

Bearers of God's Image- What Does It Mean?

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Integration Question: *How is our pastoral care of people determined by the conviction that they are image-bearers of God?*

Theological Statement

Genesis 1-3 is the interwoven tune of the Bible that Scripture seems to constantly be in dialoging with. At the climax of forming and ordering, God created humans in His image in His image and His likeness (Gen. 1:27-28). It was not the birds of the air, fish of the sea, land animals, or plants that were created in God's own image, but humans. This fact alone is why humans are so important to God's plan. The first aspect of being made in God's image is the fact that all humans have spiritual substance, a soul. While some people are unable to exercise the capacities of their soul, such as those who suffer from mental disabilities and, and other people willingly choose not to exercise the capacities of their soul, such as those who reject the reality of their spiritual design, it does not negate that fact that all humans are God's prized possession and share a unique quality with the Father that no other part of creation shares. Bearing God's image is not something to be gained, but rather, it is an intrinsic aspect of who we are. The second aspect of bearing God's image ties directly into this first point- we are created with spiritual substance in order to experience a loving relationship with the Triune God and others. When God made humans, He said "Let us make mankind in our own image and our likeness..." (Gen. 1:26). God the Father, living in a loving relationship with God the Son and God the Spirit, made male and females so that they could live in spiritual oneness with the Triune God as well as emulate that love to others. One of Jesus' last prayers recorded in Scripture is His desire for humans to become one with God and one another just as He is one with the Father (John 17). Jesus believed that His death proved a victory over the evil one, breaking the chains of the slavery that kept humanity from experiencing oneness with Him (Rom. 6).

The third aspect of bearing God's image is directly correlated to the mandate for humanity to rule and have dominion over the rest of creation. The author of Genesis reveals that God created humans in His image so that they could "rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over the cattle and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth" (Gen. 1:26). Again, it is reemphasized in the following verses, calling humans, who are all made in God's image, to "be fruitful, multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and to have dominion over" it (Gen. 1:27-28). Bearing God's image is associated with exercising God's authority. In other words, bearing God's image means we are managing creation and acting as His viceregents. This view also helps to explain why God had to become a human, for God gave humans the authority over the earth, which we forfeited when we decided not to rule and reign from His wisdom and guidance. Jesus was the first person who rightfully reclaimed God's rule in the world, and through faith in Him that allows us to be indwelt with His very life and Spirit, we are all restored to the original role God gave us (Rev. 5:10).

Ministry Application

Pastoral care for people is directly related to the fact that every human is an image bearer of God, meaning, we all are created with a soul, can live in an unblemished relationship with the Triune God, and have a purpose to co-rule creation with the Creator. In actuality, every follower of Jesus should talk to, interact with, and treat other humans as someone who is worthy of King Jesus' very life, not just a pastor. As far as pastoral care goes, viewing every human as God's image bearer means every single person has value. When someone who is thinking about hurting themselves reaches out to a pastor for help, that pastor can be 100% confident to dissuade that individual from harming themselves based on the pure fact that person has innate value and worth. Or, when someone who feels they have too much of an ugly past to have any worth in

God's eyes, a pastor must lead the charge in reminding that individual that because they are a human, they have been created in God's image, and intrinsically, have infinite worth in this world. A helpful perspective to share with these kind of individuals is that the King and Creator of the universe saw it important enough to become human and allow Himself to be murdered for that single person.

Another important aspect of pastoral care that is derived from bearing God's image is that no person can experience life to the fullest unless they are partaking in advance His kingdom as ambassadors of the King and living in oneness with Him. Practically, when people seek pastoral counseling on which job to take, where to move their family to, how to spend their free time and money, a pastor must always point their people to make decisions based on what allows them to live out their true design as citizens of God's kingdom who are called to always live in intimate relationship with Him. For example, for the person who is praying through which career job to take, a pastor should have them reflect on which job will allow them to live in a closer relationship with God, and which one will allow them to radiate God's love to others more. This can likely intersect their giftings and passions, which is a good thing as long as they are ultimately obedient to Holy Spirit's leading. If people make any decision without their image bearing identity as the foundation, such as making their income or position/title a priority, they will inevitably end up empty, unsatisfied, and seeking the next "thing". While other factors, such as pay, are not inherently wrong, they must never become the foundational aspect of decision-making if a follower of Jesus actually want to experience what bearing God's image truly means. Some people make three quarters less than their peers because they chose a job that will allow them to spend more time leading company Bible studies and interact with people in recovery

homes who do not interact with many Christians. As a result, they are way more joyful in life because they are living in the innate aspect bearing God's image in this world.