, perseverance, and to perseverance, godliness; and to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, love. For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ."

Therefore, my brothers, be all the more eager to make your calling and election sure. For if you do these things, you will never fail, and you will receive a rich welcome into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ". □

To be created in the image of God means:

- God has called us into a very special relationship with Him
- God has called us to be His representatives to the rest of His creation.
- God has called us to rule and be stewards of His creation
- God has called us to reproduce
- Being the image of God gives man his identity, his dignity, and authority to rule.