Reclaiming Self: An Augustinian Understanding of the Importance and Power of the *imago Dei.*

by

Santino Cantalupo

Duke University

Date: 4/12/2021

Approved:

Dr. Warren Smith, 1st Reader

Dr. Curtis Freeman, 2nd Reader

Dr. Will Willamon, D.Min. Director

Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Ministry in the Divinity School of Duke University

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Abstract

The following work explores identity from overlapping vantage points; biblical/theological, historical and practical to establish a robust understanding of identity in our present time. This thesis explores the ontological elements of God and the meaning of “image bearer” through Scripture in Genesis 1-2; Psalm 8; an overview of Wisdom Literature in Job and Ecclesiastes; and the New Testament in Ephesians and Colossians. From a historical view, this thesis focuses on the work of St. Augustine and how humanity was “naturally created” in the imago Dei. Even those that are not Christ followers share in the imago Dei, as hidden as it may be, to be discovered and set free. Through this process, we see holiness (in contradistinction to morality) as foundational to our existence and reflective of God. Holiness is expressed through love in its proper order. For Augustine, our love of God conditions our love for all other things. This establishes an objective starting point, fundamental to all Christians, a proper understanding and embodiment of the Great Commandment. Finally, by practically applying a fresh understanding of one’s identity, humanity has an opportunity to thrive by acknowledging the positive implications of the embracing and embodiment of the imago Dei.

The primary methodology of this thesis is through interpreting Scripture in light of the question, “what does it mean to be created in the imago Dei?” Using the work of the early Church Fathers such as Ambrose and Augustine give interpretive grounding to passages in both Old and New Testaments. Reading both primary and secondary sources on the
imago Dei and its impact upon humankind and specifically the Church. Lastly, incorporating and integrating the work of modern psychology in understanding the modern person in light of the creative work of God in the beginning to our current day.
Dedication

To my wife, Jennifer, *nos equitare aut mori*, and our five amazing children, Isabella, Giovanni, Liliana, Abriella & Juliana. I made a commitment to make you proud again! You have all given me the joy to complete this work and to never lose sight of the goal. It is your love and faithfulness that points me to God. I see God’s image reflected uniquely in each of you and that inspiration has been the foundation of this writing. Lastly, to every person who feels dejected, rejected, thrown out, used, abused and abandoned by family or the church, God loves YOU. No matter where you are, what you’ve done or where you’ve been, God wants you to know how much he loves you. You have *eternal worth* because you are created in the *imago Dei*. 
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Chapter 1. The Question of Image

Where does one find identity? Is it made, created, stumbled upon or bestowed upon a person by society at large? More specifically, where does a Christian find their identity? Through Scripture, by their friends at church or by going to a Christian school or college? The world is brimming with “identities” that are available to take, buy, claim or change with little to no effort. Being a “Christian” is one of many labels and identities presented in society today, with a buffet of choices when it comes to identity. This identity explosion has impacted all areas of life, whether secular or religious, and American Christians seem more than willing to incorporate the newest trendy identity into their daily lives. Sociologist Alan Wolfe writes, with damming praise, “in every aspect of religious life, American faith has met American culture and American culture has triumphed.”¹ This unfortunate tendency for American Christianity to acquiesce to culture creates a syncretic identity that was never intended for people in general. Not only is it wrong for Christians, but it is against the very nature created inside of all humankind to try and cobble together substitute identities. It should not be overly surprising since the “identities” of the world are easily assumed and swapped, informed by a consumer driven culture that tells people “more” is always the answer. How does one understand what it means to be “Christian” in a world driven by excess and a few clicks? How does one make reasonable, relational connections with people when their connections are based on the fleeting feelings of the day and not grounded in something with a firm foundation? In

America today, individuals are presented with “identities” which run the gamut from traditional workplace and socio-economic roles to roles based on sexuality, race, gender, age and religion. These “identities” available for consumption are more diverse than ever before and are creating a false sense of being and community. Further, the issue of identity is confused when one follows the cleverly crafted ideology that a person must “love self” first to be able to love others. By loving self-first, society has blessed the idolatrous twist of Mark 12:29-31. Jesus tells a teacher of the Law that the greatest commandment is to first love God with every part of one’s being. The second, to love your neighbor as yourself! The idolatrous twist here that is supported by society is that one cannot love anything unless one loves themselves first! Yet, this is the opposite of what Christ calls all people to, love God with all of your heart, soul, mind and strength and allow that love to inform everything else. This work will explore the danger inherent in loving the creation over the Creator, the reflection over the image and the broken before the divine. This thesis will explore how a person’s identity is based on the proper reclamation of self by understanding a person is not the totality of what we “do” or what has been achieved but is the embodiment of being created in the image of God, the imago Dei and the salvific work of Jesus Christ.

2 “Jesus answered, ‘The first is, Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one; you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.’ The second is this, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no other commandment greater than these.”
The Identity Problem

Beyond the American dream, the world is filled with a myriad of images and identities from which a person can pick and choose to be consumed at will. Consumerism has become the new god of the world, compelling humankind to serve at its altar to receive the newest and greatest comforts. In itself, consumerism is amoral, it is a required process of human existence, to consume to survive. As Ann Fritschel notes, regarding the benign appearance of consumerism, “consumerism serves the basic human needs of providing happiness, fulfillment, meaning, and personal identity.” Through this inherent, basic need, grows a disproportionate wildfire of desire which aims to consume everything possible. This desire to consume is not purely a Christian problem, not uniquely an American problem but something that has been plaguing humankind since Adam & Eve desired to consume the one thing they could not have (Genesis 3:6).

While consumerism is a problem for all of humankind, the focus of this work is the impact on the American Evangelical Christian. It will serve the reader to clarify and define the term “evangelical” as it will be used widely throughout this work. Further, this researcher comes from an American Evangelical Church, having served in a mega-church for over 10 years in what was considered a “mainstream evangelical” church. The British historian David Bebbington has developed four points which succinctly capture what it means to be “evangelical.” These evangelical distinctions are first, biblicism, a devotion

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to the Bible as God’s Word. Second, crucicentrism, meaning the cross of Christ is central to the teaching of evangelicals. Third, activism, the living of one’s faith out in society through good works. Fourth, conversionism, turning one’s life from sin and the acceptance of Christ for salvation. Known as the Bebbington Quadrilateral, this gives a foundational, academic understanding of what is meant with the term “evangelical.”

This definition sets the focus and foundation of the term and the intended audience of this work. Though, this does not necessarily limit the audience or scope, as many more than “evangelicals” would consider the importance of Scripture, the crucifixion of Christ being central to the forgiveness of sins and doing good works to change the world for God’s glory as central to their belief. Further, for those who are not “evangelical” or even considered “Christian,” this work presents the foundational truth of identity which has the ability to change the world for all humankind. This change begins with each individual, when one understands that the labels presented, even within the Church, usually draw us away from God instead of towards him. The power of the imago Dei, both inherently and through the transformational work of the Holy Spirit, is one that takes a person from making “self” the center of existence and observing God in his deserved place. A person stops desiring the consumeristic entanglement of the world and stands firm in the eternal ramifications of their true identity.

Removing oneself from the consumeristic tendencies and fraudulent identities presented by the world is a difficult task. These tendencies are woven into the fabric of

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daily life and in fact have been oftentimes propagated through Christianity! As Lucia Hulsether comments, “So potent is the alliance between Christianity and capitalism that, it is now possible to argue, even corporate bodies without such demonstrable debts to a Christian past advance presumptively Protestant tenets like salvation in productive work and emancipation in conspicuous consumer choice.”5 Freedom is what links Christianity to consumer choice, but capitalistic and consumeristic ideals rob it from its salvific meaning to become consumer friendly. Only Christ sets one truly “free” (Galatians 5:1) and what better way to wield such freedom but through the power of one’s debit/credit card? The truly sophisticated have the power to buy and sell at will and every purchase helps to build one’s image. Dollar after dollar, transaction after transaction one can become whatever their pocketbook allows. Don’t like what you have become? Buy up! So entrenched are these cultural norms that one does not recognize their indebtedness to capitalistic and consumeristic predilections. The sad truth is “if you are a person who goes shopping, or who watches reality television, or who participates in American politics, or who goes to work, you have already been formed by the Protestant norms that pervade everyday life in capitalist modernity.”6 The ties of capitalism and consumerism are closely related to Christianity and have been for decades. How can the Church in America expect to delineate itself from consumerism when it is a longstanding impetus behind consumerism? This consumeristic tendency even impacts the way Christians see the divine. Skye Jethani writes, “More than merely an economic system, it is the

6 Hulsether, 487.
framework through which we understand everything including God, the gospel, and church. As such, consumerism is competing with the kingdom of heaven for the minds and hearts of Gods people.” If consumerism is competing with the hearts and minds of Christians, then it follows that it keeps many people from ever stepping foot into a church in the first place. Consumerism is about eschewing any altar that does not erect Self as the deity of worship.

Further, commodification happens as a direct result from consumerism. Commodification is the assigning of an economic value to anything that can be exchanged. When one assigns an exchange value, that item (even a person or a person’s identity), becomes a commodity. Skye writes, “In a commodity-based culture, we have been conditioned to believe that nothing carries intrinsic value. Instead, value is found only in a thing’s usefulness to us, and tragically this belief has been applied to people as well.” Simply put, how is one considered “valuable” to society and the world around them? One of the reasons that racism, sexism and other acts of hate exist is due to the fact that one group of people feel another group of people are devalued and that devaluing “justifies” acts of hate. Further, in light of this research, identities can be commodified and sold or exchanged at will. If that purse, watch, automobile, house or education will make one’s image and identity greater, the logical, economical choice is to spend whatever one can to become the individual they want. Commodification makes one view the imago Dei and ask the question, “What value do you bring to me?” Unfortunately,

8 Jethani, 80.
even in the context of this work, there is an underlying sense that the image of God must be presented in a way in which proves value. Any description of such is simply the fault of this researcher and not intrinsically upon God’s image. This work will posit that the image of God is the only image that carries intrinsic value and has been ontologically breathed into humankind from God (Genesis 2:7). God’s mark upon humanity is one of the distinctions not seen in the rest of his creative works.

From consumerism and the related commodification of identity, comes the understanding of value and worth in the public sphere. Consumerism drives the individual to move from intrinsic meaning to one that is malleable and dependent upon the efforts of Self. As Fritschel describes, “Consumerism has become a new form of works righteousness. We seek to justify our lives, our importance and worth, through the stuff we own. I must be an important person, look at the car I drive, the school to which I send my children, the type of technological gadgets used. Each of these are instances of the new languages of works righteousness in a consumer culture.”

Consumerism is the byproduct of seeking alternate sources of identities. Consumerism can be controlled by what one buys and the manner in which it is bought. In fact, it is in the sense of establishing one’s authority to navigate the myriad of choices available in the world today, where the deception of being in control is simply a ploy of the excess of consumerism. It creates a fluidity of identity that is without grounding because consumerism and commodification don’t have a true sense of place or purpose. Why take

9 Fritschel, 97.
an identity that seemingly failed, (Genesis 3) when one can insert an alternate identity which fills their fancy? Gone are the days where a person needs to ask someone what they can or cannot be. In today’s world, one’s (counterfeit) purpose, importance and ultimately one’s worth comes from wielding choice and buying power.

The hold of consumerism goes beyond what one can buy and what value is assigned to the product and the purchaser. Image and how one is seen in the public sphere also plays a large role in identity today. As Seung Lee and Seong Park state, "Goods can possess both a physical and a symbolic value." This symbolic value can often carry an even greater identity impact than the actual product itself. There is a global movement now from corporations to “frame” someone’s identity and image through consumerism. These “commercial superpowers” as Jennifer Sandlin and Julie Maudlin accurately brand, are “corporations seeking to advance a global market and promote commercial messages that support the consumer economy.” Their goal is to drive human behavior by showing their products are not simply products but “image creators.” These commercial superpowers become less about selling products initially and more about selling the “brand” or the image of the company. Consumerism shows humankind has a natural “bent” to be less about what makes the individual whole and more about selling the image of being “whole.”

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Consumerism takes the human condition and begins to delineate it into a litany of exclusive ideals and images. Age, sex, gender, race and class are all but the tip of the identity iceberg in the world of self-made images. Men are targeted with a sense of false bravado and the imagery of what makes a man a “man” could be as innocuous as the choice of the correct cigarette. False masculinity is propagated by a mass media constructed ideology that was crystalized by the “Marlboro Man” and the smoking cowboy. An easily packaged image that is as effortless as the draw from a cigarette. Women are targeted with such distinction that certain fashion magazines offer critiques for age groups from birth that begin to change every few years! These distinctions “train” women to hold to societal norms when it comes to image. As Julia Twigg explains, “The role of dress in the expression of identity is a long-established theme in writings in sociology…one of the key means by which social difference is made concrete and visible.” Companies define the images for genders and for the ages within those genders with a continual onslaught of advertisement. As Sandlin and Maudlin write, “The inescapability of consumption is perpetuated by pervasive forms of commercial media such as television, print ads, popular music and social media, which are pedagogical sites that offer important insights into the ways that race, class and gender operate to define

13 Julia Twigg, “Fashion, the Media and Age: How Women’s Magazines Use Fashion to Negotiate Age Identities.” European Journal of Cultural Studies 21, no. 3 (2018): 338. The author’s main premise is how certain age groups are targeted through fashion. Using several different publications, the author details how specific ages are targeted by age, gender, race and median income. All for the manipulation or control of image and identity.
women as shoppers in popular cultural contexts.”14 Women being defined as shoppers or consumers would also logically equate to men, teens, tweens and children being defined as consumers. Even children, funneled through the buying power of their parents, jockey for identity by purchasing the latest iPhone or Nike Airs.15 In their conclusion, Sandlin and Maudlin lobby for new narratives (identities) to be construed specifically for women and women of color. While this may seem wise within the strict confines of their work, more identities will not cure the basic human condition, only the correct identity has that power!

In America, there is an idea that the images of mass consumption are infused with a sense of sophistication and wisdom. These identities always stress the individual achievement over the health and success of the community at large. This individualistic approach corrupts one’s divinely created relational identity and the value to one’s community. The consumeristic society commodifies the image while dehumanizing the individual. Ellen Davis pinpoints these counterfeit identities and “wisdom” of the world with great detail:

There is a notable consistency to the mock-wisdom texts produced by Hollywood and Madison Avenue: all of them uphold one or more of the core values sacred to industrialized society: personal uniqueness, freedom from constraint and fear, power both social and automotive, sexual stimulation, or (for the more sedate set) exquisitely good taste. Any doubt that these values are sacred might be dispelled by the ad that features a striking ash blonde with a long stretch of exposed torso, ending in about six inches of tattered cut-offs—a promotion for

14 Sandlin and Maudlin, 176.
15 Sandlin and Maudlin, 178. The authors research shows that historically men have been seen as producers and women have been negatively seen as consumers, or those who do the buying. These trends have, of course, been rapidly changing but continue to persist with the negative imaging of women still being in charge of the “domestic duties.” See pages 177-182.
True Religion Brand Jeans. It is acutely ironic, however, that nearly every product manufacturer or credit card company stresses "your" style or story, while mounting a campaign that can be considered a success only if tens of thousands yield to the fantasy of uniqueness.\textsuperscript{16}

The false image of self that Madison Avenue and Hollywood once peddled to the world has now found propaganda streams through every internet connected device available for (consumption) use. From one’s TV’s, computers, phones and even watches, a constant stream of corrupt images bombard individuals from the dawn to dusk and are all conveniently waiting there, ready for one’s consumption at will. Identity is created by corporate society that serves commercial interests. Girls wear a certain makeup or clothing to be noticed, guys wear a certain cologne or smoke a particular cigarette to be successful and mothers buy a vehicle to be seen as a “good mom” or environmentally conscious. As Fritschel writes, “people may buy hybrid cars, but will also want hybrid cars that look like hybrid cars. From a consumerist viewpoint, publicly demonstrating one cares for the environment is as important as actually caring for the environment.”\textsuperscript{17}

Fueled by capitalism, consumerism and individualism this desire to “create” identity and image is the dominant norm in of the world. Consumerism is ultimately about the image of truth, not about truth. The false image of self is more concerned with being perceived as truthful rather than the veracity of the statement itself. Proverbially speaking, it’s better to look like one works out on the $2,000 Peloton that a person “flexed” their consumer power upon, even if one never actually uses the bike and isn’t getting the actual

\textsuperscript{17} Fritschel, 99.
health benefits of working out! The image of working out is more seductive than the benefits of working out in a consumer driven culture. Likewise, in Christianity, the image of being a “good person” is more seductive than the sacrifice and service called for by Christ and from being created in the *imago Dei*.

These false images created by self continually promise to solve humankind’s needs at a consumer level. Why should one reflect on themselves or the divine if the situation can be solved through buying power? The continual push to overcome humankind’s inherent identity problem is “closely connected with the commercialized world of consumption, with its restless search for markets and promotion of product-based answers to ills…but do not, by and large, address the nature or sources of those problems.”18 One glaring problem with false identities is that they promise contentment and an image greater than the one previously purchased, yet they cannot deliver that in which they advertise. That isn’t their concern, a corporation simply wants to sell an individual an idea. The reality is that the idea cannot create the image and identity that it blatantly advertises. Chasing after counterfeit identities always leaves the individual more disappointed than before they began their pursuit. What happens to humanity when their sought-after identities leave them empty and unsatisfied? Can the Church help guide people on a path of understanding?

Regrettably, the American Evangelical Church has long been reflective of the emptiness of consumerism and less as the image of God representing the divine on earth.

18 Twigg, 345.
The Church was never instituted for commodification and consumption, but to be the place one meets the presence of God.\textsuperscript{19} The distinctions of what it means to be Christian in America has been mostly washed away from secular society. There isn’t much difference between the way the secular world operates and that of the common evangelical Christian. As Wolfe tartly describes, “for all their (often quite legitimate) denunciation of sex and violence in the popular media, evangelicals flourish amidst the celebrity-drenched, lowest-common-denominator, highly sentimentalized world of romance novels, daytime soaps, NASCAR races, and Opry-knockoff music that dominates America’s entertainment industry.”\textsuperscript{20} Even in the church, our identities are formed through the consumption of the American entertainment industry and now, the instantly available and always accessible social media. Follow one’s favorite celebrity, singer, actor, athlete or even “influencer” to help one decide what to wear, what to eat, and ultimately, who an individual should be. In lieu of worshipping God, an entire litany of consumeristic idols has taken his place! As with all idols, consumerism inserts a cheap, low (eternal) value substitute to the narrow path\textsuperscript{21} and dying to self\textsuperscript{22} that Jesus modeled through his life, death and resurrection. Why should the Church struggle with obedience, sacrifice and mercy when one can simply be renamed, repackaged and repurchased with the simple swipe of a credit card? As Lee Zandstra notes, “In a society preoccupied with the goal of image rather than virtues, the self comes a poor second to the ‘self-image’ one

\begin{footnotes}
\footnotetext[19]{2 Chronicles 7:15-16 and by extension 1 Corinthians 3:16}
\footnotetext[20]{Wolfe, 83.}
\footnotetext[21]{Matthew 7:13-14}
\footnotetext[22]{Luke 14:26-27}
\end{footnotes}
can create through buying power. Consumerism offers a host of selves to choose from, for the right price.”

The “right price” of image has come at the great cost of infiltrating the institution of the church. A church can simply “buy” whichever image it wants. Leaders pour money into anything that makes their image “look good” with a simple point and click to make themselves into whatever “brand” the customer surveys and market trends direct. When image is praised on the altar, how can the despondent be ministered too when the minister cares more for current market trends than the suffering of the people?

Consumerism in the church follows its cues from society at large. If image can be controlled through the power of purchase, it must follow that this can be used to manipulate and craft one’s image of righteousness! As Lucia Hulsether writes, “Moguls like John D. Rockefeller, J. P. Morgan, and Andrew Carnegie modeled a welfare capitalism in which exorbitant wealth increased in spiritual value and moral justification when volunteered as a donation to the destitute.”

In all facets of life, whether in the Church or out of it, the right image is everything! To be seen as industrious, self-made and resilient are all considered major ethical and moral qualities desired by the masses. In fact, an individual’s errors in judgement, missteps and sometimes downright bizarre behavior can be ignored and even forgotten as long as one promotes an image of generosity! Time and time again, Americans view a businessperson or church leader who makes a critical error only to be bailed out in the court of public opinion by a healthy

24 Hulsether, 490. Emphasis mine.
donation or helping a good cause with a sizable check! Consumerism promises a *salvation* which it can never provide. The temptation is one in which consumer choice and wealth distribution masquerades as a mode of liberation to people of all persuasions. Church members end up looking to those with wealth and consumeristic wherewithal as the ideal Christian “image.” As researchers Pettit and Sivanathan note, “One benefit of having high socioeconomic status is that it offers individuals control and the luxury of manipulating the negative elements of their social system.” Consumerism is a false idol of control and prestige. Falsely ascribing the ability to create one’s importance, image, and most importantly, control the outcome from cradle to grave. This power intoxicates and drives individuals to leave the Church’s mandate of service and sacrifice to God and neighbor.

To further complicate matters of identity, the world promotes the fluid change of image and identity with little concern for its reasons or validity. Those in the church have followed this alarming trend by changing “identities” on a whim. Writing in regard to Christian, college students, Michael Hammond states, “This identity crisis reflects a 21st-century ethic. Individuals hold the right to revise their categorized identity, even on matters of race and gender. Thoughtful and reflective Christians are sprinting away from

25 Hulsether, 490. Lucia highlights Coca Cola’s museum dedicated to the civil rights movement and how drinking Coke brings the world together in harmony. Yet, it fails to mention the abuses of its company in wage discrimination, poor treatment of workers and evangelical like zeal of equating selling cola as equivalent to *salvation* and upward mobility.

evangelicalism and seeking a new identifier for their beliefs.”

Is this truly an ethic or an even deeper abandonment from identity? Who makes the choice of what is and what is not appropriate when it comes to matters of identity? As an ethic, this work strongly disagrees. Perhaps, as a fad or societal movement, a way to wield more personal control that would be in line with the movement of the 21st-century. As a set of moral principles, one can only hope that society realizes that humanity, and more to the point Christianity, is treading on dangerous ground.

**The Image Solution**

The *imago Dei* challenges consumer culture by its foundational claim about who people are, what they are called to be, and ultimately what it truly means to be human. The true source of fulfillment, happiness and life begin with the reality of being created in God’s image.

Throughout the following chapters, this work will establish the image of God (*imago Dei*) as both an ontological and a transformative reality. The ontological as part of our creaturely identity, how God created humankind from the beginning. The transformative as our regeneration or baptismal identity that is a result of being united to Christ. The scope of this research will establish that personal identity is based on the creative work of God alone. Through a proper reclamation of self by understanding identity is not the totality of what we do, consume or achieve but is solely through the

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embodiment of being created in the image of God, the *imago Dei*, and the salvific work of Jesus Christ.

One of the major conversation partners this work will engage with is Saint Augustine. His work is instrumental in showing the importance of the *imago Dei* and how humankind is indebted to God for our very being. Not through consumption and the desires of self, promoted in society, but by having a participatory relationship with God. For Augustine, he warns the teachers, the “academics” of his time that their desires of success were enslaving them. He writes, “Wake up! Wake up, I beg you! Believe me, you’ll be grateful that the gifts of this world have hardly entranced you at all with the successes by which they ensnare the wary.”\(^{28}\) This work is an effort to continue the call from Saint Augustine, that we collectively “wake up” to the many snares of identity presented to us daily. There is but one true identity for all humankind, whether Christian or not, that all humankind is created in the image and likeness of God, the *imago Dei*.

In Chapter 2, this work will explore what it means to be created in the *imago Dei* and how sin impacts God’s creation found in Genesis 1-2 and Psalm 8. The intoxication and pride of self makes the struggle for understanding one’s source for identity an ongoing problem for humankind. Coincidentally, narcissism is on the rise today.\(^{29}\) This research will continuously be at odds with the work of self, self-effort and the promotion of creating a (false) self in contradistinction to the perfect work God has finished in humankind. When God created humankind “in his image” he finished a work that could


\(^{29}\) Lee, Gregg and Park, 348.
attain no higher position, regardless of what one tries to make, achieve or purchase. This is narcissism in its cruelest form, where an individual believes that they can be better or create better than God. This narcissism bleeds into everything a person does and creates a superiority complex that one shows to their peers, and ultimately, becomes transferred towards the divine. As researchers Lee, Gregg and Park describe, “visibly indicating how different one is from one’s peers or how superior one is to one’s peers—including via one’s purchases—is liable to jeopardize the likelihood of social acceptance.” This is indicative of the false (protean) images of self that believes the “ends justify the means.”

Further, the impact of the “bait and switch” cannot be overstated here, as one is driven to consume for social status and inclusion only to be excluded from the acceptance they desire! These are the familiar narcissistic undertones of the Serpent, in the Garden with Eve, slithering the words, “You will not die; for God knows that when you eat of it, your eyes will be opened and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.” In that moment, humankind was at its very closest to the divine, yet through that choice spurred by the pride of self, fell farthest from God. When humanity is bloating at the trough of consumerism, relationship with God is impossible. How can one embrace the image of God when one is constantly focused on self? This work will discover how our ancestors pridefully rejected God’s image and chose to insert their own to the detriment of every person who followed that fateful day. The reverberations of that prideful act are skillfully summed by Augustine when he writes, “But my sin was this, that I looked for pleasure,

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30 Lee, Gregg and Park, 349.
31 Genesis 3:4-5. Emphasis mine.
beauty, and truth not in him but in myself and his other creatures, and the search led me instead to pain, confusion, and error.”

Chapter 3 focuses on Wisdom Literature through a fresh reading of Job and Ecclesiastes through the lens of the imago Dei. In culture today, the world runs the gamut on identities to such an extreme level that causes confusion from a societal level. The number of uncommon denominators that each individual can use to differentiate themselves includes age, race, sexuality, gender, religion, country, (dis)abilities and possibly spectrums that haven’t been discovered as of yet. As Participant 10 stated in the research on Identity as Resistance, there are a myriad of identities to choose from, “How many marginalized identities can you have on top of each other?” The question posed by the participant is apropos, “How many identities can one have?” While a person might be old or young, black or white, American or Egyptian, straight or queer, Christian or Buddhist, these “identities” will never be more important than one’s humanity, spirit and wholeness! The power of the imago Dei is found in wholeness, not the fragmentation of the individual. The Apostle Paul writes to the believers in Thessalonica, “May the God of peace himself sanctify you entirely; and may your spirit and soul and body be kept sound and blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.” (1 Thessalonians 5:23). Paul shows how the person is spirit, soul and body as one whole. The image of God brings

wholeness to humankind and allows the individual to leave the marginal identities behind.

Chapter 3 will further establish how the biblical story of Job reveals the most important aspect of an individual is whether they have a relationship with God or not. This is the proper order of things, for the creation to serve the Creator, for the image to reflect its source. Ultimately, humankind is created in God’s image to serve God and neighbor. It is not self-effort that brings one into God’s service, as James Rimbach succinctly states, “One becomes a servant of Yahweh by choice—Yahweh’s choice.”

Chapter 4 will shift the attention to the New Testament and show how the *imago Dei* may be restored with a special focus on Ephesians and Colossians. Through one’s baptismal participation, which unites the individual to Christ, the *imago Dei* is restored in fullness of new life! Humankind was created to participate with the divine and that one’s relationship with God is in fact an act of embracing and embodying the *imago Dei*. The Apostle Peter writes to the new fledgling community of Christ followers to remember that God has blessed them that they may become, “participants of the divine nature.”

This is in contradistinction to the pattern witnessed in the evangelical Church where ministers attempt to turn a participatory relationship with God into a set of moral techniques. This moralism drives a wedge into Christianity, creating classes of the haves and have nots, those close to God and those still groveling to be “worthy” of church

35 2 Peter 1:4
membership. This mask of moralism teaches the masses to become dependent on their own skills and talents instead of the power and work of the Holy Spirit.

Further, Chapter 4 establishes how the imago Dei is the remedy against consumerism. In their research Pettit and Sivanathan make an important discovery in their second study. Their research found that “when threatened individuals are afforded an alternate route to repair self-worth, their need to acquire status goods, as a source of self-affirmation, is diminished.”36 Not surprisingly, the researchers find that when a person is able to reflect on the things that they find important in their life, i.e., family, loved ones, health, overall well-being, it lessens their desire to consume and create false identities. This underscores one of the pillars of this research, when one understands their true identity is in the image and reflection of God, they are less likely to seek false identities elsewhere. When the power and importance of being created in the imago Dei is understood, all other identities are secondary at best, and misleading and hurtful at worst. The imago Dei brings freedom to humankind by allowing one to focus their attention and energy on that which is important, reflecting the image of God, not attempting to create an alternate one.

The final chapter of this work, chapter 5, will tie the threads of the imago Dei together and use several places from the New Testament as a practical way forward. The false image of self is opposed by the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Jesus teaches at the Sermon on the Mount that God blesses the poor, the meek, those who seek

36 Sivanathan and Pettit, 566.
after righteousness, the merciful and the pure in heart.\textsuperscript{37} Jesus’ teaching assumes the truth he is teaching can’t be personally discovered on one’s own and can’t be realized through self-effort. Christ’s teaching showed the people, both individually and corporately during the Sermon on the Mount that God has created them for something more, something greater. This is why Jesus answers a Pharisee’s question regarding the coming of the kingdom of God by saying, “The kingdom of God is not coming with things that can be observed; nor will they say, ‘Look here it is!’ or ‘There it is!’ For in fact, the kingdom of God is among you.”\textsuperscript{38} Likewise, by creating all humankind in his image, God has shown how he created us and what he intends us to become, a reflection of his Son, Jesus Christ.

Practically, the false image of self is further overcome by embracing the life-giving power of the \textit{imago Dei} and understanding that God has created us to be transformed into relational community. Both with God and humankind! As James Torrance aptly states, “The triune God is in the business of creating community, in such a way that we are never more truly human, never more truly persons, than when we find our being-in-communion.”\textsuperscript{39} The antithesis of consumerism and the consumption of self is to focus on the relational movement of God towards humankind and humankind’s reflectively towards God. Further, with God and neighbor, the \textit{imago Dei} knits together the kingdom of God as one community by the transforming power of the Holy Spirit. Practically, this happens when one embraces the understanding that all people are \textit{equals},

\textsuperscript{37} Matthew 5:3-11 and by extension through chapter 7.  
\textsuperscript{38} Luke 17:20-21  
\textsuperscript{39} James Torrance, \textit{Worship, Community and the Triune God of Grace} (InterVarsity: Downers Grove, 1996), 73.
created in God’s image, not the image of buying power or consumerism. Further, one discovers they are never more truly human, than when one views themselves through the reality of the imago Dei. The more one grows in relationship with God, the more one may understand what it means to be truly human, because an image can only be known through its closeness with its source.

Finally, this work is aimed at the Christian and the non-Christian alike. The beauty of the imago Dei is that God created all humankind in his image! Even in the dark corners of human history, humanity has still retained the ability to show great compassion and love, especially in the face of disaster, war, famine, sickness and suffering. It is the belief of this researcher that the imago Dei is so uniquely transformative that it overwhelsms the broken state of humankind to redeem and restore the image of God. This is part of the power and beauty that God has intended for all humankind. How might our world change if people turned from a pursuit of commodification and consumerism to grasp the life-giving identity bestowed by the divine? As Edmund Clowney states “A final approach to the world is not simply to fight it, join it, build on it, or try to ignore it, but to change it.”40 To change the world, one must understand the power of God’s image in all humankind and what it means to be created in his image and likeness.

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40 Edmund Clowney, The Church (InterVarsity: Downers Grove, 1995), 171.
Chapter 2. Where Is Identity Found?

It may seem convenient for a Christian writer to posit the idea that Christians are made in the image of God. It may be even more expedient to discuss this image in the narrow confines of established Christian thinking to secure an already known point. After all, the verbiage of *imago Dei* shows up in the very first chapter of the Bible, wouldn’t this “discovery” of who people, let alone who Christians are, be a well-developed point thousands of years after it being penned to paper?¹ The truth behind the *imago Dei* is one that carries great importance, not only for the Christian but for all people, yet has been frequently misrepresented and misunderstood. The ontological implications of being created in the image of God, something greater than humanity, carries with it profound truths for all people, not just the Christian. As J. Richard Middleton states, “The *imago Dei* has, furthermore, become an important topic for reflection today outside of the boundaries of the academic theological curriculum, being thematized by a variety of thinkers and writers concerned about the ethical implications of the doctrine in the contemporary world.”² Much study and thought should be devoted to this work since the reality of being made in God’s image reverberates through human existence in ways that impact all people of every race, gender, creed and religion. The *imago Dei* empowers humanity to define and understand who we are, and who we are not.

¹ Or clay or papyrus scroll to be more exact.
The first chapter of Genesis captures the fascinating cosmological activity as God creates *ex nihilo* and brings life from nothing. From light, to water, to land, God is at work creating a world that is filled with life. Prior to the creation of humans, God populates the earth with plants, fish, birds and animals of all kinds. From this outpouring of life, God creates humanity from the divine image. “Then God said, ‘Let us make man in our image...in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.’”3 God’s pinnacle act of creation is the foundation of all human identity, not simply for the Christian, but the source of meaning, purpose and value for all people. In this chapter, we will wrestle with the question of how can humankind be made in the image of God and what does it mean to be created in the image and likeness of God? Furthermore, how has this been addressed by the great theologians of the past? Specifically, researching the works of St. Augustine and those that influenced him such as Ambrose and others of the Nicene tradition, how did they define the human person in light of the scriptures found in Genesis and the Psalter?

To begin, one must answer the question, how is the creation of humankind the pinnacle of God’s creative work? Surely, we have a vested interest in thinking that those with the cognitive ability to read this sentence must be “special” above the rest of the animal kingdom. A proper foundation for understanding identity lies within the Christian worldview and the creation narrative found in Genesis 1-3. According to the scriptures, God creates the world by producing light and darkness, water and sky, land and

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3 Genesis 1:26-27
vegetation while filling the seas and earth with living creatures. Fish, birds and all other animals were created to be in the seas, air and land which would ultimately come under the care and dominion of mankind. It is when God speaks at the conclusion of chapter 1 that a unique distinction is made:

Then God said, ‘Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.’ So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.”

This text found in Genesis has been the source of much theological, philosophical and ontological debate throughout history as humankind continues seeking out answers to universal questions regarding meaning and purpose. “What does it mean to be human?” “Why and how do people exist?” To further complicate matters, this is one of only four references to the imago Dei found in the Old Testament. This paucity of biblical references has created a diverse range of opinions on the possible answer to what it means to be made in God’s image. The gravity of being created in the imago Dei carries with it the answers that has eluded humanity for thousands of years. God saved his greatest work for the end of the creation narrative by creating rational, thinking beings from his very own form and likeness. This bold claim naturally leads one to ask, what exactly is the imago Dei and how is it possible for humankind to be made in the image and likeness of God? A more focused question, in response to the mystery of the imago Dei would be echoed in the words of Gerald Boersma, “How can the human person in his

4 Genesis 1:26-27, emphasis mine. NSRV
5 Genesis 1:26-27; 5:1; 9:6 and the implicit reference found in Psalm 8:5; 8:3-8.
created, temporal, material, and embodied state be in the *imago Dei*, which is by definition, an immaterial, invisible reality?\(^6\)

The early Church Father's wrestled with this same question to great extent, spurring heated debates and lengthy writings. The Bible speaks of God as “Spirit” in the opening words of Genesis, “the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters” (1:2). Jesus states in the Gospel of John, “God is Spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth” (4:24). While the classic text from Colossians states, “He (Jesus) is the image of the invisible God” (1:15). Again, the question by Boersma above is not unique to him but is something that theologians have wrestled with for ages with many confused and speculative answers.

One theologian stands in unique light when it comes to the question of the *imago Dei*, St. Augustine. Regarded as the “greatest of the fathers of the church” who “left over one hundred books, five hundred sermons, and two hundred letters”\(^7\) for the cause of Christianity. To fully understand the answer to what the *imago Dei* is, a brief look at the formation of St. Augustine’s thought and theology is appropriate and fundamental to the thread of this work as we journey forward.

Augustine of Hippo (354-430 AD) grew up in a home with strong Christian beliefs from his mother, Monica, who prayed constantly for his conversion and would also become a Saint of the Catholic Church. When Augustine left home to further his

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studies, he began seeking out other systems of thought that he believed would lead him towards truth. For many years, Augustine’s life mirrored his ever-changing pursuits as he took up a concubine, had an illegitimate son and taught rhetoric. He became a beginning adherent of a novel religion called Manicheanism for several years. Manicheanism was similar to Gnosticism with a strong distinction between both the material and spiritual worlds. At its center, was the belief that life came from the king of light and that primitive man was tricked by the king of darkness so that he became a being mingled with both light and darkness. As Cairns states, “Man’s soul linked him with the kingdom of light, but his body brought him into bondage to the kingdom of darkness.”

This duality produced a desire to separate the soul from the body as Manicheans demonized the flesh and looked to be saved from its evil. Augustine eventually tired of this dualistic outlook between body and soul and turned to philosophy and Neoplatonism. Unable to dismiss his indulgence of passions through philosophical study, Augustine details his crisis of conversion in his most widely known work Confessions. He describes meditating in a garden and hearing a child’s voice say, “Take up and read.” The exhortation led him to read Romans 13:13-14 where Augustine received the truth and spiritual revelation he had been seeking. He dismissed his old style of living leaving his teaching in rhetoric and dismissing his concubine. While, turning back to the teachings of the Church and studying under the preaching of Ambrose (337-397), who would later baptize Augustine. Augustine enjoyed Ambrose’s preaching on the imago Dei which he explains spurred

8 Cairns, 98.
him towards faith. Consecrated as bishop of Hippo in 396, he spent the remaining thirty-four years of his life devoted to studying, writing and defending Scripture. It is through the lens of his journey, from his wrestling with the duality of Neoplatonism and Manicheanism, to the convergence of his ideas under Christianity, that we ask the question of how humankind can be created in the image and likeness of an immaterial and invisible God?

**Defining Image**

Under Ambrose’s tutelage, Augustine learned much regarding the traditional understanding of the *imago Dei*. To the early Church Fathers Hilary of Poitiers, Marius Victorinus and Ambrose of Milan, the human person was created in the likeness of God understood by the immaterial soul. Their understanding of image was predicated on their Christology, “Christ is the image of God and the human person is the image of God in his much as he imitates Christ.” For these Church Fathers of the pro-Nicene tradition, there was a principal understanding that “image” language identified a “unity of substance between Father and Son; ‘image’ expressed equality.” Ambrose shares with his predecessors that Colossians 1:15 is the foundational text to describe and discuss image. “He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation.” Understandably, “Ambrose sees the imago Dei principally as a Christological referent,

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10 Augustine, *Confessions*, VI.3
11 Boersma, 87. Highlighting the building theology beginning with Hilary, Victorinus and Ambrose.
12 Boersma, 190.
and, therefore, as a spiritual reality—immaterial, invisible and eternal.”

While this coincides with the pressing question asked above, it was an impediment for these theologians to affirm the human body represented the *imago Dei*. Many of these early Church Fathers like Hilary, Victorinus and Ambrose all thought of Christ as the true image and humans as at best a secondary image, or, made in the likeness of God. This thought has bled into the contemporary mind where one gives cursory thought to image, these early Church Fathers treated it with ancillary importance, and it has given the contemporary Church no reason to think about that which plagues humankind the most.

Understanding one’s image. As Gregory of Nyssa eloquently points out, “In what then does the greatness of man consist, according to the doctrine of the Church? Not in his likeness to the created world, but in his *being in the image of the nature of the Creator*.”

How can one understand the “greatness” of what it means to be a child of God if we don’t understand the gravity of being created in the *imago Dei* to begin with?

Ambrose, along with others of the pro-Nicene tradition believed that God was spirit (as noted above) and as spirit could not have material likeness. One must ponder the question of the Trinity and ask if the Triune God is eternal, would not the corporeal element of Jesus be an eternal, fleshly reality of God? As in the difficulty of understanding the Trinity, one should equally realize that trying to describe the image and likeness of a being far beyond their understanding is at best a fool’s errand. With this being realized, one should also consider that God, in infinite wisdom considered this

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13 Boersma, 88.
weight upon humankind to be most pressing and therefore sent His Son, “the image of the invisible God” to lift the burden that one may understand more clearly the image and likeness of God is a more complex matter.

Augustine departed from the early pro-Nicene tradition that markedly differentiated image and likeness. The pro-Nicene understanding of image brought along with it an idea of equality. Thus, when Christ is said to be the “image” of God it would seem blasphemous to say that man could also be the “image” of God. It is much safer, theologically, to say that man is made in the “likeness” of God. The early Church dealt extensively with several heresies attacking the person of Christ and/or the deity of Christ which caused great hesitancy in anything seen as encroaching either part of the hypostatic union. This “safe” theological play was demonstrated by many of the early Church Fathers to keep from sullying the uniqueness of Christ. Augustine was removed enough from his predecessors and fortunate not to struggle with many of the same initial Church controversies. This allowed him the freedom to diverge from these former trepidations as he affirms that both the human person and Christ are both the imago Dei. As Boersma states, “for Augustine not all images imply equality or identity of substance.”

One of the logical fallacies of the early Church that has continued in the modern/post-modern world is merely thinking of “image” as equivalent, equal or similar in substance. In this modern world of publication one can take this manuscript, typed on a computer and print out hundreds of copies to pass out to a group. A person would be hard

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15 Boersma, 203.
pressed to find the “original” and discern it from the “copies.” This creates a subliminal programming upon our psyche that they are one in the same. One cannot take what is two dimensional, inanimate and allow it to inform their thinking of “image” and what it means to be created in the image of another being. These are not analogical or equivalent and it would behoove the reader to remove this equation from their thinking to grasp a richer understanding of image.

The beauty of theological growth is shown as Augustine departs from his predecessors strictly equating image with substance. “Augustine broadens the language of "image" to include both Christ and the human person. In doing so, he builds on the philosophy of image…insisting that there are varying ways in which an image can participate in its source.”\(^\text{16}\) Augustine builds on image to demonstrate that the concept should not be limited to one thing. Image is not simply identity of substance, i.e., we are flesh as Jesus is flesh. Quite simply for Augustine, images do not imply equality. When considering the language of “image” with Christ or humanity this allows an understanding that the terms are not always analogical. Far from being wordplay, there are inimitable differences between image, likeness and equality. Augustine makes a clear declaration of the differences in a lengthy section of *Eighty-Three Different Questions* that is foundational to this argument:

> Image and equality and likeness must be distinguished. For where where there is an image, there is necessarily a likeness, but not necessarily an equality; where an equality, necessarily a likeness, but not necessarily an image; where a likeness, not necessarily an image and not necessarily an equality. Where there is an image,

\(^{16}\) Boersma, 190.
there is necessarily a likeness, but not necessarily an equality. For example, there
is in a mirror an image of a man. Because the image has been copied from him,
there is necessarily a likeness; but, nonetheless, there is no equality, because there
is absent from the image much that is present in that thing of which it is the copy.
Where there is an equality, there is necessarily a likeness, but not necessarily an
image. For example, between two identical eggs there is a likeness because there
is an equality, for whatever belongs to one belongs also to the other. Where there
is a likeness, there is not necessarily an image and not necessarily an equality. For
every egg is like every other egg insofar as it is an egg; but a partridge egg,
although like a chicken egg insofar as it is an egg, is, nonetheless, neither its
image, because it is not a copy of that one, nor is it equal, because it is smaller
and of another species of living thing.17

A more robust understanding of image requires grasping these concepts outlined
by Augustine. An image can imply likeness to something, as in a reflection in a mirror
but that reflection can hardly be considered an equal. Equality will imply likeness but
does not necessarily mean there is the same image as in two identical eggs. Likeness
neither implies equality or the same image as in the example above of a partridge egg and
a chicken egg. Augustine moved fluidly from image, likeness and equality to broaden the
understanding of the imago Dei by showing the coherent argument that there does not
have to be equality for there to be an image. This concept is internalized by the reader in
everyday life. As the reader will discover in Chapter 4, Augustine specifically reserves
equality for the personhood of Christ. Humankind is not “equal” when created in God’s
image, nor will this research attempt to offer this explanation. The uniqueness of
humankind is understood to be in God’s image (reflection) and likeness (soul, intellect,
mind, relational).

17 Augustine, Eighty-Three Different Questions. 74 In vol. 70 of The Fathers of the Church. Translated by
David L. Mosher (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2002). Referred to from
this point as “Different Questions.”
As noted above, humankind created in the *imago Dei* has a special place above all of creation. It does not take an advanced degree to understand that while biologically animals and humans are similar,\(^\text{18}\) humankind is superior in intellect, emotion and social constructs. These behaviors can be seen by the untrained observer just as simply as opening a book and having cognition of the words printed, something that the rest of creation is not capable of duplicating. God spoke to humankind saying, “‘Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth.’”\(^\text{19}\)

Augustine took special note of this declaration from God as he began to define what was meant by the *imago Dei*. Much of his early writings on the subject were defined by his defense of Scripture against his former Manichean cohort. Augustine writes to the Manicheans who mocked the Bible because of the idea that God actually had human qualities in which people were created to resemble. Manicheans felt it was ridiculous that any “god” could resemble (reflect) that of wicked, human flesh. So appalling was the idea that they mercilessly mocked Christianity and the beliefs Augustine promoted. He writes to the Manicheans, “when man is said to have been made in the image of God, it is said with reference to the interior man, where reason is to be found and intelligence; and it is from this that he gets ‘authority over the fishes of the sea and the flying things of heaven, and all cattle and wild beasts, and the whole part, and all the crawling things that crawl

\(^{18}\) From the ground or dust, Genesis 2:7; \(^{19}\) Genesis 1:28
over the earth.’” Augustine points to the authority and power of God that we image, “not the body that man was made to God’s image, but to the power by which he surpasses all cattle, all animals.”

Augustine’s initial reaction to the human body was a defense of the mocking from the Manicheans but it never precludes his understanding that the body also imaged God. Not in the crude and impious ways the Manicheans presented but in the uniqueness of the dignity shown above the animal kingdom. Augustine explains that the body itself directs our gaze heavenly, “The bodies of all animals, you see, whether those that live in the water or those that live on land or those that fly around in the air, are bent forward to the earth, and do not have an upright posture like the human body. And this signifies that our spirit also ought to be held upright, turned to things above it, that is to eternal, spiritual realities.”

The human body participates in this initial creative act by pointing to heavenly realities, to the image and likeness of the Creator God. Conversely, while animals, fish, birds and plant life sustain life on earth, their ability to reproduce is a carbon copy of kind. As Matthew Driver states, “The divine image is transmitted to succeeding generations of human souls not through an original seed (genus) in a biological act, but rather by the direct, spiritual act of God. The spiritual nature of this act lies in the twofold

21 Ibid, 1.17.28
22 Ibid, 1.17.28
fact that the image is of God (Spirit), and the image is found in the mind, not the body.”

While this may seem contrary it is the body that is the center and embodiment of the mind. Nothing in all of creation resembles the human person, unique in its likeness to the image of God.

This uniqueness of humankind is not without distinction, for what is the image that humankind reflects? For St. Augustine, creation carried with it a great distinction from the creative act of God that separated both the material or seminal ideas (rationes seminales), with the eternal acts or ideas (rationes primordiales). Quite simply, there is a delineation from that which is material or from the earth and that which is eternal or from heaven. To Augustine, the eternal contained the intellect, soul and angels in distinction to that of the physical nature of the earth. Augustine denotes a contrast between the eternal and seminal or heavenly and earthly spheres by highlighting the opening of Genesis, “In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth” (1:1). The material object is ordered by a universal principle or structure, while the intellectual is ordered by the direct, relational action of God. The creation of the intellectual creature is created by God in an active relation with God which is contrasted

24 See Drever, 119-120.
25 Augustine, Confessions. XII.17-30 for Augustine’s conversation of the corporeal and eternal or “heaven and earth.”
26 Augustine, Confessions. XIII.2
27 Augustine, “The Literal Meaning of Genesis,” in On Genesis, vol 13. of The Works of Saint Augustine, translated by Edmund Hill (New York: New City Press, 1999), 1.2-3. Referred to from this point as Literal Meaning of Genesis. The thought Augustine wrestles with is the ordering that God institutes from the higher to the lower. The opening words of Genesis show this order and are reflected in not only the created order but also in the order of humankind in regard to intellect, body and soul.
by the material objects which are created in whole, without a distinct relational aspect. Augustine notes the Psalms, “He spoke and they were made: gave orders, and they were created.” Thus, the animal kingdom would be considered seminal or material for there is no relational aspect to God’s creative act. When humankind is created, it is from a relational movement that embodies the eternal or intellectual action of God. Not only was the action of creation in the *imago Dei* intellectual but reflective, for Augustine writes, “man was made to God’s image. That, of course, is reason itself, or mind or intelligence or whatever other word it may more suitably be named by.” Therefore, the intellectual aspect of humankind is one of the ways the divine image is reflected, but, is only part of a larger whole.

Tracing the movement of the eternal to the seminal, one might question this order from heavens to the earth and the higher to the lower in view of the original statement that humankind is unique in all of creation. What then of the host of heavenly, angelic beings and where does one rank them in all of creation? Wouldn’t this be in contrast to the idea that God created from heavenly to earthly? To Augustine, God ordered the creation narrative in subsequent “morning and evening” patterns to show the continuation of this greater to lesser movement from God’s creative work. He writes, “the first and major kind in the Word of God as in the day, the subsequent and minor kind in itself as in the evening.” Utilizing this movement from day to night, Augustine develops a contrast between humankind and angelic beings. Regarding the angels, Augustine posits that they

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28 Psalm 33:9. Whenever Augustine quotes the Bible, he is using the Latin Vulgate version.
29 Augustine, Literal Meaning of Genesis, 3.20.30
30 Augustine, Literal Meaning of Genesis, 4.31.50
were created in the “Word of God himself, in whom are the eternal ideas.”\(^{31}\) Angels, begin with a knowledge of God and move to the knowledge of themselves being created by “glancing down below”\(^{32}\) and therefore gaining a self-awareness or intellect. As Drever notes, “Augustine speculates that ‘evening’ could describe the movement of angelic intellect from its contemplation of creation in the Word to its contemplation of creation in itself. ‘Morning’ could then describe the return of the angelic intellect to the direct contemplation of God.”\(^{33}\)

For humankind, the movement is reverse and is centered on human embodiment which is the key difference to Augustine, “There is, of course a very great difference between knowledge of a thing, whatever it may be, in the Word of God and knowledge of it in its own specific nature.”\(^{34}\) For Augustine, human embodiment begins with the self-awareness of what has been made in the mind and moves to the understanding of the world and God through the body, a psychosomatic unity. This reverse order shows humankind “begin with a knowledge of the created order and progress to a knowledge of God, while angels begin with a knowledge of God before coming to a knowledge of the created order.”\(^{35}\) In essence, self-cognition images, or reflects God’s own ability (likeness) of self-awareness, thus making human embodiment superior to that of the angelic beings. Perhaps, it is this idea that the Psalmist has in mind when writing:

\(^{31}\) Augustine, Literal Meaning of Genesis, 4.24.41
\(^{32}\) Ibid, 4.24.41
\(^{33}\) Drever, 124.
\(^{34}\) Augustin, Literal Meaning of Genesis, 4.23.40
\(^{35}\) Drever, 125.
When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars that you have established; what are human beings that you are mindful of them, mortals that you care for them? Yet you have made them a little lower than God, and crowned them with glory and honor. You have given them dominion over the works of your hands; you have put all things under their feet, all sheep and oxen, and also the beasts of the field, the birds of the air, and the fish of the sea, whatever passes along the paths of the seas.  

The Psalmist shows how God is “mindful” and “cares” for humankind, a distinction not shared with the angelic hosts. This mindfulness relates to the self-awareness displayed by God and reflected in likeness as in a mirror by humankind. The embodiment of humankind carries with it a relational movement, not simply a static understanding. As Alistair McFadyen notes, “humanity is defined not in reference to a set of internal, “natural” attributes but as “placed” and constituted in the context of God’s relating—more specifically, as recipients of the divine Name and concomitant revelation.

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36 Psalm 8:3-8 emphasis mine.
of the divine majesty.”  

Correspondingly, the *imago Dei* displays the divine majesty throughout humanity, both individually and corporately.  

A more recent trend in scholarship has emphasized these resplendent elements of God that have been mirrored in the essence and body of humankind. Echoing the glory and honor language of Psalm 8, the context of the *imago Dei* harkens back to “Mesopotamian materials and the royal figure, such that there is rather widespread agreement that the image of God is a notion derived from royal ideology.”  

Reading the Bible exclusively in a culturally current context can hinder the scholar from grasping a fuller understanding of the biblical imagery. From a Mesopotamian viewpoint, when God claims the pinnacle of creation being in the divine image there is a decree of uniqueness, of royalty, exalted above all of creation.

As people of the divine Name and reflectors of God’s royalty and resplendence, it can be easy to abuse this position of authority over creation. For many in the American Evangelical Church, the “royalty” and “dominion” elements have come to the fore while the relational aspect of God’s movement is all but lost. More on this misappropriation of the divine image will be discussed in Chapters 4 & 5 but needless to say that many in the contemporary church have distinguished themselves with the kings of Neo-Assyrian

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38 While this works regards the relational aspect of the *imago Dei* more heavily, the structural element of God’s image is still present in all humankind. The fact that all humankind has mindfulness and self-awareness is evidence of this fact of this innate, God-reflecting attribute.
imagery. The kings of Assyria promoted their images as statements of their military might and violence towards humans and animals. The distinction made in the Garden is one where God commanded them to eat fruits and plants (vegetarian) (Genesis 1:29) and to be caretakers of creation. “The imago Dei, widely regarded as a royal figure, is, in biblical garb, stripped of many of the trappings of ancient Near Eastern royalty.”

Taking the theme of royalty one step further, the text in Genesis depicts God as sovereign over the cosmos and ruling by royal decree. When God speaks “let there be” all creation understands that God powerfully presides over heaven and earth in harmony and order. As stated above, part of this order is seen in the movement from “morning to evening” and the distinction of the heavenly or eternal elements and those of the seminal or material objects. Augustine points out another persuasive distinction of the royal decree God makes in Genesis 1. All of creation, whether eternal or material is created by the same decree “let there be”. The exception to this is the creation of humankind. “Then God said, ‘Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness…” (Genesis 1:26). Augustine states, “and then it does not say, and thus it was made, but leads straight into, and God made man to the image of God…” This contradistinction with all of created order highlights the likeness and significance that humanity has with the creator God. For humanity, being created in the imago Dei means being created like this God

40 Strawn, 135.
41 Augustine, Literal Meaning of Genesis, 3.20.31. Augustine is making the distinction between the “light and darkness” movements in Genesis 1 to show the distinction of humankind’s intellect reflecting that of God’s which is in contradistinction with the rest of the creation narrative.
with the purpose of presiding over creation as a representative of this same power, harmony and order.

Much to this point has been made regarding the body, likeness and intellect of humanity and a brief summary is in order to broaden the reader’s understanding of the gravity of the *imago Dei* before continuing further. The excellence of humankind is shown in a likeness to God through an intellect that originates in self-awareness. This distinguishes humanity from materials, animals and even the angelic hosts of creation. This self-awareness only comes through human embodiment which comes in sharp distinction to the Manichean teachings that Augustine showed was similar to a beacon pointing to the divine. Furthermore, humanity through royal decree, has been given the special role of imaging God’s governing over creation in power, harmony and order as illustrated throughout the creation narrative in Genesis. It is appropriate to dedicate this time to the bodily aspect of humanity first, since it has been thoroughly mocked in antiquity as has seen little more than passing recognition in modern scholarship. As Middleton correctly states, “the interpretation of the imago Dei among systematic theologians almost universally excludes the body from the image (whether explicitly or by omission).”

42 The body, therefore, is integral to the understanding of the *imago Dei* and the relational movement of God toward humanity and humanity toward God. As McFadyen beautifully describes, “we should think and speak of the image as functioning more like a verb than a noun: not so much as some internal structure or capacity we

42 Middleton, 24.
possess and that seeks definition, but as a way of speaking comprehensively about being in a relation with God that is definitive of what it means to be human.”

The *imago Dei* is not simply a label or description of humankind but the activity of who God has called *all* people to be. This crosses creedal, denominational and racial lines to include *all* humanity and it is the Christian who should be most aware of its beauty in transforming the world.

**Soul & Spirit**

For many, the phrase *imago Dei* brings the thought of the soul, a mysterious presence within or about the human body that contains an eternal glimpse of the person. Whether through emotion, will, heart, consciousness or some other spiritual reality, it is a unique marker much like a fingerprint of the spirit upon each person. Throughout the last two thousand years of Christianity, most research and systematic theology has been centered on the soul or spiritual aspect of the *imago Dei*. As stated above, many of the early Church Fathers like Hilary, Victorinus and Ambrose all thought that the soul was the locus of humankind imaging the eternal God. Where Ambrose began to depart from both Hilary and Victorinus was in the concept of the human person as a composite with a “profound appreciation for the unity of body and soul.”

43 McFadyen, 919.

44 Augustine attempts to explain what the soul may be derived from in Book VII of *Literal Meaning of Genesis*. While positing several ideas he comes to the conclusion that he “will affirm nothing as certain” but that the soul was “incorporeal; that is, not a body, but a spirit, not begotten of the substance of God nor proceeding from the substance of God, but made by God.” 7.43

45 Boersma, 88.
disparages the body, noting the uniqueness of sight and hearing, these things can be hindered by material constraints and ultimately; death. As Boersma states, “Embodiment entails specificity of place. The soul is not encumbered in this way.”

Thus, for Ambrose, the soul was over the body in its proper alignment by God. This movement by Ambrose paved the way for Augustine to broaden the understanding of the *imago Dei* through the union of the body and soul in its proper order.

In the second chapter of Genesis there is what many have described as a “second” creation narrative of humankind, “then the Lord God formed man from the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and the man became a living being.” (Genesis 2:7). It is at this moment that many see God as creating man from the “mud” and is solely the construct of the human or earthly man in distinction to the account in the first chapter that details a more “spiritual” creation. Augustine acknowledges this common delineation while showing how it actually confirms his argument that humankind was made of body and soul. He writes, “we understand that in this place the man was made of body and soul, it was by no means absurd to give that mixture the name of mud. Just as water, you see collects earth and sticks and holds it together when mud is made by mixing it in, so too the soul by animating the material of the body shapes it into a harmonious unity, and does not permit it to fall apart into its constituent elements.”

46 Boersma, 97.
47 Boersma, 212. Boersma notes that this second creation idea came from the “Eastern Fathers, most notably Clement and Origen.”
48 Augustine, A Refutation Of The Manichees, 2.7.9
interdependence of the two, as mud is made of two composite parts that become one whole, so the body and soul. Just as mud cannot exist without water flowing through earth, the body does not exist without the soul flowing through, holding it together and animating its parts. This is why Augustine speaks emphatically of the life animating duty of the soul when he writes, “The soul therefore derives life from God…while the body derives life from the soul when the soul is alive in the body.” While defending humankind as a “true” image of the Creator, Augustine highlights that it is the existence of the soul that ensures wholeness. “Therefore if nothing is true, unless it be so as it seems; and if nothing corporeal can appear, except to the senses; and if the only subject of sense is the soul; and if no body can be, unless it be a true body: it follows that there cannot be a body, unless there has first been a soul.” Further, the soul images God through creative and ruling order with “the soul ruling its subject the body and God ruling his subject the creation.”

There is great importance in Augustine’s understanding the composite human nature of body and soul. Remembering the dualism of the Manicheans, Augustine is keen to understand the locus of the imago Dei rests in the primacy of the soul, yet, attentive to the embodiment of the human person. The dangers of dualistically thinking about human

49 Augustine, *Concerning the City of God against the Pagans*, translated by Henry Scowcroft. (London: Penguin, 2003), XIII.2.3. Augustine draws upon Neoplatonic thinking of how the body derives its life from the soul. Here Augustine concludes that the body derives life from the solely regardless if “the soul derives its life from God or not.” Even if they turn from God and their souls are dead from the abandonment, the immortal is present in them “in however low a degree.” This coincides with one of the main points of this work that the image of God is in all humankind.

50 Augustine, *Soliloquies* 2.6 (NPNF 3:550).

51 Augustine, *Literal Meaning of Genesis*, 7.3.4. Augustine writes that the soul does not rule in the same way that God does over creation but that there is a likeness or similarity between the two.
nature are many, where the *imago Dei* becomes dissected and bifurcated into something it was never intended to reflect. Simply one part of the composite make-up of humankind is not God’s intention as the proper vessel of the divine image. It is in wholeness that God creates and in completeness that the work is finished (Genesis 2:1-3). Like the Manicheans of old, the modern evangelical branches of the church have promoted a separation of soul and body and a distancing from the flesh or anything not considered “spiritual.” This robs a person from understanding the complexity of God’s creative work and intention for humanity to participate with the divine as this research will cover in the following section. Having rejected this dualistic philosophy in the past, Augustine wisely rejects the Eastern Fathers concept of two distinct creation accounts in Genesis 1 & 2 that delineates a creative difference between the body and the soul. Instead, he brings both accounts together upholding the composite nature of humankind. As Boersma succinctly states, “A thoroughgoing dualism does not fit with this description.”52

For Augustine, the soul is the pinnacle of God’s intellectual or eternal work because the soul has a unique dependency on that which it images; God. In question 51 of *Eighty-Three Different Questions*, Augustine touches upon the Pauline delineation of inner and outer man noting that the soul “would be the inner man in respect to the soul.”53 The inner man or soul derives an understanding and a participation with God unlike any other created being. Augustine writes, “For this reason, since man can participate in

52 Boersma, 213.
53 Augustine, *Different Questions*, 51.1. Augustine explains how Adam is the outer man, corrupted by sin and the inner man is Christ whose resurrection renews the inner man day by day as written by Paul in 2 Corinthians 4:16. The soul then, being part of the inner man, is renewed daily in its imaging or reflection of Christ.
wisdom according to the inner man, as such he is in the image of God in such a way that he is formed without the interposition of any other nature. Therefore nothing is more closely united to God, for man knows and lives and exists and thus is unsurpassed among created beings.”\textsuperscript{54} The hierarchy of humankind over creation begins with the soul and how it participates with God without the intervention of any other device or nature. Drever highlights how Augustine rightfully identifies this unique dependency of the soul, as “the soul is part of the intellectual creation and so enjoys a type of immediacy to God.”\textsuperscript{55} He further explains, “The image of God is not some ‘thing,’ part, or faculty imprinted onto an already existing soul; rather it characterizes how the soul forms its most basic identity out of its existence. This identity is internal to the soul and not external…The soul exists in a type of reflective immediacy in which its primordial identity is given to it from that which the soul is not (i.e., God).”\textsuperscript{56} Therefore, humankind is not produced on a sort of manufacturing line in heaven, with an “image” sticker fixed upon each passing soul. Rather, our very existence is framed by our \textit{closeness} to the divine.

The perceptive reader will understand the paradox which appears when it is understood that the true identity of the soul is not of itself but its closeness, its reflective immediacy to God. The soul, therefore, is most itself when it is \textit{least} its own. This paradoxical conclusion echoes the words of Jesus when he proclaims, “For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will find it.”

\textsuperscript{54} Augustine, \textit{Different Questions}, 51.2
\textsuperscript{55} Drever, 125.
\textsuperscript{56} Drever, 127.
(Matthew 16:25). Hilary of Poitiers comments, “The Lord wished for us to grow rich through the loss of soul and body, encouraging us to become as he is.”

The paradox of being more “human” when we shed the desire to create our identity, and instead, lose our life (i.e., embody and embrace the imago Dei) is the very aspect that encapsulates God’s very nature. The soul and therefore the identity of humankind is not the creation of self-effort or the affixing of labels but in the acceptance of eternal truth: “God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.” (Genesis 1:27).

Framed within the Augustinian understanding of the imago Dei that the body is distinct but not separate from the soul, true formation of self happens when embodiment begins with the joining of the soul and the identity is formed. Thus, identity to Augustine is not merely a spiritual or non-qualitative aspect of existence. It is not merely an abstraction but defined by the soul and body in unison. The value of Augustine’s thought is the foundational aspect of what it means to be created in the imago Dei. Humankind has been thoroughly described in this work as the embodiment of flesh and soul. It has a unique dependency, not a one-time indebtedness to God, creating the essence of our being which reflects the divine image.

God’s pinnacle act of creating humankind in the imago Dei is the foundation to every question (and answer) regarding human existence. Humankind is the embodiment of body and soul made to reflect the likeness and image of God. From an intellect that

originates in self-awareness, to a soul that reflects its immediacy to God, there is an
excellence that drives a deep dependence to the Creator. Further, there is the royal decree
of God, placed upon humanity in ruling over creation in power, harmony and order, as
God rules over creation and likewise the soul rules over the body. Humankind continues
to reflect God when one considers that image, both in body and soul, function as a verb in
a relational aspect that defines the foundation of what it means to be human. Thus,
making Augustine’s words above ring all the more clearly, “nothing is more closely
united to God.”

The closeness that humankind shares with God is not something shared by one
group of people alone. The implications of humankind being created in the imago Dei is
that all of humanity shares a trace of the divine. For the Christian, this compels an
understanding that those who are not Christ followers share in the imago Dei, as hidden
as it may be, to be discovered and set free. As Michelangelo perceived every block a
stone stated above, the Christian should understand this beauty better than any other
people group with even a cursory understanding of Scripture and the nature of God. Yet,
it is the Christian that often struggles with accepting that all of humankind, regardless of
race, sexuality, creed, etc., shares in the imago Dei. The doors of every church should
welcome all with a foundational equity that begins with a deep conviction to the majestic
words of Genesis 1:27, “God created humankind in his image…”.

58 See Footnote 50. Augustine, Different Questions, 51.2
59 Michelangelo describes “Every block of stone has a statue inside it and it is the task of the sculptor to
discover it.”
There is another concept highlighted above that humankind is created with an origination of self-awareness. This same self-awareness also compliments humankind to understand things that are true and those which are false. In Augustine’s work, *Against the Academicians* he develops the argument that certain types of truth or knowledge\(^60\) are impervious to skeptical doubts, such as the knowledge of knowing whether it is raining or not raining. These same logical truths can be utilized when viewing humanity. The uniqueness of humankind can be perceived by all people, a logical truth that finds its origination in the foundational aspect of being created in the *imago Dei*. This truth should fully imbed itself into all of our difficult, yet necessary conversations regarding race, sexuality, inclusion, exclusion and the purpose and intention of humanity. Framed within a proper understanding of what it means to be created in the *imago Dei*, there should also be a proper understanding of what it means to image something. Augustine developed an understanding that truth can be known through an image. As Boersma suggests the key takeaway from *Against the Academicians* is, “The fundamental nature of an image is to participate in and show forth that of which it is an image.”\(^61\) If one thinks about this in a purely philosophical way, the goal of life is not to create something different but to *properly* reflect the Creator. If that Creator by definition is perfect, how could our attempts to alter our identity equal anything less than perfection? Simply put, if we bear

\(^{60}\) Augustine posits three different truth claims in his work *Against the Academicians* and the supplemental appendices. First, logical truth as the example listed above. Second are appearance claims which would be understood as something “seems” to be a certain way and thirdly there are mathematical truths.

\(^{61}\) Boersma, 189.
the image of God, no identity we create, choose or decide upon could equal what is the essential element to all of humankind.

**Sin (The Fall)**

When an image functions properly, it reflects and represents that which it images. The truth of this statement can be seen in the uniqueness of humankind, created to reflect the perfect Creator. This uniqueness of being created in God’s image with body and soul in harmonious unity is a treasure bestowed upon humankind alone. Yet, one can also view that there is a restlessness within the human spirit, a brokenness in the heart of humankind, an ugliness in the world that drives people with a desire to reflect anything but the *imago Dei*. If an image functions in truth when reflecting that which it images, then the contrary would be, “the temporal, material image remains *deceptive* when its nature as an image is forgotten.”62 When an image no longer reflects or forgets that which it derives its source, substance and meaning from, it no longer functions as an image. We deceive ourselves when we chose to turn to other images, we deceive ourselves when we forget our image and we are deceived when we put our trust or belief in anything that claims to have a better solution for our image.

As quickly as the narrative develops on the uniqueness of humankind in Genesis, it devolves into a corruption, an unsettling of the soul and a brokenness of the proverbial mirror that has plagued humanity since. Humankind goes from a firm understanding of

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truth, being created in the *imago Dei*, to the deception that something in our grasp could be greater.

While developing the argument that truth can be known in *Against the Academicians* Augustine develops the idea of Proteus who in Greek Mythology was the “Old Man of the Sea” according to Homer. Proteus was a shapeshifter, someone who changed his shape so he wouldn’t have to tell the future. This is where we get the idea that something is protean “to be able to change frequently or easily.” With this in mind, Augustine claims that Proteus is someone “introduced as an image of truth” which people cannot obtain because we are “deceived by false images…These images, in the customary manner of corporeal things, try to fool and deceive us through our senses (which we use for the necessities of our life), even when we apprehend the truth and hold it, so to speak, within our hands.” A perfect echo of the events in the garden of Eden. What better way to subvert the meaning of an image than by deceiving the archetype of said image? Adam and Eve had a firm handle on the truth that was clearly delivered by God to them as the only humans present and responsible as caretakers over creation. At that time, they had no need but that which is foundational to all human existence, i.e., companionship, food, shelter and it was through the corporeal, the need of the body, that they were ultimately deceived. The serpent spoke to the woman saying, “Did God say, ‘You shall not eat from any tree in the garden’?” (Genesis 3:1). The needs of the body are nothing to be ashamed of, one must eat to survive. Yet, the serpent asks a question

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63 Augustine, *Against the Academicians and The Teacher*, translated by Peter King (Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, 1995), 3.6.13. Referred to from this point as *Against the Academicians*. 

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precluding food from any of the trees in the garden, surely to make her normal need of eating to be something to be ashamed about. Right from the beginning, the serpent insinuates to the woman that the normal feelings that *God created you with* of being hungry are wrong. The way you were created was wrong and ultimately the image that you supposedly “reflect” is warped and simply trying to hold you back from your potential. All from a question of a simple fruit to the first woman and man causing them to struggle with identity. Can the serpent still be operating in this way today? Sowing the seeds of distrust and deception in the simple, yet mysterious, things that God has created inherent inside of humankind? The current cultural climate is one of distrust in all bodily functions, especially that which cave to the desires of eating, drinking and sexual function. What would happen to one’s image if there was a loss of self-control in one of these areas? Deceptive images seem more appealing and comfortable when the juicy fruit is within our grasp.

Beyond attacking the supposed insecurities of the first man and woman, Augustine sees the work of the serpent as an attack on the archetype of the *imago Dei*, and further, an attack on the composite unity of body and soul. For Augustine, Adam and Eve serve as a symbol of the proper ordering of the soul’s appetites or desires and the way of reason. In his exposition of Genesis 2 against his former Manichean cohort, he explains how the man and woman symbolize the single person made in the *imago Dei*. Augustine writes, “what can be seen more clearly in two human beings, that is, in male and female, may be considered *in a single person*; that the interior mind, like the manly reason, should have as its subject the soul’s appetite or desire, through which we put the
limbs and parts of the body to work, and by just law should keep its help within bounds.”

Thus, for Augustine, male and female is less about sexual distinction and more focused upon a spiritual referent predicated on the immaterial aspect of God.

Further, the joining of Adam and Eve by God taking the rib of the man and fashioning the woman shows a love and unity for our composite nature of body and soul. This close proximity and intimacy of the first couple beautifully describes the proper ordering of the soul and body. As Augustine writes “that each of us may exercise a proper lordship or mastery over this part of ourselves, and become a kind of wedded couple in the very self, with the flesh not warring against the spirit with its desires but submitting to it, that is, the desire of the flesh not opposing reason but rather complying with it and thus ceasing to be of the flesh.” Analogically, Adam and Eve’s nuptial relationship symbolizes a beautiful understanding of the proper ordering of the body to the soul.

With a proper understanding of the composite nature of the imago Dei being symbolically represented through Adam and Eve, one can return to the protean foil the serpent plays in the Garden. A false image of the truth who “had fallen from his blessed state, because he did not stand in the truth (Jn 8:44).” In Question 12 of Eighty-Three Different Questions, Augustine describes how the devil attacks the body and soul by “intermingling with the senses” and further to “pollute the sanctity of the soul and

64 Augustine, A Refutation Of The Manichees, 2.11.15. Emphasis mine.
65 Augustine, A Refutation Of The Manichees, 2.12.16
66 Augustine, A Refutation Of The Manichees, 2.14.20
becloud the light of the mind.” In his craftiness he “lurks hidden in anger and in the deception of speech…it darkens the senses with darksome affections.” The devil operates in this way by identifying the divine order and inverting its foundational structure. Through the senses, the devil suggests the proper order decreed by God is wrong and that the body be given control over the spirit. It is the devil who desires to bring duality, a warring between body and soul to the forefront of humanity’s existence. This is a disorder of the divine way, which locks humankind in a place of eternal frustration when the body dictates the soul. The devil’s insidious attacks are not simply on one part of creation, but rather, on the very reflection of the divine. What could be more destructive and demoralizing than attacking what Augustine describes as the image that “mirrors the divine presence, for in it God, in it the blameless will, in it the merit of virtuous action all shine forth.” Ultimately, it is the devil’s desire to corrupt the imago Dei and destroy the pinnacle work of God.

Classically, the sin of the Garden or “Original sin” is disobedience to God’s clear instruction that the fruit of the “tree of knowledge of good and evil” should not be eaten. In this disobedience, humanity displayed an arrogance, a pride which circumvented God and deposed his law with one profound, yet simple choice. Augustine

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67 Augustine, Eighty-Three Different Questions, 12
68 Ibid, 12
69 Ibid, 12
70 Interestingly, Eve states to the serpent that God said, “You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the middle of the garden, nor shall you touch it, or you shall die.” (Genesis 3:3). Yet, the addition of the statement of not touching the fruit is nowhere presented in God’s original command (2:17). As discussed above, the serpent used the senses to bring disorder and disrupt the way the woman perceived the choice before her.
describes pride as, “being the mother of all heretics, these have had the nerve to say that the soul is identical with God’s nature.” If one feels “equal” to God than naturally there will be a sense of pride that develops from such a seemingly lofty position. For Adam and Eve, they understood intrinsically that they were not God, having walked in the cool of the Garden. No, there is an unfathomable sin here that normally masquerades as “prideful disobedience” but should more precisely be described as the prideful rejection of the *imago Dei*. Not simply an arrogance but the pride of not choosing one’s identity as created in the *imago Dei*. Humankind didn’t have Wall Street, Madison Ave, YouTube, SnapChat, Instagram, TikTok or any other host of modern “identity labelers” to shape and inform their choice. Yet, given the choice between the perfect identity bestowed from the Creator or the half-truths of a surreptitious serpent, humankind believed that identity could be negotiated, compromised and surrendered at will. Deceived by the false image of self. The subversive sin on full display in the garden was that one could choose their identity, and ultimately, be more fulfilling and pleasing than anything God could create or give. This is sin at its most subversive, and coincidentally, its most life taking form.

A word of caution must be made here, identity is not simply an exercise of the intellect. One must consider that Adam and Eve understood the command that God gave them to not eat from the tree of good and evil. It was not confusion or a misunderstanding of the command and expectation that God brought to them that led to their demise. People often glimpse over the notion of the *imago Dei* and turn it into a logical or mental

71 Augustine, A Refutation Of The Manichees, 2.8.11
exercise. Identity is participatory, it requires a reflective immediacy to the Creator and an intentional choice to live (participate) into this identity. In many Christian circles it seems conducive to repeat that one is a “child of God” as some sort of reprogramming system or daily affirmation that will simply “reset” the Christ follower to understand something that was beyond their understanding to begin with. This is not identity. Understanding one’s identity is but the first step which then requires embracing and living into one’s identity and this was put on full display in the Garden. Adam and Eve weren’t confused about their identity, strolling through the garden and seeing the Creator would affirm in their composite unity of body and soul that the reflection and likeness of the divine was foundational to them. The intellect did not struggle to see the similarities nor did the soul fail to grasp the depth of image. The man and woman failed to embrace and participate into the image Dei and in doing so humankind has been plunged into sin ever since. Augustine powerfully captures the moment of rejection in the Garden by stating, “what else is to be understood but a suggestion that they should refuse to be under God any longer, but should be their own masters instead without the Lord, that they should not keep a rule apparently laid down by him out of a jealous refusal to let them be in control of their own lives, no longer needing inner enlightenment from him, but using their own wits, their own eyes so to say, to tell the difference between good and evil, which he wanted to stop them doing?”

72 Augustine, A Refutation Of The Manichees. 2.15.22
We are so convinced of our own superiority and goodness that we can disregard the image, the participation, the enlightenment that we have been created in and in its stead, insert *ourselves*. With God out of the way, man and woman simply usurped their Creator and inserted themselves as *image creators*, instead of *image bearers*, and humanity has been dealing with these devastating effects ever since.

Once it is realized that sin is a rejection of the *imago Dei*, one can ascertain that any identity that is inserted in place of the *imago Dei* is counterfeit. Pride leads one to believe that the counterfeit is actually better than the original! This sinister act of sin leads one astray by refusing to live into the identity of the *imago Dei*. The great lie that God is holding something back from humankind is reborn anew! If the identity of a person is formed by the soul and body coming together in unison, as explained through Augustine, one cannot simply craft, choose or live into something different. Human identity cannot be formed by “self.” Attempts at forming one’s identity through external measures are ineffective, since identity exists in its reflective immediacy to God. Humankind strives to create that which has long before been willed into existence when God created humankind in his image and likeness. For when one rejects their identity as made in the *imago Dei*, they reject the very fiber of their being. One pridefully rejects what has been made for something inferior. This in essence is a rebirth of the fall narrative. By rejecting God, we reject ourselves. *Sin, therefore, is a rejection of one’s self by rejecting the One who created self.*

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Conclusion

This chapter has developed an impactful answer to the question of what it means to be human, and more to the point, to be created in the *imago Dei*. Humankind was created by God to “mirror the divine presence.” Humankind shares a beautiful likeness and imagery of the divine, but importantly, not an equality. In both image and likeness, the implication of being created in the *imago Dei* carries a closeness to the divine that no other creature shares and this uniqueness should be thoroughly embraced and celebrated as it brings eternal meaning to life. Further, by understanding the proper ordering of the composite embodiment of the body and soul in the human person we see the reflective power, harmony and order of God. Each and every human being has been created with the purpose of participating into a close, relational unity with God. For humankind, the gravity of this truth should lovingly lead one to a place of acceptance of the beauty of the *imago Dei*. Which empowers each one of us to accept our role as an image bearer and our ultimate purpose to live in a way which reflects that which we image!

Participation in a reflective immediacy to God allows humanity to mirror the divine but also brings an inherent danger. The serpent, the devil, seeks out the corruption and destruction of that divine mirror through the enticement of the senses and the corruption of the created order of body and soul. Like any mirror, the reflection can be smudged, dirtied and broken. Aided by the devil’s deception and driven by pride, the “mother of all heretics”, humankind sinned and rejected the *imago Dei*. By rejecting our identity, we have in turn rejected God and have therefore rejected ourselves. This is where sin continues to perpetuate and destroy the optics of humanity’s true identity. Sin
blurs, muddies and fractures the image until all we can perceive are broken pieces of an image lying all around us. The true image becomes distorted, corrupted and lost, blindly plunging us not to the remedy but to the broken cisterns to create our own image. Any image that is *other* than the image created in us by the perfect God will always leave humanity in a state of frustration. Without understanding that the true self comes from God alone, one cannot live in the wisdom, closeness and relational immediacy to God that is foundational to human existence. Humankind desperately needs the pieces of the image restored, redeemed or remade to recapture what it means to be truly human.

The sin of the Garden...was it simply a bite of the forbidden fruit? How unreasonable must be any god that might smite someone who ate a simple piece of fruit? Isn’t that what is being discussed here, eating the green apple instead of the red apple? Fruit though wasn’t the problem; it was a rejection of our created identity and purpose of being obedient to the Creator. Obedience is considered the “mother and guardian of all the other virtues.”¹ The created element is never above that of its creator in any aspect, how much more so in the very essence of life? The folly of the Garden was believing that humankind could thrive in contradiction to its Creator. Augustine points out, “it is to man’s advantage to be in subjection to God, and it is calamitous for him to act according to his own will, and not to obey the will of his Creator.”²

A great question to ponder is, has humankind broken, marred or perhaps even lost something that now leaves humanity doomed to failure? What is the prognosis on the situation, has identity, the *imago Dei*, been lost forever or is there any way to overcome that devastating moment in the Garden? Throughout human existence, to know one’s “self” is considered wisdom and the source of wise living. The ancient Greek maxim of “Know Thyself” comes to mind when one discusses identity and purpose. One must truly understand who they are before they can become what they have been created to be. This

¹ Augustine, *Concerning the City of God against the Pagans*, translated by Henry Scowcroft (London: Penguin, 2003), XIV.13.12. Referred to from this point as “City of God.”
² Ibid, XIV.13.12
theme of “being” before “doing” will be addressed in more detail in the following chapter but cannot be lost as we discuss identity. The focus of this chapter will be the understanding and knowing of self in view of Wisdom literature, specifically that of Job and Ecclesiastes. How does one appropriately perceive themselves in view of being created in the imago Dei, which has now become negatively impacted by sin, specifically pride? Further, when one has everything stripped bare, or in contrast, has all that the world offers does it change one’s core identity? By asking these questions, what can we learn about the state of humanity and how can one live in such a way that is fundamentally true to our created self; to know thyself? When the labels, identities and masks are removed…what is humankind left with?

**A New Look At Job**

For the modern reader, identity is normally something attained or constructed through effort, guile, skill and determination. Our labels of identity come from work, school, friends, parents, spouses, even enemies and critics can form our (counterfeit) identities. What happens when these identities that have taken a lifetime to “create” are stripped away and one is left bare? The biblical story of Job is worth a fresh look, one that isn’t simply myopic on suffering but on the true self of someone grounded in the *imago Dei*.

The book of Job is synonymous with suffering and wrestling with understanding where God is, in the midst of not only Job’s suffering, but our own. Considered part of “Wisdom literature,” there is much more than suffering to learn from the story of Job.
The beauty of Scripture is that one is not limited to interpreting the Bible as the major expositors do, or in any other single way. Taking a fresh look at the book of Job allows us to continue mining the Bible for its depth and beauty of wisdom. While there has been much anthropological research in an attempt to understand “self” in the New Testament, Brian Doak notes, “the Hebrew Bible has been under-explored in this respect.” While true, an understanding of “anthropological theory” can help one to unearth the universal human elements that Job suffered through and what thing(s) allowed him to overcome.

Whether one views Job as a fictional story to teach a universal lesson, or a story grounded in a historical person, time and place, it is a story immersed in identity as it unfolds. The opening verse sets the tone, “There was once a man in the land of Uz whose name was Job. That man was blameless and upright, one who feared God and turned away from evil.” (Job 1:1). Job’s identity is founded in his respect or fear for God, which has in turn effected his behavior of living virtuously and upright. To put this into perspective, by turning from evil and fearing God it is understood that Job lives in a participatory relationship with God. He “participates” by shunning evil and living in respect of God. This is further detailed in the following versus (4-5) that intimate Job’s children feasting and Job making intercessional burnt offerings to ensure that his children had not broken fellowship with God by cursing “God in their hearts.” Job acts as an

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4 Thomas W. Overholt, Cultural Anthropology and the Old Testament (Fortress Press: Minneapolis, 1996), 3. He writes, “Anthropological theory can offer valuable assistance by helping us understand the nature of culture and of the relationship between a given culture and the everyday lives of the individuals who live in it.”
intermediary with God, participating with God’s mercy and grace on behalf of his children. If one recalls from the previous chapter, identity is participatory, it requires a reflective immediacy to the Creator and an intentional choice to live (participate) into this identity. Job embodies this participatory relationship with God which is the core understanding of being created in the imago Dei.

Only after Job is described with his unwavering commitment to his Creator does the writer go on to describe what many readers would understand as most significant, his great wealth and his standing among the people. Therefore, the beginning of Job serves as a template for the premise that what is truly valuable is the incorruptible treasure of the *imago Dei*. There is a proper “order” to Job’s identity, and it begins with his reflection of the divine. It is this “identity” that is foundational to all of humanity, all others are secondary at best.

It is only after the true identity of Job, a man whom participates with the divine is revealed, that the peripheral labels of identity are added to describe Job. In contrast to the identities of consumption seen in the first chapter of this work, Job shows that while dependent on the material goods for life, his identity is not grounded in the material. He is a man who is blessed with a large, prosperous family with seven sons and three daughters (v.2). Further, he is a man with a vast amount of wealth amassing thousands of heads of sheep (livestock), in addition to camels and donkeys (transportation) and five hundred yoke of oxen (farming and construction). With such a large enterprise he also “employs” many servants to which he shows a unique responsibility and justice towards (31:13). The humancentric title that Job is provided in Scripture is “greatest of all the
people of the east.” (1:3). Augustine echo’s this title which Scripture crowns upon Job by calling him a “holy and amazing man” and describing him further that “no man of his period is put on the same level as far as righteousness and devotion are concerned.”

There seems to be much pomp and circumstance about who Job is and how he is seen by the readers of the book. The logical follow up question to this development would be, “why”? Perhaps the book of Job is more about overcoming the identities generated by the world (that we cling to) than one would like to admit?!

How does one identify self in the present world? A recent Barna study polled 1,000 Evangelicals to see what influenced their identity with 62% of respondents citing family, 52% citing religious faith and upwards of 38% citing career. Any meeting of people at the proverbial “cocktail party” usually begins with, “what do you do for work?” “I’m a plumber or an office manager. I do sales for a fortune 500 company or I’m a lawyer, doctor or professor at an esteemed institution.” While working in ministry for over 15 years in counseling, these identity labels are far too real and entrenched in both men and women. For many men, identity stems from their occupation. As Barna notes, over one in three people see themselves through the lens of their occupation. When a man loses his job the effects can be devastating beyond the loss of income, what has become of his identity?

For women, identity often stems from relationships, family, marriage and children. When counseling a woman who has been unable to bear children, she often

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5 Augustine, *City of God*, XVIII.47.1
feels as part of her identity is destroyed or lost. Correspondingly, when a marriage fails, many men and women will sense that their identity has failed with it. For many women those that have felt empowered with pursuing family and career, the loss of a job can be even more palpable. Not only does her identity as a career person suffer, but also, her identity as a mother, wife and/or provider for her family suffers as well.

Assuredly Job speaks to those that have experienced suffering, but perhaps Job also speaks to those who have never felt the pain of career loss or identity confusion? They have been successful in whatever endeavor and have achieved every identity or label they sought out to be bestowed upon them. From a wealth perspective, Job was the Bill Gates, Jeff Bezos or Warren Buffet of his time. One can reasonably assume that Job never intended any of his “titles” to be taken or his great wealth to be stripped from him. Job was a man with deep pockets and great resources who becomes pillaged by an onslaught of evil and suffering. As Doak notes, “Since Job is the quintessential biblical sufferer, we cannot help but read Job’s own identity in terms of the suffering self.”7

While Job and the reader may identify Job in terms of the “suffering self” is this truly the sole intention of the story?

Peering through the lens of this work, does God desire Job to see himself as a “sufferer” or someone/something more? What way does God want Job, his friends, the reader and even Satan to understand and identify Job? A closer look at the titles and identities given and taken are in order.

7 Doak, Consider Leviathan, 16.
When approached by Satan, Job is offered up by God who proclaims, “Have you considered my servant Job? There is no one like him on earth, a blameless and upright man who fears God and turns away from evil.” (1:8). God’s description of Job is one whose life is centered on participating, respecting and reflecting the characteristics of God. One can say that Job was reflecting the image of his Creator while worshipping with his very life. Augustine beautifully captures this idea by writing, “For surely the supremely important thing in religion is to model oneself on the object of one’s worship.” Job modeled himself to reflect God in all areas of his life. It is also very telling what God does not use to describe Job to Satan, his possessions, family or wealth. God relays the foundational aspect of Job by focusing on the relational, participatory aspect of Job; a man living into the imago Dei. This of course incites Satan since his goal has been to tarnish, divert, break and destroy the imago Dei since he first entered into the Garden. Augustine keenly points out that Satan’s pride is what created an envious swelling inside of him and “what brought about his fall from the supernal regions was his jealous grudging of the man being made to the image of God.” For Satan, the words, “for in the day you eat of it you shall die” (Genesis 2:17) was a promise to salacious for

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8 Saint Ambrose states that Job understood his sin and confessed it regularly, a mode of participation in the pre-Christ writings of Job while fully understanding it was but God who could forgive, sanctify and restore him. Ambrose writes, “One who denies his guilt and does not confess it, is in effect denying his birth…And so, let the sinner confess, the unholy man lament, and the just one not raise himself up and extol himself: else he may lose the reward of his justice through pride. And Job appropriately says, ‘If I am just, I cannot rise up, for I am full of shame.’” (10:15). Ambrose, *The Prayer of Job*, 6.19-20. In vol. 65 of *The Fathers of the Church*. Translated by Michael P. McHugh (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2003).

9 Augustine, *City of God*, VIII.17.2

him to pass up! Satan’s protest against Job was that he only feared God due to the protection and blessings bestowed upon him (vv. 9-10). According to Satan, the moment those possessions and great wealth were taken from Job, he would assuredly curse God to his face (v.11). Satan is effectively telling God, “your spoiled, protected being will no longer reflect your “image” the moment he believes you have deserted him!”

The story unfolds with Job losing his oxen, servants, sheep, camels and ultimately all of his children as a great wind causes their house to collapse upon them (vv.14-19). Devastated, Job blesses the name of the Lord and worships after Satan does his evil best at having him turn away from God and his true identity. Afforded a second audience, Satan appears before God in the heavenly court. Even after Job’s first round of “suffering”, God repeats verbatim his description of Job (2:3). God continues to refer to him relationally, as someone who is in close, participatory relationship to him and has not turned his back on God. If “sufferer” was the true identity of Job, God would have simply told Satan, “see Job, my suffering servant, look at how he suffers and yet takes it like a man!” No, suffering was a temporal circumstance of Job’s life, it wasn’t his life, it wasn’t his identity! God illuminates the proper order to human identity, and it begins with a reflective relationship with the divine. To God, Job was best described in participatory language, what his relationship with God was like, for it is our relationship with the divine that holds the key to our eternal identity!

Job’s second assault was much more profane than the first, with Satan attacking his body and health (2:7). He retreats away to the trash heap, scraping his flesh with a piece of broken pottery to find relief from the boils on his body. His wife entreats him to,
“Curse God and die.” (2:9) and yet he refuses to break his participatory relationship with God and again offers up his worship. It is in this bodily breaking of Job that Satan is no longer heard from and three friends come onto the scene.

While many of the identities and labels one strives for are self-obtained or self-appointed, our peers also carry a great influence upon the way one identifies themselves. Job’s three friends, Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar come to console Job after they hear of the atrocities he has experienced (2:11). What begins as an empathetic mission quickly devolves into a judgmental, label-making experience with Job in the crosshairs of his three friends. To his friends, Job had broken the cultural cardinal sin, his body had become broken and “confirmed” his true nature; hidden sinner!

From an anthropological standpoint the cultural ramifications of being diseased, broken and sick was akin to having a scarlet “A” sewn onto your chest. As Amy Erickson states, “In general, the body serves as an outward indicator of one’s role and place in the community as well as one’s standing in God’s eyes.”

Several times Job references the betrayal of his body; “my flesh is clothed with worms and dirt” (7:5), “though I am innocent, my own mouth would condemn me” (9:20), and “my leanness has risen up against me” (16:8). With his friends reacting to his diseased circumstances by replying, “For your iniquity teaches your mouth, and you choose the tongue of the crafty. Your own mouth condemns you, and not I;” (15:5-6). As Erickson describes, “Job’s body,

12 See also Job 9:30–31; 19:20–23; and 19:25–27
13 See also Job 8:4-6, 20; 11:14-15; 15:20; 18:4-7; 20:27-29 by no means an exhaustive list.
clothed in disintegrating skin, would likely have suggested to ancient readers divine sanction for sin and have stood in contrast to evaluations of his character by the narrator and by God in the prologue.”

In fact, it is but God and the reader that truly knows the true identity of Job as the story develops, for all other characters are so focused on the outward, circumstantial evidence that they have forgotten what is truly important; the *imago Dei*.

A moment to reflect on the gravity of Job is in order. The characters in the book of Job or the people living in this time and place all looked upon Job and threw label after label upon him due to his *circumstances*. Ultimately, his identity was stamped upon him with the proclamation, “Job is being punished because he is a ‘sinner’”. The question one is moved to ask becomes; how often do we operate in this same place in our churches today? How often do we see someone struggling with the circumstances of divorce, cancer, career loss or loss of a loved one and the same judgment of Job’s friends becomes our judgement and the *de facto* identity of another human being created in God’s image?!

With poor personal choices these people are now being stripped publicly of their rightful identity because of our own pettiness?!

In his mercy, God does not allow the counterfeit identities thrust upon Job to stand. In the epilogue, God speaks out to Eliphaz and friends, proclaiming, “My wrath is kindled against you and against your two friends; for you have not spoken of me what is right, as my servant Job has.” (42:7). In all of Job’s lamenting over his situation, God

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14 Erickson, Job’s Rhetoric of the Body, 299.
affirms Job and their relationship through his rebuke against Job’s friends and the many blessings of restoring family, friends and wealth (42:7-17). While God never explains his actions to Job, he overpowers Job through his mastery over creation, force of nature, dominion over animals and divine wisdom. God challenges Job by stating, “Will you even put me in the wrong? Will you condemn me that you may be justified? Have you an arm like God, and can you thunder with a voice like his? Deck yourself with majesty and dignity; clothe yourself with glory and splendor. Pour out the overflowings of your anger, and look on all who are proud, and bring them low.” (40:8-12). God presents Job and the reader a very profound understanding of identity by stating; “You are the image bearer; I Am the Image!” As Saint Ambrose points out in his Prayer of Job, it is our inherent lacking that shows humankind’s ontological standing. He writes, “One man falls because he has the more power, another is tormented because he has none. The fault lies in our condition, because our life is swifter than a runner; it has passed away and seen nothing.”15 For Augustine, the wisest living involved the foundational understanding that, “All instruction in wisdom, the purpose of which is the education of men, is for distinguishing the creator and the creature, and worshipping the one as Lord and confessing the other as subject.”16 The antithesis of pride and the embodiment of the imago Dei is accepting that one is not God. Through this acceptance comes our authentic dependency upon God, which rightfully exists for all eternity.

16 Augustine, Eighty-Three Different Questions. 74 In vol. 70 of The Fathers of the Church. Translated by David L. Mosher (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2002). 81.1 Referred to from this point as “Different Questions.”
The story of Job teaches that there is but one identity “Creator” and when faced with this stark reality humankind is left with its hand over its proverbial mouth, unable to speak a reply (40:4-5). Yet, in view of the reality that God alone has the right to create human identity, we still reach for earthly materials and circumstances as a better alternative! The arrogance of such a choice is aptly described by Augustine as he states, “They would have existed in a higher degree, if they had adhered to him who exists in the highest degree; but in preferring themselves to him they chose a lower degree of existence.” As in the Garden, when Adam and Eve chose their own wisdom, so does Job’s friends when they counsel him on his “great sin.” They chose themselves, their own wisdom and chose a lower existence because of their prideful choices. Job didn’t take this path, he understood, before an onslaught of evil overtook him, that he was an image bearer of God. One of the greatest “treasures” Job possessed that could never be stolen, corrupted, destroyed or lost was his fear of God and rejection of evil. By fearing God, Job embodied the *imago Dei*. His acknowledgement of God as one to be feared was in the deepest sense an understanding that by acknowledging God he was acknowledging his self.

Job’s greatest treasure or possession wasn’t anything material but in reality, was God himself. Job’s path was a circuitous one through suffering, loss, pain, doubt, anger and frustration. Through this long searching path, Job learns the lesson of a lifetime. This lesson is echoed in another place in wisdom literature, Psalm 73, which is often referred

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17 Augustine, *City of God*, XII.6.1
to as “Job’s Psalm.” The Psalmist describes his confusion with how the wicked seem to prosper while the righteous are laid down with heavy burdens. Yet, it is through this struggle that the Psalmist realizes that he must lay down all of his questions and burdens before God in his holy place. The Psalmist writes:

> “Whom have I in heaven but you?  
> And there is nothing on earth that I desire other than you.  
> My flesh and my heart may fail,  
> but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.”\(^{18}\)

Like Job, the Psalmist remains steadfast through his time of suffering. As Gregory Polan writes, “The encounter with God in the holy place transforms the Psalmist’s lonely search for answers into an experience of “walking” with God.”\(^{19}\) Both Job and the Psalmist realize that by participating with God, they have chosen the “highest degree of existence” and not themselves or the possessions of this world. Augustine specifically highlights that “The psalmist goes on to say that his ‘possession’ is God himself, and not something which comes from God.”\(^{20}\) Despite all of the suffering that had been thrown upon them, both the Psalmist and Job “possessed” God through their participatory relationship with the divine.

Ultimately, this was the lesson taught to Satan, Job’s friends, and is still being learned to this day. Job had all of the things that come from God, the material blessings that people yearn and strive for their entire lives. Job had wealth, flocks, lands, children

\(^{18}\) Psalm 73:25-26  
\(^{20}\) Augustine, *City of God*, X.25.6
and a host of servants, all of the things that showed that someone was important in the ancient world (and many consider important to this day!). These are all the things that come from God, yet they are not God himself. In speaking of his Father, Jesus proclaims, “for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous.”21 The blessings of God are not indicative of some special relationship with God. They do show that God shares blessings with all humankind because all humankind is created in the imago Dei. The righteous and unrighteous alike share in God’s good nature just as the righteous and unrighteous alike share in the ability to reflect the image of God. Yet, the “blessed” in Jesus’ same Sermon on the Mount are those who specifically humble themselves before God while living relationally dependent upon him each day. This shows that reflecting the image of God and “possessing” God are vastly different things. For Job, when stripped bare of all that he had, even the sharing of the blessings of humanity while he sat in a trash heap on the outskirts of town while scraping at his boils. He realized that “possessing” God was the only thing that mattered in life. Job understood that wise living was embodied in his participation in the image Dei, reflecting the very nature and being of God and his participation with God by living into his image as an acceptance that God’s way is always right. This was the key to Job’s experience, and which still teaches us to this day.

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21 Matthew 5:44b
A New Look At Ecclesiastes

When everything is removed from a person one is left with the clarity that the only possession that matters is a relationship with God. What happens when the opposite is true? When one possesses all that the world has to offer; all of the riches, fame, kingdoms and pleasures that are available in life, how might one establish what is truly “valuable?” Further, how does one identify themselves when all of the labels the world offers are well within one’s grasp? We move from one extreme, Job, to the polar opposite in Ecclesiastes to discover if the world offers a better substitute to one’s identity than the one created by God. Can humankind create, achieve or work for an identity that replaces or supersedes the imago Dei? What can a man who “owned it all” thousands of years ago teach us about our identity today? A fresh look at the book of Ecclesiastes will allow us to contrast Job and discover another facet regarding the true value of the imago Dei.

The book of Ecclesiastes has created many interpretive problems regarding the date written, who the author was and what the actual meaning of the book is meant to be. While these questions are not conducive to this work, a quick look at the author does carry significance. There are many different interpretations of whom the author may be, from many different sages editing portions in subsequent years to Solomon with editor(s) adding or creating the epilogue. The first verse of Ecclesiastes opens to, “The words of the Teacher, the son of David, king in Jerusalem.” This Teacher, or Qohelet, was someone of standing in the Jewish community. As Aron Pinker describes, “The author of the Book of Kohelet was a rich and wise Jewish patrician in Jerusalem. He was not a teacher or a preacher. More likely, he was a leader of a circle of social and intellectual
peers, the kohelet.”

This work agrees that Kohelet was a great influencer and leader of the people. What more influential person in antiquity than the king of a nation? For many, the opening statement points to Solomon as the author of the book of Ecclesiastes. This has been the traditional understanding for the Evangelical community and will be reflected in this work. Understanding the viewpoint and lifestyle of the author is paramount to our contrast of Job and our comparison with modern life.

Solomon ruled during the “golden years” of Israel. David, Solomon’s father, had vanquished all of Israel’s enemies and left construction plans for the building of God’s temple to Solomon. When God approached Solomon at the beginning of his reign to give him anything he wanted, Solomon famously humbled himself and asked, “Give your servant therefore an understanding mind to govern your people, able to discern between good and evil; for who can govern this your great people?” (1 Kings 3:9). Being pleased with his answer, God blesses Solomon with a “wise and discerning mind” (3:12) and “both riches and honor all your life; no other king shall compare with you.” (3:13). Solomon is rightfully considered one of the wisest and richest men to ever walk the earth. He speaks of his vast resources, abilities and standing in the community writing:

So I became great and surpassed all who were before me in Jerusalem; also my wisdom remained with me. Whatever my eyes desired I did not keep from them; I kept my heart from no pleasure, for my heart found pleasure in all my toil, and this was my reward for all my toil. Then I considered all that my hands had done and the toil I had spent in doing it, and again, all was vanity and a chasing after the wind, and there was nothing to be gained under the sun.” (Ecclesiastes 2:9-11)

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22 Aron Pinker, “Ecclesiastes: Part II: Themes.” *Jewish Bible Quarterly* 41, no. 3 (July 2013): 168.
Solomon had acquired all that the world had to offer; riches, wisdom, fame, importance, power and pleasure. Yet, to all of this, Solomon describes it as a “vanity” and a “chasing after the wind.” All of the identities and the labels that the world has to offer, and Solomon describes them as prideful and worthless. How then should one read the book of Ecclesiastes? Are these the last words of a brooding but wise, old man or is there a greater purpose that shows the importance of turning from pride and accepting the beauty of being created in the *imago Dei*?

Many readers of the book of Ecclesiastes will interpret the book of wisdom in a way that addresses the purpose of life. Most scholarship, in fact, has taken a similar tenor with the book. Arthur Keefer points out that “It has become increasingly popular since the beginning of the twentieth century to interpret the book of Ecclesiastes as if it addresses “the meaning of life.”

In essence, Solomon’s own words rebut this argument, “For who knows what is good for mortals while they live the few days of their vain life, which they pass like a shadow? (6:12). Perhaps, it is not the meaning of life that one should be looking for, but rather, what the ultimate goal of humanity is and how that can be expressed during one’s lifetime? In terms of this work, what is the importance of the *imago Dei* and how can one express that importance in their lifetime?

This importance must be seen through the correct lens for all humanity “under the sun”. Some may read a work grounded in Scripture and think that it does not “speak” to

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23 Ecclesiastes 3:11 states, “He has made everything “beautiful” for its time...”. While the pride and vanity of humankind is on display and its emptiness in finding joy there is the belief that Solomon understood the beauty of having God’s image embodied within us.

them because their beliefs on religion or spirituality may differ. For Evangelicals, they might read something from Ecclesiastes and believe it has a “special” meaning just for them. Yet, the importance of the *imago Dei* surpasses human belief, for it is not our belief that makes something true. When Solomon writes “under the sun” he is incorporating people of all beliefs. Douglas Groothuis beautifully portrays this by writing, “I do not think that Ecclesiastes gives us two views of life: one that is secular and without God and that is denoted by the phrase "under the sun," and another that is God-oriented and that rescues us from the grim observations of life "under the sun." No, "under the sun" means earthly existence as it is for everyone. Ecclesiastes, rather, teaches us how to live wisely in a fallen world that is still God's world.”25 Wise living is a gift to all humankind. It is a path forward for humanity to embody the image of the divine in stark contrast to the suffering brought upon ourselves when we reject the wisdom of the divine and instead embrace our own worst enemy; pride.

The continuing theme in the book of Ecclesiastes is the concept of vanity, meaninglessness or worthlessness of one’s pursuits in life. Solomon opens his teaching by stating, “Vanity of vanities! All is vanity.” (1:2) Augustine takes this statement to heart when speaking of the sinister pride of humanity. He writes, “The vanity of the foolish! All is vanity! What advantage is there for a man in all the toil at which he toils under the sun…his willful sin was to act contrary to the commandment of truth; but the

punishment for his sin, to be subject to deception."  

What a perfect example of vanity, a willful act to become something one is not, all the while being deceived that one is more than they really are! The irony cannot be lost here! From the Garden, humankind has been caught in a vicious cycle of rejecting the identity of the divine for that which we can obtain, produce or create. Like playing an impossible lottery that can never be won, we choose to lose, willfully and with a lifetime of effort, frustration and toil to show for it!

Augustine does not lack words when it comes to the destructive force of pride. As stated in the last chapter, pride leads one to believe that the counterfeit is actually better than the original. Augustine captures this thought when he states:

And what is pride except a longing for a perverse kind of exaltation? For it is a perverse kind of exaltation to abandon the basis on which the mind should be firmly fixed, and to become, as it were, based on oneself, and so remain. This happens when a man is too pleased with himself: and a man is self-complacent when he deserts that changeless Good in which, rather than in himself, he ought to have found his satisfaction.  

It is in God that humankind should find satisfaction, not the chasing after riches, position, titles, lands and all the other trappings the world has to offer. This is why Solomon correctly states, “Then I saw that all toil and all skill in work come from one person’s envy of another. This is also vanity and a chasing after wind.” (4:4). And further, “With many dreams come vanities and a multitude of words; but fear God.” (5:7). Several times Solomon describes “my” or “your” “vain life” to elucidate the heart of

26 Augustine, *Different Questions*, 67.3
27 Augustine, *City of God*, XIV.13.1
28 See also Ecclesiastes 6:1-3; 11; 7:15; 8:10; 14; 9:9.
29 See Ecclesiastes 7:15; 9:9 by no means not an exhaustive list
humankind bent on pride (8:11). When our hearts and minds become focused on ourselves, we fall into the same snare that has haunted humanity from the moment Eve picked the fruit and took that first delicious bite. We choose to compile success, riches, wealth, titles and a desperate envy that drives us to do more than our peers so we can be exalted. Throughout the book of Ecclesiastes, one reads how these pursuits are “vanities”, “meaningless” and ultimately profit one as much as simply a “chasing after the wind.” It is only the person, like Solomon, who has achieved all that the world can possibly offer to fully understand the worthlessness and vanity of it all. Therefore, it is wisdom and an act of “knowing self” to take the knowledge of the sage, the king, the Creator and apply it to our own lives. The pursuits of humankind are vanity and have been repeating themselves for millennia. What, therefore, can reverse this folly?

One of the most famous lines in Ecclesiastes sheds some light to the path forward for humankind. Solomon famously wrote, “He has made everything beautiful in its time. He has also set eternity in the human heart; yet no one can fathom what God has done from beginning to end.”

God has set eternity into the human heart by creating humankind in the image of God. Humankind has longed for eternity, not simply a desire of power, wealth or pride but that which reflects our Creator. It makes perfect sense that Solomon understood the importance of the imago Dei and how reflecting the divine would naturally give humanity an eternal quality. If the Creator is eternal, shouldn’t humankind naturally desire that same eternal quality as the divine is embodied and

reflected? As this research has posited, one can only reflect the eternal nature of God by embodying the *imago Dei* and participating with the divine. Therefore, one of the striking aspects of the *imago Dei* is that it moves one from a position of self-centered pride and points one upwards to the heart and purposes of God. In essence, a true acceptance and understanding of the *imago Dei* becomes the *antithesis of pride*. This is *wise living*

Living into the *imago Dei* is wise living and the foundation of Wisdom literature.

Solomon writes:

> Wisdom is as good as an inheritance, an advantage to those who see the sun. For the protection of wisdom is like the protection of money, and the advantage of knowledge is that wisdom gives life to the one who possesses it. (Ecclesiastes 7:11-12)

Wisdom is beneficial because it preserves us in the truth of knowing self. When one understands their role as image bearer of God they do not chase after the things “under the sun” as Solomon spent a lifetime doing. Wisdom is a shelter, a protection to the one who applies it to their life. Ultimately, wisdom brings a sense of purpose, coherence and significance to one’s existence by focusing life through the proper understanding of

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31 Arthur Keefer, “The Meaning of Life in Ecclesiastes: Coherence, Purpose, and Significance from a Psychological Perspective,” Harvard Theological Review, vol. 112, no. 4, 2019, pp. 447–466. He writes “Coherence” refers to the human’s cognitive comprehension of life, as life “makes sense” because predictable and recognizable patterns are discernable within it. When coherent, life holds epistemological integrity, especially with respect to stable patterns of cause and effect. The second type, “purpose,” arises when life has a future, overarching goal. This goal gives direction to life and bears significance for present activities, so that to say “my life has purpose” amounts to saying “my life has meaning.” Third, “significance” refers to life’s value or worthwhileness, wherein factors past, present, or future generate a life that “matters.” Pg 450.
God’s requirements for humankind. Most importantly, wisdom is an understanding that through the mystery of life, one’s existence is secured by the work of God. Solomon understood that in many area’s life was unexplainable, but wisdom was the one thing that would keep a person focused on God and one’s purpose. As Keefer points out, “For Qoheleth, God provides a sort of anchor amid life’s unpredictability, and while the divine in many ways remains beyond human comprehension in Ecclesiastes, it serves an indispensable role when exploring the meaning of life.”

Throughout Wisdom literature the fundamental way a person turns from pride to a life of wisdom (embodying the imago Dei) is through a “fear of God.” This phrase has already been seen as God’s description for Job as one who “fears God” in the opening verses. The Psalmist writes in Psalm 111:

The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom;
All those who practice it have a good understanding.
His praise endures forever. (v.10).

As outlined earlier in this chapter, the “fear of the Lord” or the “fear of God” describes a participatory element that requires a daily engagement with the divine. The “fear of the Lord” is an activity the Psalmist calls one to “practice” which requires one to be engaged relationally with God. While discussing this theme found in both Proverbs and Psalms, Allan Bornapé states, “The wisdom imparted by the sage is not an abstract or unreachable

knowledge, only for a few. On the contrary, wisdom finds its first steps in a personal relationship with God."\textsuperscript{33}

Augustine takes this concept of the “fear of God” being synonymous with a relationship with the divine by placing love in its proper order. This relational movement is seen “when God is loved more than the soul so that a man prefers to belong to him rather than to himself.”\textsuperscript{34} This vanity that is inherent in humanity, to choose oneself even over the divine, can only be addressed by an understanding of true wisdom. Augustine writes, “The lessening of covetousness begins with the fear of God who alone cannot be feared apart from love. For one strives toward wisdom, and nothing is truer than saying: ‘The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.’”\textsuperscript{35} When one embraces the reality of the \textit{imago Dei} there should be a natural “striving toward wisdom,” a simultaneous fear and love for the divine. This simultaneous movement of fear and love leads one to run from those things that are evil and to cling to God and his precepts. As Bornapé explains, the “fear of God” motif in Ecclesiastes “shares a common theological background on proper conduct in the presence of God with the importance of obeying the commandments of God.”\textsuperscript{36} The importance of this simultaneous movement allows one to understand the fear of God is not a cowardice to come before the divine, nor is it a type of terror that comes from something evil. No, the fear of God is a proper, simultaneous


\textsuperscript{34} Augustine, \textit{Different Questions}, 36.1 Question 36 is an incredible answer to what one should consider as the definition of a “wise man” by showing how the fear of God points one to a great love of God. This love turns a person from their own pride and selfishness to a place of wise living.

\textsuperscript{35} Ibid, 36.1

\textsuperscript{36} Bornapé, 48.
movement of obedience and love. This is wise living. To properly fear God, one must put
themselves in the proper order, after God. Augustine describes that a person must first
overcome their own selfishness, then the pride associated with the praise of other people
before one can truly overcome pride and embody what it means to “fear God.” He
beautifully states, “For this reason, the fear of God is not only the beginning of the wise
man’s wisdom, but the completion of it as well. And the [wise man] is he who loves God
supremely and his neighbor as himself.”

Solomon punctuates the fear of God in his famous epilogue of Ecclesiastes. For
Solomon, it is the singular purpose of humanity. He closes the book of Ecclesiastes by
writing:

The end of the matter; all has been heard. Fear God and keep his commandments;
for that is the whole duty of everyone. For God will bring every deed into
judgment, including every secret thing, whether good or evil. (12:13-14).

Solomon succinctly summarizes human life with a simple, yet far from simplistic
statement on the duty of humankind; fear God and keep his commandments. This is the
foundation of the imago Dei, actively participating relationally with God. One embodies
the image of God by fearing their Creator and obeying his precepts. As Tremper
Longman beautifully encapsulates the final verses of Ecclesiastes he states, “The general
meaning of the statement is fairly clear: fearing God and obeying his commandments is
the most important thing a man or a woman can do.” Further, Bornapé writes, “The last

37 Augustine, Different Questions, 36.4 Augustine concludes this answer on his view of the “wise man” as
the one who fears and loves God.
verses of Qohelet exhort us to face life with a deep sense of the presence of God and every day to perfect a character in harmony with his holy precepts.”

Ultimately, the identity that Solomon sought, after a lifetime of achievement was not that of king, teacher, preacher or any other title bestowed by man. The only identity that Solomon realized carried meaning for eternity was that of one who would “fear God and keep his commandments.” Fearing God can only come from a deep sense of love for God which is the beginning and completion of wisdom for humankind. When one actively pursues after God, there is a purposeful participation that habitually drives a person in the reflection of God’s image. God created humankind with eternity in mind, not an eternity of chasing after the riches and titles of this world, but with the purpose of intentional obedience and love for his precepts. Solomon was a man uniquely qualified to write Ecclesiastes after gaining all that the world had to offer and still realizing that it was simply a “chasing after the wind.” When one has “everything” they truly have nothing if they do not fear God.

**Conclusion**

This chapter has been a contrast between one being stripped bare and one having all that the world offers. Yet, these are two sides of the same “identity” coin. Humankind developed a critical problem in the moment that Adam and Eve ate of the fruit; it shattered, broke and marred the image of God in such a way that it made “knowing

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“thyme” impossible on one’s own. God did not leave humankind without resources for overcoming this deficit but has shown us through a relational movement with the divine that humanity’s purpose becomes clear. Reflecting the \textit{imago Dei} as the most important aspect of one’s being.

Ecclesiastes is a powerful contrast to Job. The story of Job shows that a person can be stripped of everything one has and still remain steadfast and faithful to God, realizing that possessing God is worth more than anything the world can offer. On the contrary, when one has too many “things” it is easy to slip away from the Creator and in fact try to replace the divine with oneself. The truth of the matter is not the lack of “things” that causes us to lose heart and faith in God, it is the excess of “things” that wears down our soul and drives us from the Creator. The same can be said of the excess of titles and identities, the things that we drive ourselves towards for respect, meaning and purpose in life. Yet, none of this brings us true purpose, it is but the love, respect and fear of God that places our lives into its proper perspective. One can possess all that the world offers yet have nothing if they do not “possess” God.

Ultimately, it is the title that God bestows upon us that carries eternal significance. All of humankind has been crowned in the image of God. Yet, all of humankind has been broken and marred by sin. God is not left powerless but calls his children to reflect the divine in a simultaneous fear and love that actively engages God daily. To be called one who “fears God” is the greatest “title” one can have bestowed upon them and reveals the participatory relational aspect of embodying the \textit{imago Dei}. This is wise living and allows one to move forward to reclaim what was once lost.
Chapter 4. Reclaiming The imago Dei

The essence of being created in the imago Dei is one that surpasses all understanding. After five days of glorious, creative work, God saved the pinnacle of creative acts to make humankind in his image. By creating man and woman in his image God bestowed upon them (and by extension all of humankind) a unique closeness to the divine not found in all of creation. This closeness was meant to give humankind the ability to mirror the divine presence on earth and rule over God’s creation with justice, harmony, power and love. With such a uniquely divine mandate at being God’s representatives on earth one might think that humankind would be ecstatic to begin the honorable calling immediately. Unfortunately, humankind’s own desires ran contrary to God’s and the first disobedient act brought about a terrible judgement that has plagued humanity ever since. Instead of embracing the identity of being created in the imago Dei, the first man and woman rejected God’s identity for one of their own making. This act of pride continues to impact humankind to make one believe that they are the creator and not the creation. This sin badly damaged the imago Dei, but it has not destroyed it completely. Augustine writes in the City of God, “And yet there is still the spark, as it were, of that reasoning virtue of which he was made in the image of God; that spark has not been utterly put out.”¹ That spark allows humankind an understanding that we are the creation and not the creator, which is embraced through wise living, by knowing oneself in relation to the divine. Although, wise living alone is only the recognition of the

¹ Augustine, Concerning the City of God against the Pagans, translated by Henry Scowcroft (London: Penguin, 2003), XXII.24.1 Referred to from this point as “City of God.”
distance between humankind and God and allows us to understand that we cannot create an identity that is even remotely equal to the one God has created for us. In fact, one is less human when rejecting God’s image (identity) for one in which we craft, desire or strive towards in an effort to replace that which one has rejected. It is in the depth of that rejection that we begin to realize humankind desperately needs the pieces of the image restored, redeemed or remade to recapture what it means to be truly human. The emphasis of this chapter will be to progress from an understanding of the creation/fall of the imago Dei to the relational implications this brings to humankind. Can the once pristine image of God that has obviously become damaged due to sin be restored, remade or redeemed to allow humankind the type of relational immediacy that was once intended for us in the Garden? Further, by shifting our focus now to the New Testament, specifically Ephesians and Colossians, how is it possible for humanity to have a redemptive way forward in the movement of God toward humanity and humanity toward God?

**Stopping the Cycle**

Adam and Eve had the chance to stop the “cycle” before it even began. This cycle of pride making us believe that we can be greater than our Creator and to make choices more impactful than God has led to an age of frustration for humanity. Humankind was created as a mirror of the divine, to reflect the image and the likeness of God in such a way that all creation would understand the unique relation between the two. Yet, as discussed in Chapter 2, Adam and Eve’s choice to disobey God was truly a rejection of
God’s image for that of a counterfeit, the image of their own making. This sin has created a harmful repetition of sin in humanity that we have (of course) repeatedly failed at trying to solve ourselves. It has, in fact become part of human nature, and in essence…part of human identity. Augustine writes about this nature, “And this race would not have been destined for death, in respect of its individual members, had not the two first human beings (of whom one was created from no one, and the other from him) incurred death as a reward of disobedience: and so heinous was their sin that man’s nature suffered a change for the worse; and bondage to sin and inevitable death was the legacy handed on to their posterity.”

A legacy of bondage and death has not only been handed down to humankind but continues to be perpetuated from generation to generation.

This sinful act took the image, the mirror of God and cracked, shattered and disfigured the reflection that humankind was created to reflect. In one of Augustine’s most important works, *The Trinity*, he writes in reference to humankind, “But by committing sin it has lost justice and the holiness of truth, and on account of it this image has become disfigured and discolored.”

There are two important things to understand here; the first is that humankind has lost justice and truth, or the ability to fully actualize the true depth that the image of God has been disfigured. This first premise is one that is intellectually repeated but not often understood in the modern Evangelical Church. The implications of the imago Dei being disfigured is that the immediacy to God has also been altered. The second premise is that by deforming the image of God, we have

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2 Augustine, *City of God*, XIV.1.1
rejected ourselves (Chapter 2) which leads us to become less human. While many will agree with the first premise, it is the second premise that is often denied or ignored which slowly deprives us of encountering the joy of relationship with others and ultimately God. By operating less than fully human, we are deprived of true joy, love and relational intimacy with God and those we most cherish.

The heart of the problem is not that we are left with an intellectual understanding of discoloring and disfiguring the image of God but that we struggle all the more thinking that we alone can fix that which terminally ails us! As discussed in Chapter 3, both Job and Solomon showcased that humankind is powerless to fix our shortcomings when attempting to restore the damage done to the divine image. The story of Job showed how even in all of Job’s right living he was completely powerless to change his position even after having acquired all of the greatness that the world had to offer. In a moment, the world’s titles, rights and riches were stripped from him and he was left bare before the world. Job was powerless to change his position. The one thing that Job had the power to do was accept that God alone was in control of the situation. Job intentionally chose to participate with God and accept his true identity (Job 40:4-5) while rejecting the labels, titles and identities placed on him by his friends and society in general. Likewise,

4 Augustine writes in On the Spirit and the Letter regarding the parable found in Luke 18:10-14 on the Pharisee and the Publican. In the parable a Pharisee approaches the divine in a haughty matter because of his “righteous” living. The Publican, knowing he is a sinner beats his chest and asks for forgiveness. About the contrast, Augustine writes, “Now, having duly considered and weighed all these circumstances and testimonies, we conclude that a man is not justified by the precepts of a holy life, but by faith in Jesus Christ, in a word, not by the law of works, but by the law of faith; not by the letter, but by the spirit; not by the merit of deeds, but by free grace.” Augustine, On the Spirit and the Letter. Chapter 22. Translated by Philip Schaff. Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers: a select library of the Christian Church. Vol. 5. (Hendrickson Publishers: Peabody, 1999).
Solomon had been blessed by God and not only gained all of the wisdom of the world but all of the titles and riches that came along with it. Yet, in all of his gain, Solomon began to follow after counterfeit identities by worshipping the gods of his many wives (1 Kings 11:1-8). In his old age he finally understood that his purpose in life was to simply fear God and keep his commandments (Ecclesiastes 12:13-14), not to try and create his own.

Wise living is the understanding that God is the Creator, and we are the creation, but this understanding is only the first step towards participating in our divinely bestowed identity.

Every example thus far shown in this work from Adam & Eve, Job or Solomon paints a picture that humanity has a critical problem, and no one has the strength, power or ability to solve the problem of the disfigured, discolored and broken image Dei. Augustine wisely states, “For it cannot reform itself as it could deform itself.”5 This has been the dilemma for humanity since the fall and the reason that humankind has been stuck in perpetual frustration, the problem cannot be solved by creating new identities, producing new labels or by wearing a more complex mask.

Ephesians 2:1-3 places the human condition in its proper context:

You were dead through the trespasses and sins in which you once lived, following the course of this world, following the ruler of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work among those who are disobedient. All of us once lived among them in the passions of our flesh, following the desires of flesh and senses, and were by nature children of wrath, like everyone else.6

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5 Augustine, The Trinity, 14.16.22
6 Emphasis mine.
The Apostle Paul makes a stunning statement that proclaims a harsh reality for all humankind. All of humankind is effectively “dead” due to the sins and trespasses committed by each and every person. What can a dead person do to change their circumstances? Nothing. The dead cannot effectuate change in any way, shape or form and this picture of the human condition properly describes the impossibility that humankind faces when fixing the broken imago Dei.

Not having the ability to effectuate change has only perpetuated the problem for humanity. Instead of seeking that which could “solve” the problem, humankind has masked its intentions of self-effort through the veil of religion. Christianity, has in fact, taken the truth of Ephesians 2 and has cocktailed a toxic mixture of moralism and consumerism in the place of what should be a vibrant, growing relationship with God.

With respect to American Evangelicals, this researcher spent over a decade serving as an Elder at a megachurch7 witnessing the image of self being promoted while the image of God was simply something considered a colloquial nicety of Christian belief. While not indicative of all Evangelical worship, the Megachurch has become the crème de la crème of the Evangelical movement. As Jennifer Dyer rightfully concludes, “Megachurches are but one segment, albeit perhaps the dominant one, of the patchwork quilt of Evangelicalism in America today.”8 To some extent, the cycle of pride exists in its most evil and life taking form in the modern Evangelical church. In the place of a

7 According to the Hartford Institute for Religion Research, a megachurch is any church with an average weekly attendance of 2,000 or more people.
growing relationship with God is placed a toxic morality that actually draws a person from the divine and misappropriates the image of God. Instead of promoting the attributes of the divine’s relational royalty, many in the Church are drawn to the aspects which they feel can be wielded for the glory of self. The modern, Evangelical pastor has turned from one responsible for modeling the beauty of a relationship with the divine to a king of Assyria seeking to promote his own glory through larger churches and congregations. As discussed in Chapter 2 regarding the misappropriation of the imago Dei, Neo-Assyrian imagery was focused on promoting the king to that of a god-like nature to represent the greatness of his exploits and conquests. As Brent Strawn describes, “The Neo-Assyrian kings were fond of setting up images of themselves celebrating their victories…the function of these images and inscriptions — inscribed, as they are, after military victories — was to declare the might and power that was the Assyrian king.”

What is more “king” like than to issue decrees of morality to thousands of congregants requiring their loyal adherence to gain the right “image” of standing in the church? Furthermore, how can one miss the parallel to large, movie theater-esque places of worship that are completely devoid of any religious symbols or liturgy to that of an image of consumerism and personal success? In our CEO modeled churches, pastors look to how many people can be drawn into the cinema style auditorium and are concerned about “church growth, platform personality and program development.”


10 Robert Webber, The Younger Evangelicals (Baker: Grand Rapids, 2002), 149.
Church in America is rapidly declining. Megachurches have been booming with unparalleled growth in the religious landscape. The reader, though, should understand that “all that glitters is not gold” and this “growth” has not come without its cost. Instead of teaching their congregants the doctrines of God and the relational intimacy humankind has been created to reflect, most regurgitate moralistic codes of conduct that allow one to be “accepted” into the church. As Dyer states, “The behavioral requirements include a variety of mandatory rituals, such as being born again and participation in worship, as well as prohibitions, including any kind of critical response, as described by each megachurch…These distinctive qualities, I believe, typify a subculture of narcissism in evangelical megachurches.” The goal of each church becomes how to best imitate the celebrity pastor or small group leader in lieu of learning to reflect the imago Dei and participating with the divine.

The counterfeit identity of following another human and their list of rules which makes one morally acceptable further creates a façade of church health when the opposite is true. The modern Megachurch may be growing in overall numbers, but the amount of people actually engaging in relational closeness with others (let alone God) is precipitously falling at an alarming rate. Weekly church engagement has dramatically

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13 Dyer, 244. While it is beyond the scope of this work to define levels of narcissism in the church, Dyer rightfully shows how the megachurch is reaching people through the base desire of promoting self and not promoting God.
dropped from 96% of a congregation in 2005 to 68% in 2020!\textsuperscript{14} People are less likely to attend church weekly and less likely to get involved with church activities, instead, utilizing a “pick-n-choose” strategy of implementing the moral rules, programs and activities that benefit them. David Eagle sums up the heart of the issue by stating, “If anything, megachurches represent the loosening of religious bonds.”\textsuperscript{15} The Evangelical church becomes more self-centric instead of being God-centric and people are suffering due to this same cycle of pride that was witnessed in the Garden; reject the identity God has created for all humankind and insert your own.

Evangelical Christianity’s desire to create their own identity lies within the deceptive promises made by morality. The moral person is promised to be “holy” and the more moral a person the closer to the divine one undoubtedly becomes. Morality is similar to the fruit that hung from the tree as Eve contemplated whether listening to the serpent or obeying God. It is something within one’s grasp that a person erroneously believes can be made and molded according to their needs and desires. Yet, the Apostle Paul explicitly warns those who follow after Christ saying:

If with Christ you died to the elemental spirits of the universe, why do you live as if you still belonged to the world? Why do you submit to regulations, “Do not handle, Do not taste, Do not touch”? All these regulations refer to things that perish with use; they are simply human commands and teachings. These have indeed an appearance of wisdom in promoting self-imposed piety, humility and severe treatment of the body, but they are of no value in checking self-indulgence.\textsuperscript{16}

\textsuperscript{14} HIRR, Changing Reality, 6.
\textsuperscript{16} Colossians 2:20-23
The Apostle shows that moralism allows a person to appear as someone of high standing in the church, yet the reality is that this self-created image is powerless to actually save one from themselves. The rules and laws that are required by most churches, denominations and religious groups simply come down to human beings trying to exert their power and influence like the ancient kings of Mesopotamia. These laws do nothing to bring people together but actually drive people apart. As Matthew Jarvinen writes on the relational costs of moralism, he warns, “When adherence to behavioral standards is primary, vital relationships are often taxed. Relationships begin to become dependent on adherence to moral norms. Following the rules leads to acceptance, but breaking the rules leads to confrontation, critique, and other forms of social pressure intended to bring one back into alignment with what is expected of them.”\(^{17}\) The counterfeit image of moralism is one that leads a person inextricably to either pride or shame. This is the same response that Adam & Eve exhibited after they rejected their God given identity for that of their own prideful making as they hid from God in shame (Genesis 3:8-11). Rather than being the key component in which to craft one’s identity, moralism deceptively leads to a break in relational community with other people and ultimately, with God. Try as we might, humankind cannot usurp the beauty, majesty and great honor of being created in the *imago Dei*. No amount of self-effort laid upon the altar will ever allow humanity to

\(^{17}\) Matthew J. Jarvinen, “The Relational Cost of Moralism: Implications for Congregational Practice.” *Journal of Psychology and Christianity* 35, no. 3 (Fall 2016): 256. Jarvinen does a fantastic job of using case studies within the church highlighting how moral standards are the driving force of people leaving church relationships and ultimately turning away from a God that they feel they can never please.
redeem, remake or restore the *imago Dei*. In the truly powerful words of James Torrance, “There is only one offering which is truly acceptable to God, and it is not ours.”\(^{18}\)

**The Imago Dei - Being Comes Before Doing**

While the Christ follower may be implored by others of all that they must *do*, God wants each person to first know what they must *be*, an image bearer of God. The modern, Evangelical Church struggles to understand this key element by loading upon their congregants all that must be done to imitate Jesus without first equipping the saints with the knowledge of who they truly are. In essence, a *copy without a soul*. Go through the actions as handed down to you by the structures of power and you will be considered “Christian” and have the ability to change your eternal trajectory! The impact of not understanding the power of the *imago Dei* deceptively continues to build the counterfeit kingdoms of men in place of the kingdom of God. The relational impact of not understanding the beauty of being created in the *imago Dei* deceptively draws people to be *less* human by leading them away from relationship with God and his children. No amount of self-effort or hard work can fix our condition of *being* dead in our sins which has produced a disfigured *imago Dei*. It is not humankind’s righteousness, offerings or sacrifices that bring forth the mending or redemption of the *imago Dei*. As Augustine writes in City of God, “God does not need even the righteousness of man; and that it is

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man, not God, who is benefited by all the worship which is rightfully offered to God.”

No one has the power.

*No one except God.*

God, in his rich mercy and grace, has created humankind in his image and has also created a way to restore that which has been disfigured and broken. The Apostle Paul writes about this beautiful movement of God towards humankind in the opening verses of Ephesians.

Blessed be the God and Father of our **Lord Jesus Christ**, who has blessed us **in Christ** with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, just as he chose us **in Christ** before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless before him in love. He destined us for adoption as his children **through Jesus Christ**, according to the good pleasure of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace that he freely bestowed on us **in the Beloved.** **In him** we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace that he lavished on us. With all wisdom and insight he has made known to us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure that he set forth **in Christ**, as a plan for the fullness of time, to gather up all things **in him**, things in heaven and things on earth. **In Christ** we have also obtained an inheritance... **In him** you also, when you had heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and had believed **in him**, were marked with the seal of the promised Holy Spirit;  

The Apostle Paul writes in the course of ten verses about “Jesus Christ” or being “in Christ” eleven times! Paul describes how a person has been blessed, adopted, redeemed, forgiven, obtained an inheritance and marked with the Holy Spirit because of **being** in Jesus Christ. This cannot be missed in great distinction to what was discussed at the beginning of this chapter. Paul does not highlight all of these blessings because of all that

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19 Augustine, *City of God*, X.5.1  
20 Ephesians 1:3-13
one is doing in Christ. On the contrary, he tells the reader eleven times in this short section that these blessings come from being in Christ. It should bring one great pause to further apprehend “he chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world…”, meaning his was the Image in which all humankind was made. Christ is the forerunner, the archetype for all humanity and was chosen by the Father to bring humankind into eternal relationship with him. The only way forward for humanity, and it is a way that is large enough for all of humanity is by being in the **Imago Dei**, Jesus Christ.

One of the major obstacles for humankind has been the thought that one could solve the disfigurement of the *imago Dei* through good works and righteous acts. If the reader remembers from Chapter 2, this research explained “The uniqueness of humankind is understood to be in God’s image (reflection) and likeness (soul, intellect, mind, relational)” but never in equality to God. The body, mind and soul of humankind signify the human embodiment which images God. The working of our bodies, mind and soul should therefore also point to or reflect God. This is where one moves past the idea of being good and earning salvation or the escape of damnation. For, if a person acts good, one is simply acting in accordance with how humankind was originally intended. This is why *salvation is impossible through good works or on moral grounds*. One is simply living out the intention of the Creator, not gaining merit or favor because humankind participates in the *imago Dei* in image and likeness, not equality. This lack of equality is not a punishment against humankind or necessarily a lack of substance (though it is) but a key component to draw humankind into a participatory relationship with the divine. God intends for humankind to need a relationship with the divine to fulfill one’s humanity.
Augustine beautifully embraces this thought when he writes, “For the true honor of man is to be the image and the likeness of God which is preserved only in relation to Him by whom it is impressed. Hence he clings to God so much the more, the less he loves what is his own.”21 This is a participatory movement from God to humankind and humankind to God. Humankind has been honored because God has created us in his image. Humankind accepts and participates in this with the reflection and imitation of the divine, being in God’s likeness. This further leads one into a relationship with God for one realizes that the fullness of humanity is found by clinging to God and a desire to operate less as self and more as a relational participant with the divine.

Humankind becomes a relational participant with the divine when one understands that the Imago Dei is the mediator for both God and humanity. Our inequality with God, coupled with the fact of our rejection of God’s image (sin) has created a deep need for humankind. As Augustine rightfully points out, “For the cure of this condition we need a mediator, since there can be no direct meetings between the immortal purity on high and the mortal and unclean things below.”22 The need for mediation becomes even greater when humanity understands that the chasm between humankind and the divine is unassailable through human means. This chasm is the direct consequence of sin which damages one’s relational closeness and reflection of God. This distance can only be bridged through the One unique mediation which Augustine explains, “We need a mediator linked with us in our lowliness by reason of the mortal

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21 Augustine, *The Trinity*, 12.11.16
22 Augustine, *City of God*, IX.17.1
nature of his body, and yet able to render us truly divine assistance for our purification and liberation, through the immortal justice of his spirit in virtue of which he has remained in his dwelling on high—not by spatial remoteness from us, but by his unique resemblance to God.”

Jesus Christ is the **Imago Dei** who uniquely reflects the image, likeness and equality of God. Jesus is the only path for humankind to have the divine image restored. As Augustine succinctly states, “As God, he is the goal; as man, he is the way.” Christ shows his equality with the Father by being the “perfect” image. Augustine explains, “For if any image answers perfectly to that of which it is the image, then it is made equal to it, not the object to it its own image.” Being the perfect representation of that which he images, Christ is seen as equal to God. Much like understanding that one is created in the *imago Dei*, the equality of Christ is something that goes beyond logical exercise and must be embraced to truly grasp the importance of the *imago Dei*. It is essential to look at a powerful text from Augustine in *The Trinity* to understand the impact Christ has upon being the equal **Image Dei**:

He gave the name form to the Image, I believe, on account of the beauty, which arises from this perfect harmony, this primal equality, this primal similarity, where there exists no difference, no disproportion, no dissimilarity, but which corresponds in everything to that of which it is the image. **This Image possesses the primal and supreme life.** For it, life is not one thing and being another, **but to be and to live is one and the same:** It has the primal and supreme intellect, since for it, to live is not one thing and to know another thing, but to know, to live, and to be are one and the same, and all together are one.”

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23 Augustine, *City of God*, IX.17.2
24 Augustine, *City of God*, XI.2.1
25 Augustine, *The Trinity*, 6.10.2
26 Ibid, 6.10.2 Emphasis mine.
Augustine shows the reader Christ’s life and existence is God himself. He is the ultimate Image because Father, Son and Spirit are co-equal, co-eternal persons of the Triune Godhead. Augustine worked hard to protect the Trinity against the onslaught of detractors and opponents to the deity and humanity of Christ. The beauty of Jesus’ equality in the Trinity, with the Father and Holy Spirit is placed on full display here as Augustine makes the point that God “all together are one.” Jesus tells his disciples, “Whoever has seen me has seen the Father.” (John 14:9). The image of God is made complete in Christ. By seeing Christ and striving to imitate Christ, one is able to reflect the image of our heavenly Father. Correspondingly, by being the God-man, Christ shows us the Father’s intention for all humankind! The beauty, harmony and equality that Christ shares in the Trinity becomes the One Way which all humankind moves forward in the restoration of the imago Dei. As stated before, Ephesians 1 points humankind to embrace an understanding that a person’s life and being should be one and the same, in Christ.

One of the ideas that Augustine matures from his predecessors is in the expansion of the imago Dei as both humankind and the person of Christ. The imago Dei, therefore, becomes both how God made humankind and what he intends for humanity to become. Augustine details this beautifully in The Trinity:

For we are, likewise, the image of God, not indeed an equal image, since it was made by the Father through the Son, not born of the Father as that is. And we are so, because we are enlightened by the light, but He is the light that enlightens. And, therefore, this image is an example for us without itself having an example. For He does not imitate anyone who comes before Him in respect to the Father, from whom He is wholly inseparable, since He has the same essence with Him from whom He is. But by our striving we imitate Him who remains and follow
Him who stands; when we walk in Him, we tend toward Him, because by His humility He has been made a road for us in time, in order that by His divinity He might be for us a mansion in eternity.27

Augustine shows the supremacy of Christ in his very essence and being. For humankind, the imago Dei has become the *imago Christi*! Christ is the consummation of humanity, the image and the likeness. He uniquely demonstrates how humanity is transformed to reflect the goodness of God in the world. Jesus is the Image that is humankind’s example and yet he has no example because God cannot follow or imitate anyone and still philosophically be defined as “God.”28 Therefore, if we are to imitate that in which we image (Christ) we should understand that we are to imitate *no one* but Christ. The implications of this statement are enormous! Even in the Apostle Paul’s words to the Corinthians, “Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ.” (1 Corinthians 11:1), points one to Christ. Paul is intimating that as followers of Christ one should serve as a window to the divine. By looking through the window, one may see Christ. The reflection comes from Christ and our actions should allow a clear view of that reflection. It also means chasing after emulating one’s favorite celebrity/actor/singer/businessperson is truly a “chasing after the wind” when everything else falls short of the goodness and glory of God! Jesus is the archetype for humankind, the new Adam (1 Corinthians 15:45)! As the Apostle Paul states, “Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust,

27 Augustine, *The Trinity*, 7.3.5
28 How could a “perfect” being imitate or follow a “non-perfect” being? A non sequitur of divine proportions!
we will also bear the image of the man of heaven.”

The man of heaven imitates no one because he is God which should encourage us to walk with him, to humbly strive to imitate him continuously and therefore “live into” and “participate” with Jesus in all of our actions. This is what it means to “participate” with Jesus, and this is what unlocks the door to enter into relationship with him. He made the first two movements towards securing humanity into eternal relationship. First, by creating humankind in his image, the imago Dei. Secondly, by dying for humankind to restore the image that was damaged and secure our hope for eternity (Romans 5:8). This death was a movement of grace before anyone had chosen God, his image, or even the desire for the image to be restored. As we participate with the divine, we accept the movements of creative beauty and saving grace that God has offered to all people and we enter into relationship with the Triune God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

The equality found within the Trinity further points to the honor and uniqueness of being created in the imago Dei. Augustine powerfully addresses the uniqueness of the Trinity when writing, “In the Trinity, to be is nothing else than to be God, and, therefore, there is one God, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.” If being is the supreme ability of God then being God is the highest good that could ever conceivably exist. God does not desire to be anything but God. Let this last point take hold, the Triune

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29 1 Corinthians 15:49 Paul is speaking specifically of the resurrection here and for all who place their belief in Jesus Christ will gain eternal life in the resurrected body after the example of Jesus.
30 Augustine, The Trinity, 7.3.6
31 Augustine, The Trinity, 8.3.4. “God…is the good of every good.” Further, Saint Anselm uses this thought as the basis of his ontological argument for God’s perfection in Prosologium when positing that “God is that which nothing greater can be conceived.”
God’s highest desire is to be God. Why, therefore, would the reflection of his image and likeness (humankind) desire to be anything other than the image of the greatest conceivable being? Philosophically, one cannot be “more than perfect” which means that one could never be more than God. This work has already established that humankind does not share in the equality of God, only the image and likeness of God. Even through one’s imitation of the divine, one could never become equal to the divine. Any attempt to become equal to God, either by action or identity is nothing more than a delusional “chasing after the wind.” True identity is found in Christ alone. If one is to be in Christ, they must therefore find their highest contentment in life by being in that which we image, God.

**Baptism & Placing Love In Its Proper Order**

Only after we understand who we truly are can we ever move forward in wholeness and begin to do with purpose! Baptism is the starting point of reclaiming the *imago Dei*, being united with Christ, dying to the world that we can be raised in new life and spirit. It is reclaiming our new self, our intended self, in the diving image. What does it mean to be human? This work has shown that to truly be human, one must embrace being in the imago Dei and live in the image and likeness of the divine. Baptism is the beginning of the journey which leads one to find the fullness of their humanity through obedience and holy living before that in which humankind reflects, God. In the Old
Testament what it meant to be human was better understood by asking what it meant to be the people of God, Israel. The key to being Israel was to follow all that God commanded, the concept of obedience, which was synonymous with being holy. God speaks to Israel in Leviticus 19:2, “Be holy, for the Lord your God is holy.” Obedience is the theme that connects God’s people from Testament to Testament and is realized in the person of Christ as the author of Hebrews writes, “Although he was a son, he learned obedience from what he suffered and, once made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him…”32 Jesus learned obedience through suffering and was made perfect, the recapitulation of all things is found in Christ. If humankind has therefore been created in the imago Christi, our obedience to God is what brings us into the perfect reflection of the divine. The second half of this chapter will focus on how baptism begins the journey of obedience and holy living. How holiness, properly defined, allows us to relationally participate with God and allows us to experience what God truly intends for humanity, living into the imago Dei.

Christian baptism has its roots in the dominical command of Matthew 28:19 and Jesus’ own example when presenting himself before John the Baptist (Matthew 3:13-17). Renown scholar Everett Ferguson summarizes the main benefits and beliefs of baptism as, “the person baptized received forgiveness of sins and the gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38). The two fundamental doctrinal interpretations of baptism are sharing in the death and resurrection of Christ, with the attendant benefits and responsibilities (Romans 6:3-

32 Hebrews 5:8-9 Emphasis mine.
4), and regeneration from above (John 3:5).”\textsuperscript{33} Baptism is the culmination of God’s sealing of his Spirit and the outpouring of his grace, forgiveness and mercy. This process is one of both a current reality and a future hope. As Amy Allen writes, “the experience of sealing at baptism both guarantees the future hope of redemption to the newly baptized and transforms them to live in the reality of the Spirit here and now.”\textsuperscript{34}

In the ancient church those who wanted to become baptized (catechumens) would enter into a process of learning Scripture and the confession of faith. This process became longer and more symbolic as more Gentiles and less converts from Judaism came to be baptized since they had no background in the Old Testament or the teachings of Christ. As Ferguson states, “The ceremony of baptism (the new birth motif), and actions accompanying the baptism (like unclothing and reclothing) were given a symbolic meaning—these too perhaps as teaching devices.”\textsuperscript{35} For the early church, baptism was metonymous with salvation as the ceremony involved an expression of faith, forgiveness and a renunciation of the devil. While baptism is not a requirement of salvation (Acts 10:45-48; 16:31) it is also seen by this work as the biblical mandate of publicly accepting the work that Christ has done to redeem humankind and the consistent relational movement towards God. Far beyond a moral exercise, baptism is correctly seen as God’s work, never as the work of humankind. Augustine accurately writes how even our desire

\textsuperscript{33} Everett Ferguson, \textit{Baptism in the early church: history, theology, and liturgy in the first five centuries} (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 854.
\textsuperscript{35} Ferguson, 855. For a concise overview of baptism in the first five centuries, chapter 55 of Ferguson’s work gives an excellent conclusion on the primary purposes, doctrines and liturgy behind the ceremony.
to do what is right comes from God, “For it is only sins that separate men from God; and in this life purification from sins is not effected by our merit, but by the compassion of God, through his indulgence, not through our power; for even that poor little virtue which we call ours has itself been granted to us by his bounty.”36 God is the one who created us in his image, and further still, redeemed us to his image. For all of the good humankind likes to claim as its own, it is still completely the work of God’s compassion, mercy and grace upon humanity! Baptism unlocks this bounty, the eternal, participatory relationship with the divine as we accept what Christ has done for humankind as the only path for redemption and restoration.

Baptism brings forth the renewal of the person as alluded to in Ephesians 4:22-24, “You were taught to put away your former way of life, your old self, corrupt and deluded by its lusts, and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and to clothe yourselves with the new self, created according to the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.” Part of the liturgy of the early church was the removal of clothing to symbolize the removal of the “old self” and putting on white robes after being baptized to symbolize the “new self” which, “carried the significance of purity, being clothed with Christ, and the eschatological meaning of heavenly clothing.”37 This “new self” is the restoration of the imago Dei, the “likeness of God” that all who accept make a commitment to reflect God more and themselves less. Not only is there a separation of the old self but a healing from the old self that God bestows upon the baptized. Augustine

36 Augustine, City of God, X.22.1
37 Ferguson, 856.
speaks of his own baptism and writes in his most widely known work, _Confessions_, “We were baptized, and all anxiety over the past melted away from us.”

Paul speaks further of this transition from the past existence of death to the new life experienced through baptism with Christ as he writes to the church in Colossae:

> In him also you were circumcised with a spiritual circumcision, by putting off the body of the flesh in the circumcision of Christ; when you were _buried with him in baptism_, you were also raised with him through faith in the power of God, who raised him from the dead. And when you were dead in trespasses and in the uncircumcision of your flesh, _God made you alive together with him_, when he forgave us all our trespasses, _erasing the record_ that stood against us with its legal demands. He set this aside, nailing it to the cross. He disarmed the rulers and authorities and _made a public example_ of them, triumphing over them in it.

The old self, the one destined for death has been redeemed, restored and renewed in baptism with Christ. Not only has this life been redeemed, but it has also been publicly made known as the triumphant work of God. The beautiful work of God began at creation and is seen anew with each person renewed in the _imago Dei!_ This idea should not be understated, for God created humankind and we rejected him by rejecting his image and likeness. Therefore, God sent his Son to die for us and redeem his image for eternity!

Augustine beautifully explains, “For it was said of this human nature itself: ‘A man ought not to cover his head, because he is the image and glory of God.’ And when this nature, the most excellent in created things, is justified from its impiety by its own Creator, it is transferred from a deformed form into a beautiful form.”

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39 Colossians 2:11-15 Emphasis mine.
40 1 Corinthians 11:7
41 Augustine, _The Trinity_, 15.8.14
Baptism further transforms humankind from the deformed, sinful past to being transformed in the beauty of the *imago Dei* and living into the reality of the Spirit. Jesus told his disciples that he must go to send the Holy Spirit to them (John 16:7-8). The Spirit would teach the Christ follower truth (16:13), convict the world of sin (16:9), give gifts for the building of the church (Ephesians 4:11-12) and empower one to overcome the flesh (Romans 8:2). While not an exhaustive list, the gift of the Holy Spirit is shown throughout the New Testament for those who accept Christ as Savior and are baptized into his death and resurrection (Romans 6:3-4). Augustine constantly refers to the Holy Spirit as the gift of God and states, “there are many other testimonies of the Scriptures, which unanimously attest that the Gift of God is the Holy Spirit, inasmuch as He is given to those who love God through Him.”

The Sacrament of baptism ushers in the gift of the Holy Spirit, which allows humankind to leave behind the counterfeit identity of self-effort and the delusion of moralism effectuating change in the human condition. By drawing one closer to God on a consistent basis, the *imago Dei* is renewed. As Augustine details, “the first step in a cure is to remove the cause of the disease, which is done through the remission of all sins; the second is to heal the disease itself, which is done gradually by making progress in the renewal of this image.” Once the cause of the disease has been removed (completely by the work of God) one is drawn into a relational immediacy with God. This proximity to

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42 Augustine, *The Trinity*, 15.19.35 In Chapter 19, Augustine spends time detailing many of the different ways that God has sent the Holy Spirit as his gift to humankind to build the body of Christ and to empower the Christian.
43 Augustine, *The Trinity*, 14.17.28
the divine shows that one has been created to reflect Christ and not that of the false image(s) of self. The Holy Spirit allows the divine image to be rekindled and renewed in humankind by consistently drawing one into a life-giving relationship with Jesus Christ.

What does it mean to be in a life-giving relationship with Christ and how is this different from the moral practices discussed earlier in this chapter? The Evangelical Church is comfortable with the phrase “relationship with Christ” as it closely resembles the doing for Christ before one understands the being in Christ. To put another way, how does the imago Dei keep us from exploiting Christ as a moral reflection or moral paradigm we disseminate to suit the convenience of our (counterfeit) image? The fundamental way that one moves from a moralistic, religious approach to a life-giving one is through reflecting that which we image, God. The Apostle Paul writes to the Ephesians, “Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children, and live in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.”44 Paul challenges the Ephesians to imitate God, not through the following of some rote law, but through the same love that Christ has shown all humankind. This love has purpose and rightful order behind it as Augustine writes, “Whoever, then, is being renewed in the knowledge of God, and in justice and holiness of truth, by making progress day by day, transfers his love from temporal to eternal things, from visible to intelligible things, from

44 Ephesians 5:1-2
carnal to spiritual things and constantly endeavors to restrain and to lessen the desire for the former, and to bind himself by love of the latter.”

One of the principal ways Augustine impacts this work is in his understanding of holiness, love in its proper order and the perfect segue into a proper understanding of how one imitates Christ. For Christ, love was always given outward, in selfless and sacrificial ways, not with his own interest in mind but the interest of others. For “the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many” (Matthew 20:28). Jesus is the perfect model of love in its proper order and the incarnational embodiment of holiness. Love is always placed in reference to the Trinity and flows downward from the Triune relationship. Christ’s love is relational and always eternally focused. He did not forsake the law or its moral aspects but transcended it and showed God’s intentions fulfilled in humankind when we reflect the imago Dei. Jesus shows humanity what we are intended to be! Tantamount to this work is Augustine’s description of how the affections of a person become desperate for the temporal, self-serving things of life and less for the eternally perfect (God). In City of God, Augustine gives the reader a clear understanding:

Greed, for example, is not something wrong with gold; the fault is the man who perversely loves gold and for its sake abandons justice, which ought to be put beyond comparison above gold. Lust is not something wrong in a beautiful and attractive body; the fault is in a soul which perversely delights in sensual pleasures, to the neglect of that self control by which we are made fit for spiritual realities far more beautiful, with a loveliness which cannot fade. Boasting is not something wrong with the praise of men; the fault is in a soul which cares nothing for the ‘witness of conscience’. Pride is not something wrong in the power, or in

45 Augustine, The Trinity, 14.17.23
the power itself; the fault is in the soul which perversely loves its own power, and has no thought for the justice of the Omnipotent. By the same token, anyone who perversely loves the goodness of any nature whatsoever, even if he obtains the enjoyment of it, becomes evil in the enjoyment of the good, and wretched in being deprived of a higher good.46

A powerful section of Augustine and the crux of true relationship with the divine. Humanity has fallen into sin and broken the reflective image of the divine from an equally broken desire to love improperly, to place love in a self-serving priority over reflecting the way God loves. Instead of loving justice, humankind loves money more and pervert’s justice. Instead of loving self-control, we desire lust and pervert the beauty of humanity and the sacred expression of sexuality. Instead of loving the proper ordering of power, we desire to wield power above God’s and completely pervert the proper meaning of power. Humankind has an uncanny ability to flip that which is good, and through selfish desire, produce something that is evil. When we take something out of its proper function and order and place it into an improper order, we create something that will never achieve the best for which it was created! Not only does humankind miss out on the complete enjoyment in a thing, but we also miss out on the completion of the enjoyment, most notably God.

Place this in perspective of this treatise, the imago Dei. By rejecting God, we have rejected self. By rejecting self, we have placed the desires of self over the One who truly creates self. Not only do we miss out on experiencing true self, the fullness of humanity, but we also miss out on a relationship with the only source which makes humanity

46 Augustine, City of God, XII.8.2 Emphasis mine.
whole! Humankind, like a proverbial dog chasing its own tail, continues in an endless circle for completion and wholeness. Love must have a proper order to truly be love, otherwise, even that which is good can deprive humankind of the highest good, God. This cannot be missed, for humankind’s default, operating in the chaotic mess, which was the broken mirror of the divine, is to choose the lesser over the greater! Augustine prefaces his statement above, “For this failure does not consist in defection to things which are evil in themselves; it is the defection in itself that is evil…as a defection from him who supremely exists to something of a lower degree of reality; and this is contrary to the order of nature.”

Love for God must be that which informs all things. It is contrary to nature itself to desire something that is flawed over something that is perfect. It is contrary to nature to love the lesser over the greater. Yet, this has been the pattern for humankind since Adam & Eve took the fruit and decided that the temporal could become greater than the eternal, that the reflection could usurp the Image! Jesus Christ is the antithesis of the improperly ordered love found in the Garden, he is the new Adam who says to the Father, “not my will but yours be done.” (Luke 22:42b). Holiness in its fundamental essence is loving God over all other things. Holiness is a love for the “new self” that God has redeemed more than the “old self” and the broken image. It is realizing that love begins with God and flows properly downward. Augustine succinctly captures this idea when saying, “But anyone who puts any loved objects before Christ does not

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47 Augustine, City of God, XII.8.1 Emphasis mine.
have Christ for his foundation.”

Having Christ as one’s foundation is holiness in its most complete sense and form.

Jesus calls humankind to imitate his life of holiness by placing one’s love and desires in their proper order. This is the relational, participatory movement that we are called to which enables us to progress in the fullness of the *imago Dei.* By placing love in its proper order, we embody a holiness that is visible to both God and humankind. As we imitate the divine, we properly participate in the greatest commandment, “you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.’ The second is this, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no other commandment greater than these.” (Mark 12:30-31). Loving God and loving people is only possible when love is holy, i.e., love in its proper order. Holiness is a participatory, relational response to God which reflects his image and glory.

How does one distinguish holiness over cleverly disguised moralism in life? Moralism enjoys masquerading as holiness and even the process of sanctification. Moralism doesn’t care about any image but the image of self, how do I look when I am doing all of the right things? Do people see me as a good person, do people think I am a good Christian, do people tell me how good of an example I am? These are the concerns of moralism and not the concerns of Christ and his pursuit to see all humankind reflecting the *imago Christi.* This pride that drives moralism must be overcome if someone is to ever truly live a holy life. True holiness embraces the reflective qualities of God and

48 Augustine, *City of God,* XXI.26.7
desires to move away from the carnal desires and move closer to the divine. Augustine describes how holiness allows humankind to overcome the sinful desires in a way that moralism could never achieve. He writes, “every carnal desire is made subject to our spirit now illumined and made alive, i.e., to the good will...this will happen to every carnal delight when perfect holiness restores wholeness to man.”49 As explained earlier in this chapter, humankind can only be made alive (the *imago Dei* restored) through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. Through the sacrament of baptism, we accept the sacrifice made by Christ and receive the many benefits of the Holy Spirit. Most notably, we receive the ability to enter into relationship with the divine and participate with God through holiness, which is love arranged properly. One’s love for God, properly arranged is in itself a reflection of God. Speaking of this beautiful arrangement, Augustine writes, “Love, then, which is from God and is God, is properly the Holy Spirit, through whom the charity of God is poured forth in our hearts, through which the whole Trinity dwells in us.” The *imago Dei* is embraced in humankind when reflecting God, most importantly, when God’s love is our highest aim.

When humankind strives to reflect God, his love and his image, we in turn understand what it means to be fully human. Naturally, humanity should desire to know more about God “precisely because an image is unintelligible apart from the participatory union it has with its source.”50 Without relationally knowing God, his holiness and his

actions, humankind has no sense of bearing or purpose. An image is useless apart from reflecting and imitating its source. This requires all humankind to draw close to God. For one to participate with God, one must be a lover of the divine, someone who actively seeks each day how to properly reflect the very nature of God. The only way to properly reflect any image is through the light. An image cannot be reflected in the darkness. As stated earlier, Augustine expands the language of the *imago Dei* to include that of Christ and the human person. Jesus speaks to all people, saying, “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life.” (John 8:12). At another time, Jesus speaks to his followers and tells them, “You are the light of the world…let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.” (Matthew 5:14; 16). Both statements are true. Jesus is the light of the world and he calls all people to reflect and imitate himself so that humankind may in turn also be the reflective light of the world! Therefore, the *imitatio Dei* is only possible through the *imago Christi*, the **Imago Dei**.

The image of God is restored in humankind through the work of Jesus Christ and is to be imitated through the desire to love God in a proper, holy manner. Unlike moralism, which falsely calls us to perfection for perfection’s sake, Christ calls his people to relationally draw close to him through the Spirit. By living in this pattern daily, humanity leaves behind the image of self and progressively becomes more reflective of our Maker. Augustine describes that those who strive for progress each day by imitating Christ and holding firm in faith will one day be brought by angels before God where they
will receive their reward, an incorruptible body in glory. “For the likeness to God in this image will then be perfect when the vision of God will be perfect.”

Conclusion

Humankind has been created in a unique closeness to God that is honored above all of creation. When God created humankind in his image, he ensured that our existence would require a relational immediacy to him to truly embody what it means to be human. Unfortunately, sin brought a devastating betrayal and disfigurement of the image that has drawn humanity into a wicked desire to circumvent the image through the false glory of self. Being so disfigured and broken, our image of self has improperly attempted to supersede God’s image and has created a critical need for the image to be restored. Regrettably, humanity has resorted to self-effort and religion, through the intoxicating promises of moralism to make right what was wrong. These false promises of moralism have further splintered the broken mirror down and effectually makes humankind reflect God less. The image that is being reflected is one of other people, other leaders and those that place themselves upon morally superior pedestals and platforms to dictate what is required of their followers. Instead of pointing people towards Christ, the modern Evangelical Church points people to reflect a talking head, a window dressing without substance and a false idol of moral perfectionism. We slip further away from the *imago Dei* as we begin to react in either pride or shame which drives us out of the proverbial

51 Augustine, *The Trinity*, 14.17.23
Garden from God. We become an unintelligible image because we have lost the relational
closeness to our Source. It is in this deep state of disorder and hopelessness that
humankind realizes that a mediator is needed to restore that which has been lost!

Jesus Christ is the only mediator that brings hope and can restore the image that
has been broken. Christ is uniquely qualified being God and sharing incarnationally in
our humanity. Jesus shows humankind what it means to be the Imago Dei, in fullness of
image, likeness and equality to God. Jesus calls humankind to draw near to him to reflect
his image and likeness, yet never in his equality to the divine. Humankind draws near to
its Source through the beautiful Sacrament of baptism which brings the gift of God, the
Holy Spirit. The Spirit teaches us to love as God loves, in holiness which is contrary to
moralism and self-effort. As Augustine describes, holiness is the practice of love in its
proper order. All things have their proper place in life. For instance, the love for your
child should supersede your love for your profession. While both are inherently good
your child is placed above other priorities, this is a holy pursuit and love arranged
properly. When we love anything before God, we act out of order, or unholy and in the
image of self. By allowing our love of God to inform us of all things, we reflect God and
fully embrace what it means to live into the imago Dei. In this pursuit of love in its
proper order we turn to Christ to imitate his life, teachings and aspirations for humanity
to properly honor the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Through this pursuit we realize that we
become comprehensible only though our relationship with God. Embracing this
relationship with the divine while embodying the purposes of being in the imago Dei has
practical implications to change ourselves and the world.
Chapter 5. Image Today & The Practical Implications

Image is a concept that this work has looked at from several different viewpoints. The world views the image of a person in a completely different way than that of your everyday church goer. Likewise, God views the image of humankind in a much different way than both the world and the church goer, he sees humankind in a reflective manner because of the great truth of creating humankind to reflect himself. The true crux of the matter is humankind continues to default to a different view of self than the one in which God has bestowed upon humanity. Perhaps one can trace it back to the prideful interaction in the Garden where man and woman chose to usurp God’s command and decided that they knew more than the divine? One of the reasons that humankind fell under the influence of the Devil was due to the fact that he brought upon the same fall that he himself experienced. The same sin of pride that caused Lucifer to fall from God’s side was what the Devil used to entice humankind, which God created to uniquely reflect himself. In a form of poetic justice humankind was handed over to the Devil, as Augustine describes, “In justice we have been delivered to the author of sin, the prince of death, because he has coaxed us to make our will conform with his.”¹ God sent his Son, Jesus, to be the mediation between humankind and the Father for forgiveness of sins and the restoration of the divine image. As the Apostle Paul proclaims, “He has rescued us from the power of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of his beloved Son, in

whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.” (Colossians 1:13-14). All who call upon the name of Jesus are delivered from the power and influence of the Devil to the beauty of God’s true intention for humanity. Augustine considers a person passing from eternal damnation through the redemptive work of Jesus, writing, “anyone who desires to escape everlasting pains needs not only to be baptized but also to be justified in Christ, and thus to pass from the Devil to Christ.”2 This transfer from darkness to light, the Devil to Christ and from death to life carries along with it a transference of identity from self to divine. As discussed in the previous chapter, the Sacrament of baptism initiates the renewal of the divine image in us and delivers the gift of God, the Holy Spirit. Through the Spirit, humankind is empowered to live a life of holiness, or the love of God defining and guiding our love for all things. As Paul writes to the Corinthians, “For the love of Christ urges us on,”3 prompting our will and our desires to be fashioned to reflect the image of our Creator. This chapter will finalize the arc of this work by focusing on the practical aspects and implications of being fashioned in the *imago Dei* and how it impacts not only our lives but the world at large. How do the fields of both religion and psychology shape much of human “identity” formation today through the focus of negative elements and the false construction of self? Finally, how does humankind use the truth of the *imago Dei* to impact the health of their lives and therefore be equipped to influence the lives of the world around them?

2 Augustine, *Concerning the City of God against the Pagans*, translated by Henry Scowcroft (London: Penguin, 2003), XXI.16.2. Referred to from this point as *City of God*.

3 2 Corinthians 5:14a emphasis mine
False Images Of Self

The continuing thread of this work has been to highlight the power, uniqueness and liberty that the reality and truth of being created in the imago Dei brings upon all humankind. The beauty of God’s creation is that he did not create a bunch of robots which were programmed to do as instructed. To the contrary, God created humankind with a freedom of will, to decide whether to embrace or reject the reality of our true identity. Further, that same freedom allows one to choose whether to accept or deny the reality of Christ’s sacrifice on Calvary to redeem and restore not only one’s identity but also their eternity. This has not stopped the enemy attempting to subvert the crown jewel of God’s creation and the Devil has been hard at work since being banished alongside of Adam & Eve from the Garden. Scripture tells the reader that the Devil is the “deceiver of the whole world” (Revelation 12:9) and “When he lies, he speaks according to his own nature, for he is a liar and the father of lies.” (John 8:44). The Devil has been sowing the seeds of distrust, deception and confusion since the moment the serpent slyly told Eve she “will not die” if she disobeyed God by eating the forbidden fruit. This sowing of distrust continues today as humankind blindly consumes every label or identity offered. What, therefore, could be more destructive than perpetuating the lie of the Garden to all humankind by attacking the very foundation of our identity, the image of God? In the way of a sly serpent, the Devil does not tell humankind that the image of God is worthless and should be discarded but tells humankind that there are (false) identities that can be had of our own making that will fulfill our every desire. In fact, the Devil doesn’t relent when one goes to church, gets baptized or thinks of themselves as a “good person”
as long as they continue to chase after the temporal things of this world and express their
own selfish desires. It is at this point that one rejects the image of God and inserts
whichever image or identity that one’s energies have been focused upon. Augustine
describes this destructive pull:

“For when the soul loves its own power, it slips from the common whole
to its own particular part…but in that apostatizing pride, which is called the
beginning of sin, it sought for something more than the whole…The efforts by
which it urges its own interests against the whole, and against the laws by which
the whole is governed, are made through its own body which it possesses as part
of the whole; and so, having found its delights in those corporeal forms and
movements, since it cannot have them with it within itself, it becomes entangled
with their images which it has fixed in its memory, and is fouly defiled by the
fornication of the phantasy…”

Instead of wholeness, humankind would rather have a broken piece or smaller
part of the whole. Instead of the completeness that only God provides, we would rather
have the shallowness of our own desires. The “images” that we chase after become
ingrained into our psyche in such a way that we become completely “defiled” pursuing
after things that can never satisfy. Like the mirage in the desert to the eyes of a thirsty,
weary traveler, humankind continues to stumble after that which will never satisfy our
thirst! Not only will it never satisfy our thirst, but it also only makes one thirstier and
perpetuates a cycle of despair! We effectively turn our backs to God because our desires
take priority in our lives. In essence, after the banishment from the Garden, in the most
obnoxious, prideful way, humankind turns to God and attempts to dispel him from the

4 Augustine, *The Trinity*. In vol. 45 of *The Fathers of the Church*. Translated by Stephen McKenna
Garden! Jules-Antoine Castagnary, the nineteenth century French politician and Impressionist art critic stated, “Beside the divine garden from which I have been expelled, I will erect a new Eden…At its entrance, I will set up Progress…and I will give a flaming sword into his hands and he will say to God, ‘Thou shalt not enter here.’”

Humankind erroneously believes that we have progressed to the point that we no longer need the identity foundational to our existence and can now be liberated to create that which suits us. This subversive thought doesn’t simply happen to people who are atheist, agnostic or don’t go to church but also infiltrates our religious institutions and people’s daily faith. These are the protean images referenced in Chapter 2 that continuously shift truth and ultimately create a false image of self. Not only do they create a false image of self, these “identities” available for consumption are more diverse than ever before and are also creating a false sense of being and community. Our society, churches, institutions, schools and even our families have become void of any lasting depth and stability because of these ever-shifting identities leading wherever the cultural winds may blow. For the Christian, seeing these changes are paramount to recalibrating one’s life to the calling of the Spirit and the imitation of Christ.

One way humankind reflects God’s image is through the freedom of the will and having the space to choose between living out the image of the Creator or trying to create a new (false) image for ourselves. In our participatory relationship with God, we oftentimes participate by the things we do not choose! This is where the God’s agency is

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microcosmically reflected in humankind when we imitate God through our choices of love. For Augustine, the will was driven by the soul’s “weight,” or actions of love. Using an analogy of oil and water, one rises to the top, the other sinks to the bottom according to its proper weight. Likewise, our choices of the will, either lead us away from God or closer to him. Ultimately, “To whatever place I go, I am drawn to it by love.” Augustine describes that what creates a desire for movement in the soul is virtue, or the perfect love of God. Augustine states that “virtue gives perfection to the soul.” While discussing virtue, Augustine makes the point that humankind has to have something greater than themselves to move upward towards this perfect love. This desire cannot originate in humankind since we do not have that type of perfection, nor can it come from a wise person since they share the same inherent flaws. Perfect love only comes from the perfect being, God. Therefore, when humankind strives toward God, we strive for something greater than ourselves. The antidote to creating the false image of self is striving for that which is greater than ourselves. This is the proper order of things and that which reflects holiness and the movement of the lesser to the greater. Yet, even with this understanding, humankind still defaults to the faulty logic that something greater than perfect can be created. Our focus, like a proverbial pendulum tends to swing from one extreme view to the next. Humankind has an improper view of self because of the lack of understanding what it truly means to be created in the imago Dei. Both religion and psychology reveal

\[\text{6} \text{ Augustine, } \textit{Confessions}, \text{ XIII.9} \]
\[\text{7} \text{ Ibid, XIII.9.2} \]
\[\text{8} \text{ Augustine, } \textit{Of The Morals Of The Catholic Church}, \text{ 6.9 (NPNF}^4 \text{ 4:42).} \]
\[\text{9} \text{ Ibid, 6.10} \]
the negative tendencies in our desires to create for ourselves in a way that seems more efficient and expedient. By believing we are the ones responsible for the finished image, we actually turn from the only thing that can help us to the institutions of humankind.

Humankind has traveled between two extremes over the course of human history. Either we are overly optimistic about who we are as people and our trajectory to figuring out all of life’s problems, or we are overly pessimistic about who we are and look at everything in a very negative light. The Apostle Paul admonishes the reader in Romans “not to think of yourself more highly than you ought to think, but to think with sober judgement, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned.” (12:3).

Thinking of oneself correctly is supremely important in Scripture and the basis of one understanding the dire need for redemption. When thinking of that need for redemption, both psychology and religion tend to get things wrong by only focusing on the negative aspects of humankind. In their eye-opening research, Entwistle and Moroney discuss an integrative approach to religion and psychology and the downfall of their negative focus. The authors state that, “Psychology, in its 140-year history, has predominantly focused on what goes wrong with human beings.”

Much of this focus began with the need to treat a plethora of different mental illnesses. This pursuit to treat mental illness is a very noble and needed pursuit, but it has come at a greater cost of painting humanity as a whole in a very negative light. Psychology has mostly ignored normal human behavior

and the conditions that foster human well-being because research grants come in the way of discovering, treating and solving psychological disorders. These “dark” issues plaguing humankind receive much of the spotlight and this is true when integrating religious studies into the treatment of human problems.

Similar to the approach taken by psychology, religion is strongly focused on overcoming the negative aspects of humanity. As Entwistle and Moroney write, “The integration of psychology and theology has been out of balance, focusing so much on what is wrong with human beings that it has often neglected what is right about human beings.” Evangelical churches are filled with sermons and teachings that are focused on all of the “dark” human behavior but simply repackaged theologically as “sin.” Much of recent Christian discipleship making has been focused on how to keep people from sinning and how to ask for forgiveness on all of the bad things a person has done. This mirrors the trajectory of the secular world and psychology as Entwistle and Moroney state, “there is much more emphasis in the integration literature on the negative dimension of humans as evil sinners compared to the positive dimension of humans as good creatures made in the image of God.” There is little in the modern Evangelical church that celebrates the goodness of humankind and the joy of being created in God’s image. Instead of focusing on the behavior that a Christ follower should be displaying, i.e., reflecting the imago Dei and those characteristics that we share in part with God.

Practically, religion has a problem of focusing on the sin and corruption of human nature to the detriment of all of the positive aspects of human nature. Too often, the teachings from the pulpit are a zero-sum game. The thinking goes, if one does not spend their time and energy focused on how not to sin and how not to fall into temptation, they will effectively fail anyway and be of no use to God. Quite simply, your sin should always be at the forefront of your thinking and how you can escape it! The thought is that as humans we are inherently evil, battling the flesh and must do everything in our power to overcome temptation. Preachers throw around Paul stating, “For I know that nothing good dwells within me, that is, in my flesh. I can will what is right, but I cannot do it.” (Romans 7:18). All the while neglecting that it is not a person’s efforts that bring redemption, salvation and/or the renewal of God’s image but solely the work of Jesus alone! Further, this type of Evangelical logic is flawed to begin with, that you are simply an evil, broken person who has no ability to do good without God. This type of double talk completely ignores the foundation of being created in the imago Dei! For how could one be completely lost if God’s image still resides within each person, however small that spark may be? The teaching in the Evangelical Church gives with one hand while deftly taking with the other. Sermons and discipleship studies focus on trying harder or doing a better job at being a “Christian.” This isn’t the way of Jesus; this is the way of the Devil. Work harder, do better, try more and you’ll eventually be a “good Christian” and be what other Christians look up to. This is the scandal of American Christianity where it is more works based than one would like to admit. This is also reflective of the false self, which
is reflective of self-effort instead of focusing on embracing and embodying the *imago Dei* with the daily imitation of Christ.

Humankind is not some simple puzzle that can be put together with ease. The thinking is if you live “perfectly” you will then be holy, so you have to do everything right and follow the list of ethical, moral rules. Moralism reborn! As Aku Visala writes, “Our characters are inclined to both virtue and vice and a highly moral character does not make moral failure impossible.” Human beings are complex creatures. We do amazingly good things and amazingly bad things every day. This is one of the reasons the idea of self-effort and moralism is so misleading, following a list of rules will never ensure a person will not make poor choices. As the Apostle Paul states in Romans, “For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do.” (7:19) The complexity of the humankind is placed on full display as one could argue that the Apostle Paul was top of the list of “moral” people yet struggled with the complexity of humanity. Some may argue that Paul is simply speaking of the flesh and spirit as two parts to humankind which brings about a duality that this work has distanced itself from. The human person is only human as one whole, not as a bunch of broken pieces that one tries to fuse together and make work. This was the problem from the beginning for humankind in the attempt to take the broken mirror and expect that the image reflected back would still look untarnished through the prism of a thousand fragments.

The glimmer of the divine still exists in all humanity, no matter how far one may be from God. This is the truth of the Gospel as the Apostle Paul beautifully tells the citizens of Athens, “so that they would search for God and perhaps grope for him and find him—though indeed he is not far from each one of us. For ‘In him we live and move and have our being’”\(^\text{15}\). The Church must not be so callous proclaiming that all humankind is worthless because of sin, for many good acts come from those who do not have a relationship with God. If one truly understands the power of the *imago Dei*, it is that God created all humankind to reflect his nature. Augustine shows humankind should be viewed properly within the context of goodness, stating, “If they were of the supreme order of goodness, they could not become corrupt; but neither could they become corrupt unless they were in some way good. For if they were supremely good, it would not be possible for them to be corrupted. On the other hand, if they were entirely without good, there would be nothing in them that could become corrupt.”\(^\text{16}\) Augustine’s point cannot be missed, only God is supremely good and therefore *incorruptible*. For all other things, including humankind, we have been created good and because of this have the ability to be corrupted. The actions of Adam & Eve highlight this in the Garden, what was created good became corrupted through pride. The reader should understand that God created all things good and this is the reason that all things have the possibility to become corrupted. What this teaches us is that we are not the adjudicator of good, humanity is not by default “good” as in the sense of the divine. Yet, humankind is not utterly devoid of good or

\(^{15}\) Acts 17:27-28  
\(^{16}\) Augustine, *Confessions*, VII.12.1
there would be nothing to corrupt in the first place! The power of this statement in sharing the truth of the imago Dei to the world cannot be missed! God is not here to blame but to bond. God wants all humankind to see the *imago Dei*, however small that spark may be as a beacon of hope, a glimmer of more to come to all who enter into relationship with him.

Viewing humankind through a more positive lens allows religion and psychology to paint a more realistic image of humanity. The focus on the negative aspects of human behavior (e.g., sin or psychological issues) to the detriment of the positive aspects has effectively kept researchers confined within a negative construct. By raising the focus on the positive aspects of human behavior, religion and psychology are able to offer a more complete view of humanity. In their research on this subject, Entwistle and Moroney did a comparative search in both the Journal of Psychology and Theology (JPT) and the Journal of Psychology and Christianity (JPC). Their search focused on the terms “imago Dei” and “goodness” in comparison with the darker terms of human nature such as “sin,” “sinful,” and “evil.” The results were shocking with over fifty-one results showing the darker side of human behavior in comparison with only two discussing both “imago Dei” and “goodness.”¹⁷ This supports the argument that a deeper understanding of the *imago Dei* is required for humankind to stop searching out broken cisterns for identity.

A positive view of humanity can only be rooted in the truth of the *imago Dei* or humankind swings the pendulum too far in the opposite direction to dispel the negative.

¹⁷ Entwistle & Moroney, *Imago Dei and Positive Psychology*, 296. See Table 1 & 2 comparing their search on page 297. This research ran its own comparison and likewise was able to produce two different articles on the topic, one in which is being used in this work.
Positive psychology has gained traction in both the secular and religious worlds with some unintended consequences. As Entwistle and Moroney caution, “positive psychology also runs the risk of catering to our natural bent towards self-deception about our own goodness and our own potential.” One of the downfalls of secular psychology is the focus on self-improvement, where “hope” is something as trite as “looking on the bright side” or a general idea of expectation with no degree of certainty that things will be alright. This is not the biblical idea of hope, nor grace which comes solely through the work of God in Jesus Christ. The Apostle Paul writes to the Romans, “Therefore, since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand; and we boast in our hope of sharing the glory of God.” (5:1-2). The work of Christ through his life, death and resurrection has secured an eschatological hope that is also realized in the present life. Christ is humankind’s only hope because Christ is the perfect Image. Augustine explains that Jesus is “the perfect man. I did not think of him as having only the body of a man or a man’s body and sensitive soul without his reasoning mind, but as a man complete. And I thought he was superior to other men, not because he was Truth in person, but because in him human nature had reached the highest point of excellence and he had a more perfect share of divine wisdom.” Our imitation of Christ is to share in reaching the

19 Christopher Peterson and Martin Seligman, Values in Action (VIA) Classification of Strengths. (Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 2004), 30. The authors write that hope can be defined as, “expecting the best in the future and working to achieve it.” Further that hope is “I always look on the bright side” or, “I do not have a plan for what I am doing 5 years from now.”
20 Augustine, Confessions, VII.19.1
highest point of excellence, the fullness of what it means to be human. Not through self-effort and the false image of self but through participating with Christ each day reflecting his love. Modern psychology promotes a dependance on self rather than complete dependance on God. This would be the reverse of the imago Dei, for God is not created in man’s image but man in God’s image. This is beyond wordplay; the difference is monumental!

People have a tendency to over-estimate how good they are and what their good actions will bring them in return. In concert with the Barna Group, Arizona Christian University’s recent American Worldview Inventory 2020 cites that most Christians believe good works will get a person into heaven, not the salvific work of Jesus Christ!21 Further, the work states that a large portion of adults, Christian or not, have little concern with breaking God’s law because they see themselves as “good people.” This means “that a plurality of adults (48%) believes that if a person is generally good, or does enough good things during their life, they will “earn” a place in Heaven.”22 Yet, Jesus never asks how many good works a person may have to enter into heaven and instead proclaims, “I am the way, and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”23 American Christianity is in dire straits if we believe that our good efforts will earn us merit into heaven! This is indicative of society in general where many people see

22 Ibid, 2.
23 John 14:6. See also John 3:16; 3:36; Acts 4:12; Ephesians 2:8-9; 1 Timothy 2:5. This is by no means an exhaustive list of passages highlighting that Jesus is the only way one receives salvation.
themselves as “good people.” One of the barriers to spreading the Gospel is a generation of people who believe they are “good” to begin with, why would one need salvation from being good? As discussed above, the Bible tells us not to think of ourselves more highly than we ought (Romans 12:3). In fact, the Bible never tells us that we are to think of ourselves, but God and others. In the Great Commandment (Matthew 22:37-40) the assumption is a person already thinks of themselves and this is why Jesus finishes the command by entreating, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” (Matthew 22:39). If anything, God’s Word is the rebuke for the amount of time we spend in the proverbial mirror admiring ourselves and our accomplishments. Augustine states, “God didn’t consider that you had to be admonished to love yourself.”24 While bringing the argument full circle by stating, “this is what it means to love yourself...to love God.”25 The command shows one to love God, who is greater, and to love neighbor, who is our equal. Likewise, for the person with low self-esteem, the same is true. The time we spend beating ourselves up and filling ourselves with negative self-talk is still centered on one person: me. The complete opposite of what being made in the imago Dei signifies, that we reflect God and love God first to truly love ourselves.

Psychology is often looked upon with a level of disdain or distrust from those in conservative Evangelical settings, teaching that the Bible has all a person needs in life (2 Timothy 3:16-17). Psychology is often seen as a type of “serpent” in the Garden that slightly twists what God’s Word says in such a way to favor humankind at the expense of

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the Creator’s desire. If one does not temper the self-aggrandizing and self-effort employed by psychology this may very well be true. Further, if one does not consider the great potential for human evil one can also be severely mislead by positive psychology and the trappings that everything is wonderful with me and the world! This is where an understanding of the *imago Dei* is so critical to bring balance to the state of humanity. No matter how good one may see themselves being it must be rooted in the genesis of humankind, for nothing has or will be achieved without the divine! Commenting on the Apostle Paul, Augustine effectively points out, “For Saint Paul teaches that he who sees ought not to boast as though what he sees, and even the power by which he sees had not come to him by gift. For, whatever power he has, did they not come to him by gift? By the gift of grace he is not only shown how to see you…but is also given the strength to hold you.”26 The good, positive attributes that humankind adamantly proclaims as our own are completely the gift of God. Everything that we claim for our own as good originates from God. We act prideful over things like our effort, our guile, our determination, our skill and yet Augustine’s point is that anything that we think is our own is actually a gift from God. Scripture never explicitly claims that the *imago Dei* has been lost or destroyed, yet this is not due to our hard effort or self-generated by humankind. No, Scripture does not speak of this because the sacredness and unassailability of the *imago Dei* does not rest in the hands of humankind but in the loving movement of God towards humankind. While this work has suggested that humankind is

26 Augustine, *Confessions*, VII.21.1
responsible to participate with God by moving towards him, it is always God who makes
the initial move. Any aspect of goodness that humankind can claim is directly attributed
to God. Our identity is dependent upon the imago Dei, not a byproduct of it. Naturally,
our creaturely identity, being created by God, is considered here but so is one’s baptismal
identity of being united in Christ’s death and resurrection and reflecting the imago
Christi. As Augustine writes, "every one learns that whatever good life he leads he has
from the grace of God, and that from no other source whatever can he obtain the means
of becoming perfect in the love of righteousness."27 This is the difference between
moralism and holiness, self-effort versus acknowledging the One in whom all good gifts
come from (James 1:17). It is the difference between a proper understanding of humanity
and a poor concept of the genesis of goodness.

Religion and psychology exemplify the importance of properly understanding
humanity and what is possible when things are out of balance. Fallen, human nature tends
to swing from one extreme to the next. On one extreme, in the Evangelical Church, John
Calvin’s “Total Depravity” of humankind is trumpeted from the pulpit on a constant
basis. Without Christ, humankind is nothing more than earthworms wriggling their way
through life. On the other end of the spectrum, society communicates that people are
inherently good and can make any choice that pleases them outside of those taboo few
that are frowned upon by society. In fact, society is more about the parts of one’s identity
and less about the whole. Both of these paths are divisive and only deal in half truths.


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When Adam and Eve sinned, the image of God was broken, but not completely destroyed. Even post fall, this work has posited, alongside of Augustine that humankind continues to hold a remnant of God’s image within each and every person. Humankind is not beyond redemption though that redemption comes through one path alone, the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. This redemption is needed because humankind has a critical condition that Paul exposes when writing, “There is no one who is righteous, not even one;” (Romans 3:10). Humanity has been broken, so while a glimmer of what God made good is still found in everyone it cannot be fully harnessed, accessed or made available until one enters into a relationship with God. As described in the previous chapter, by entering into the Sacrament of baptism the *imago Dei* is restored and rekindled to more fully reflect God. Therefore, one of the most important, practical implications of the *imago Dei* is found in keeping humankind grounded in the reality of who and what we truly are. Humankind was created good by God, in his image, which was broken when we fell into sin. Even in the midst of this brokenness, there is a remnant of the image that draws humanity to seek out God. God sent his Son, the true Image to redeem humankind and to restore the broken image. No amount of self-effort or positive thinking can restore the image and we must be careful to have a “sober” view of our (in)ability before God. This restoration is completely the work of God which we embrace when we enter into relationship with the Son, through baptism, to participate with his resurrected life and be restored in the *imago Christi*. The *imago Dei*, therefore, calls humankind into a deeper relationship with God to find wholeness. It is the *imago Dei* that
makes a person fully human and without it we are left promoting broken pieces in lieu of the whole.

**The Call Of The Image**

The truth of being created in the *imago Dei* is different than the transformational work of the *imago Dei* and God’s goal for humankind. The Apostle Paul exhorts the Corinthian believers when describing the journey of transformation, “Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And all of us, with unveiled faces, seeing the glory of the Lord as though reflected in a mirror, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another; for this comes from the Lord, the Spirit.”28 The power of the *imago Dei* is not a future destination but a continual, transformational work upon our hearts and lives. As theologian Stanley Grenz notes, “The eschatological destiny of bearing the divine image is present in the here and now as the Spirit is at work transforming those who are in Christ into the image that Christ bears.”29 Not only was humankind created in the image of God, but we are also being transformed into the image. Part of the restoration of the divine image is through the process of *becoming* more like Christ. As discussed in the previous chapter, we must be in Christ before we can *do* anything for Christ. Our *being in Christ* begins the transformation that allows us the proper heart and spirit to *do for Christ*. This is realized


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in the proper reflection of Christ’s image and through the imitation of his life. This is seen in essence as the Jews try to stone Jesus because they felt he was blaspheming by claiming to be the Son of God. Jesus answers the crowd, “If I am not doing the works of the Father, then do not believe me. But if I do them, even though you do not believe me, believe the works, so that you may know and understand that the Father is in me and I am in the Father.” The essence of this answer should be true for all followers of Christ. A person may not believe in God, they may not believe that you can be created in the image of God but through your actions, they will see God made real. This is far from the attitude of moralism, trying to earn status, title or favor through good actions that is completely devoid of divine purpose. This is the *imitatio Christi* and reflecting Christ in all that we do so that he may be known on earth.

The imitation of Christ brings another profound truth to humankind, that the image of God is found within us. Humankind’s mind, heart and will are shaped by God’s image and molded to reflect his goodness. The problem is humankind struggles to give control of the will to God in an act of pride. This causes division in the best of Christ followers. As Augustine implies that humankind “has one soul which is torn between conflicting wills.” A person is focused on self and not completely focused on God. Augustine describes the struggle “It is therefore no strange phenomenon partly to will to do something and partly to will not to do it. It is a disease of the mind, which does not wholly rise to the heights where it is lifted by the truth, because it is weighed down by

30 John 10:37-38  
31 Augustine, *Confessions*, VIII.10  
32 Ibid, VIII.10
habit.” God is the one who lifts our minds and our wills to receive Truth and to know God. If it were not for his work inside of humankind, the habit of our own wills along with the habit of sin and choosing the false image of self would continuously win the tug of war. Like goodness, the movement always begins with God towards humankind and then humankind is able to respond back towards God. This is the work of the Spirit, as Augustine details, “When it rightly remembers its Lord, however, whose Spirit it has received, it feels with absolute certainty, because it learns this from an inward teaching, that it can only raise itself by the affection which He freely gives.” When the mind is turned to God through the work of the Spirit it is seen within a person before anything manifests outwardly in a person. One realizes, inside themselves this transformation happening and participates with God by responding in likeness to his image. This is true for all people, as Augustine completes his thought saying, “But it is reminded that it should turn to the Lord as to that light by which it was touched in some way, even when it was turned away from him. For hence it is that even the godless think of eternity, and rightly condemn and rightly praise many things in the moral conduct of men.”

Therefore, the call of God’s image begins within each person, drawn to the Creator by the eternal seal it bears. Augustine demonstrates that one’s closeness with the divine begins by looking inward. Charles Taylor aptly describes this movement, stating, “The reason Augustine took this path seem to me to be rather that his concern was to show that God is to be found not just in the world but also and more importantly at the

33 Augustine, Confessions, VIII.9
34 Augustine, The Trinity, 14.15.21
35 Ibid, 14.15.21
very foundations of the person...God is to be found in the intimacy of self presence. God as Truth gives us the standards, the principles of right judgement." Here is a powerful truth on the importance of the *imago Dei*, God has placed many truths in this world that are important and should be followed. At the foundation of all truth is what God has created inside each and every human, the reflection of Truth. Being created in the *imago Dei* means pure Truth is part of each person and one must simply look to what God has placed inside to know how one reflects God. The Apostle Paul speaks to this when addressing the followers of Christ in Rome, “When Gentiles, who do not possess the law, do instinctively what the law requires, these, though not having the law, are a law to themselves. They show that what the law requires is written on their hearts, to which their conscience also bears witness…” God’s law is written on our hearts because his image is there being reflected upon everyone who takes the time to look within. For Augustine, therefore, the path within always leads above. When we look inside of ourselves every person should see God staring back at them and that should shift our focus upwards and to the divine. Our bodies, minds, spirits, hearts and ability to comprehend these things show that this is far from common chance or cosmic blind luck. The glory of our being points to the glory of God.

This brings profound practical implications for Church leadership. The *imago Dei* brings an essence of equality that must never be forgotten or overlooked. When equality is brought up in a church setting it will usually bring up thoughts of racial inequality or

37 Romans 2:14-15
perhaps even gender inequality. Part of the power of the *imago Dei* is the leveling of the field when it comes to one’s importance before God. All are equal in the eyes of the Lord because all bear his image and should therefore be treated with the same level of respect, value and importance. This is further extended to the non-believer and the way they are treated by those in the church as a second-tier citizen. Our equality isn’t based on the false image of self and the things that we have achieved or modeled in life. Equality in the *imago Dei* is ontological, the equality of being. This was made clear when Jesus was asked by an expert of the Law “who is my neighbor?” (Luke 10:29) and his response was the parable of the Good Samaritan. In the end, Jesus turns the question back onto the expert of the Law and asks which man acted as a neighbor to the man lying on the side of the road naked and bleeding. The lawyer replies, “the one who showed him mercy.” with Jesus’ reply, “Go and do likewise.” (v.37). We are to show mercy to all humankind because we are created equal and we have all been shown mercy from God equally. Christ’s sacrifice on Calvary was not for one group of people but for all people, equally created in his image!

The image of God leads one to shift their love from self to the divine and to realize the fullness of humanity. Augustine powerfully states, “However, when God is loved more than the soul so that a man prefers to belong to him rather than to himself, then is it that we are genuinely mindful in the highest degree of the soul and consequently

38 I personally do not like this phrase or use it in a ministry setting as it makes people seem like they have “no belief.” In essence by using this phrase we look down on people in the church who do not have a relationship with God instead of being a “doctor to the sick” (Luke 5:31) as Jesus was on this earth.
also of the body.”39 For Augustine, the love of God, or charity, is the highest love. This love is the essence of holiness as discussed in the previous chapter. The fullness of humankind is found through the love of God above all things, especially over self. It has long been the critical failure of humankind to love self over all other things. When God is loved above all the highest degree of humanity is attained. To truly gain the highest degree of self, it is self that must be given up. Augustine continues his thought on loving God over self by writing, “The nourishment of charity is the lessening of covetousness, the perfection of charity, the absence of covetousness. The lessening of fear is the sign of its progress, the absence of fear, the sign of its perfection. For ‘the root of all evils is covetousness,’40 and, “love made perfect casts out fear.”41 Accordingly, whoever wants to nourish charity in himself, let him pursue the lessening of covetous desires (covetous being the love of getting and holding onto temporal things).”42 Love for temporal things can be directly applied to ourselves. This life, our bodies and the temporal identities that we strive so hard for are the very things that we must shed ourselves to realize the highest love for God, and therefore, for ourselves. Love can only be perfected when it places God above the temporal. The more we move from the temporal and the lord of self, the deeper we enter into relationship with God.

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39 Augustine, Eighty-Three Different Questions. 36.1 In vol. 70 of The Fathers of the Church. Translated by David L. Mosher (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2002). Referred to from this point as Different Questions.
40 1 Timothy 6:10
41 1 John 4:18
42 Augustine, Eighty-Three Different Questions, 36.1
Ultimately, God is the only one who can fill the longing that humankind has for meaning, purpose and eternity. After thousands of years of grasping and chasing after the images created by self, we still are painfully short of knowing contentment and wholeness. God is the only thing we should be grasping after and holding onto tightly. The image of God within us shows us that he is not far from us and desires that all turn to him. Augustine beautifully captures this thought saying, “He is the one we should love. He made the world and stays close to it. For when he made the world he did not go away and leave it. By him it was created and in him it exists. Wherever we taste truth, God is there. He is in our very inmost hearts, but our hearts have strayed from him. Think well on it, unbelieving hearts and cling to him who made you. Stand with him and you will not fall; rest in him and peace shall be yours.”43 The life that everyone seeks, a life filled and fulfilled can only be had by clinging to God. Augustine points out that God is found inward, he is the still small voice that we must still ourselves to hear. Yet, when turning inward we must be wary that we don’t stray from him for our own selfish desires. God has given us the will to choose him or to choose the temporal and the fleeting. Unfortunately, when we choose the temporal masks of this world, the labels, the degrees, the wealth, the accolades and the worldly power we pridefully reject the One thing we so desperately seek. Peace will only be found in turning inward, seeing God staring back at us and taking our gaze heavenward to complete that which we were created for, to reflect and imitate God.

43 Augustine, Confessions, III.12.1
Moving Forward

Moving from the academic and theoretical, I would like to close this work with some thoughts on how the truth of the *imago Dei* impacts our daily lives. One of the most significant ways is in our relationships at work, school, church and especially within our families. The power of the *imago Dei* is one where we value the presence of others as fellow image bearers of God. We treat people with the same mercy that God has shown us because of the deep truth of the *imago Dei*. There is an inherent equality of all humankind that points us to God and brings us together as one family. Everything that we do in relation to others is seen through the view of our relationship with God and this relationship then informs our actions outwards. As the soul informs the body and our love of God informs others, we embody holiness, love in its proper order. The *imago Dei* is a mirror reminding us of that order that begins with God and properly flows downward from the divine. Further, we understand that as we look inside to see God reflected, we can also see others reflect the image of God toward us. Understanding our relationships as reflections of the divine help us to understand the importance and sacredness of others. As Solomon writes in Ecclesiastes 4:9-10, "Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their toil. For if they fall, one will lift up the other; but woe to one who is alone and falls and does not have another to help" As an image bearer of God, we have been called to come alongside each other to “lift up the other” and to remind each other that God has uniquely invested into each one of us. As Entwistle and Moroney note, “Positive social relationships have been found to inhibit depressive symptoms and reduce
the risk of suicide, while…People who are socially isolated experience poorer health and greater risk of death.”

God created humankind communally, to reflect his trinitarian image. As Father, Son and Spirit exist in eternal community, God has created humankind to reflect this same sacredness of relational community.

From a communal perspective, our relationships within the Church should be a place that fosters growth and not a place that brings about the shame of not living up to moralistic standards. The Church should be a place of grace, mercy and forgiveness which allows a person to move beyond guilt and the shame of sin. If we remember from chapter two, shame is what was introduced after Adam & Eve sinned and then fled from God’s presence. The fallout from that first sinful act has haunted humankind ever since. If we pause for a moment, what do we think may have happened if Adam & Eve had sought after God instead of fleeing from him in shame? We can accurately say that God would have been rich in his love and mercy (Ephesians 1:3-14) and human history might look radically different than it does now. The power of the imago Dei is that it draws us toward God, never away from him, for how does one turn from themselves? The Church has been called to be a conduit of God’s grace, mercy and forgiveness. Unfortunately, many experiences within the walls of a person’s local church building are negative and create barriers for people desiring to attend. The Church should realize even more than the secular world that the church must be a place of community. As Grenz comments, “The relational self must be viewed as the ecclesial self, the new humanity in communion

Entwistle & Moroney, Imago Dei and Positive Psychology, 299.
with the triune God.”⁴⁵ Our relationship with God defines our desire to grow close to others in openness and vulnerability, for this is the picture of the incarnation, Christ sent to us as a baby to grow with us. We too must imitate Christ and proverbially grow with the people that God has placed into our lives. This is similar to the transformational process that God initiates at the time of baptism when the image of God is being renewed in us. Commenting on the importance of the church, Entwistle and Moroney write, “its many glaring flaws notwithstanding, the Church can serve as a place where people are gradually formed into the individuals and corporate body that the Lord intends them to be—the people of God, the bride of Christ, and the temple of the Holy Spirit.”⁴⁶ The restoration of the imago Dei brings with it the vision God has for the redemption and restoration of his people as the positive force of change in this world. God created humankind relationally and to practice that relationship as a community of holy, godly people. Augustine writes, “God also foresaw that by his grace a community of godly men was to be called to adoption as his sons,⁴⁷ and these men, with their sins forgiven, were to be justified by the Holy Spirit and then to enter into fellowship with the holy angels in eternal peace…”⁴⁸

God always intended humanity to be a community of grace, naturally reflecting the divine and sharing those attributes with each other in the form of love, mercy and grace. The community of faith is not about jostling for position in an organization, nor about

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⁴⁵ Grenz, Social God, 305
⁴⁶ Entwistle & Moroney, Imago Dei and Positive Psychology, 300.
⁴⁷ Romans 8:15
⁴⁸ Augustine, City of God, XII.23.2
building a kingdom that is ultimately about us or the celebrity pastor, nor about our needs and wants but solely about operating as the body of Christ (Ephesians 1:22-23) and being the imago Christi.

Further, in our most intimate relationships we must learn to reject the false images of self that the world deceptively offers for mass consumption. This work has presented how these deceptions began in the Garden and have continued to keep humankind enslaved to a lower existence than the one God intends for us. The world’s identities are found in the excess, yet the return is always temporary and without eternal substance. They are found through consumerism, the glitz of Madison Ave and Wall Street, promising that the more we consume and spend the greater we will become. Yet, the imago Dei shows us that no amount of human effort can buy or bring fulfillment. We learned this through Job and Solomon, that all the riches in the world, all of the titles that can be achieved or given cannot save our souls from the destruction of chasing after the temporary. It is the eternal that our soul longs for, which God has placed upon our hearts and is fulfilled in him alone. Augustine speaks on the eternal, saying, “For of all things, the most excellent is what is eternal…it is eternal life which is the happy life. However, what else but God is that eternal object which affects the soul with eternity?” A significant amount of the world’s efforts are spent chasing after happiness when God created the answer to be found within, drawing our attention upwards to God’s eternal love.

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49 Augustine, Different Questions, 35.2
Similar to chasing after happiness, the world forms identity through the part of a person and never the whole. In fact, the whole person is not the world’s concern, simply the pieces which can be used to promote, incite or placate the masses. This is why race becomes our identity, sexuality becomes our identity, gender becomes our identity and/or body parts become our identity and through all of this we elevate the partial and the incomplete to the detriment of our humanity and soul. While these parts may be a part of who and what I am, it is not all that I am, and it can never be more important than my wholeness in the imago Dei. The parts can never be whole without the mending work of God. He alone is the one which makes all of the pieces and all of our parts work together in harmony and wholeness in the foundation of his image. This is why it is supremely important that we do not hand pieces of ourselves to others and allow them to craft our identity, for we give them the counterfeit power of a god and the true God clearly tells us we shall have no other gods before him (Exodus 20:3)! In essence we allow others to tell us who we are and what we should be in contradistinction to living into the truth of what we will always be. The Apostle Paul tells the Galatians to see themselves in wholeness for who they truly are, rejecting the identities handed out by the world and to stop competing in their individual parts imploring them, “As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourself with Christ. There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ
Jesus."\(^{50}\) We must throw off the thinking that the individual pieces are greater than the whole and embrace the wholeness that God alone bestows in the *imago Dei*.

**Conclusion**

In conclusion, I owe a great debt and stand largely upon the shoulders of Saint Augustine for his theological, philosophical and practical contribution to this work. This work has been a journey of discovery fueled by one of the greatest Fathers of the Church. The Evangelical Church would do well to revisit Augustine in lieu of being predisposed with Calvin, Wesley and Luther. For me personally, Augustine’s work and the chronicling of his life drew me to the genuineness of the struggles he faced and overcame. Not only did he triumph but he was able to frame life’s most important questions through the framework of real-life struggles and not simply an ivory tower approach to the world. It was through these struggles that Augustine understands that the *imago Dei* was critical to knowing God and ultimately knowing self. As Gerald Boersma summarizes Augustine’s theology, he writes, "It is difficult to exaggerate the importance of the theology of the imago Dei for Augustine’s thought. The image of God in the human person gives expression to the participatory ontology that is foundational to his anthropology. The mystery of the human person, for Augustine, is ultimately intelligible only in relation to God."\(^{51}\)

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What Augustine taught me and hopefully teaches us corporately is that we will never know ourselves until we strive to understand God. Our identity is not formed from the good or bad that we have done, but from God and the richness of his love. This is from a man who didn’t try to hide from his past like many people try today. He stole pears just for the rush saying, “our real pleasure consisted in doing something that was forbidden.”\(^{52}\) He came to the realization that he rebelled against God for over ten years because he wanted to be driven by his lust and didn’t care who was hurt as long as his needs were met. Even when Augustine finally understood that it was better to give himself over to the love of God than the lust of his flesh, he still cried out habitually and lazily, “let me wait a little longer.”\(^{53}\) The beauty of Augustine’s publicly made known struggles in *Confessions* is that he intimately understood that the only one who could take his false identities away was God. No number of public relations campaigns would solve his problem and no amount of trying to clean up his act would make him acceptable before God. What a refreshing change from how the world operates today, especially in ministry. Our Church leaders are polished and dazzle publicly but what are their lives really like? What is my life really like, what is your life really like? Do any of us have the “perfect” life where we can parade around a lifestyle of perfection while peddling “answers” to living a life that is at best a whitewashed tomb (Matthew 23:27)? We place celebrity pastors on pedestals and try to reflect them, instead of Jesus Christ. Even though we “know” as Christians we have been created in God’s image, we still run to the false

\(^{52}\) Augustine, *Confessions*, II.4  
\(^{53}\) Augustine, *Confessions*, VIII.5
images of self, of prosperity, celebrity and of comfort. This is why we desperately need a better understanding of the power of the imago Dei, in my life and hopefully yours too! That Christ died to save sinners like us and in doing so redeemed his image inside of us as a beacon of hope for a world dark with despair. He did this so we can be authentic about who we are, sinners saved by grace, people who have been redeemed to reflect Christ in our very being and doing! Think about what the Church would become if authentic leadership preached to their congregants, “don’t look to me, look to Christ, but if you have to see me, I pray that I reflect the imago Christi!” Augustine’s struggle is my struggle and I speculate the struggle of many people, both in and out of the Church today. We do not know God and therefore we do not know ourselves. No amount of learning, experience or good fortune will allow us the divinely wielded power of creating our identity and who we are. This is God’s power and God’s alone. We must know God and the beauty of his image inside of us and every person, yearning to be redeemed, renewed and rekindled with only the passion the Spirit creates. My hope is that this work has created a renewed interest in the importance of our identity, especially in view of the ever-changing world we live in today. Self-made identities abound, but the imago Dei has and will outlast them all. The imago Dei is eternal, waiting in each one of us to be unleashed upon the world in a life-giving way. After sitting at the feet of Jesus Christ and his servant Saint Augustine, I understand that now and I am all the more thankful for it.
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Biography

My bachelors work was conducted at Multnomah University and I was granted an exceptional admittance into Multnomah’s Master of Divinity program in 2011. I graduated Magna Cum Laude in 2016 with a Master of Divinity with a concentration in Pastoral Leadership. I was awarded the B.B. Sutcliffe Expository Preaching Award. This award is presented to the master’s student who demonstrated the greatest proficiency in biblical, expository preaching as evidenced by accuracy handling the biblical text, by excellence in sermonic style and by effectiveness in applicational relevance. Lastly, I received a scholarship from Duke Divinity for my Doctor of Ministry degree.