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IN THE LIKENESS OF GOD

And God said: “Let Us make man **in Our image** and **after Our likeness**”. That’s what we are told in Genesis 1:26. What do these two expressions actually mean? Is there a difference between “image” and “likeness”? Or are these two words simply synonyms?

The Hebrew word translated as “image” is “**tselem**”, which is used 17 times in the Old Testament. The Hebrew word translated as “likeness” is “**demuwth**”, and this word is used 25 times in the Old Testament.

[Comment: Some scholarly works will transliterate these two words slightly differently, as for example “selem” and “demut”. Such differences are not of any significance.]

Another Hebrew word that also ties into this subject, though it is not used in this verse, is “**mareh**”, which is used 103 times in the Old Testament. This word is mostly translated as “**appearance**”. This word “mareh” is formed from a common Hebrew verb that means “to see”. So the noun “mareh” refers to “something we can see”. And “appearance” is a suitable translation for the Hebrew word “mareh”. It is also translated as “sight” and as “vision”. As a point of reference, this word “mareh” is used 15 times in Ezekiel chapter 1, where it is always translated as “appearance”.

Potentially we thus have three different Hebrew words, which are translated as follows:

1) “Tselem” = image.

2) “Demuwth” = likeness.

3) “Mareh” = appearance.

Do these three words all more or less refer to the same thing? Or are there differences in meanings between these words? This is a question that Hebrew scholars have argued over for centuries, voicing opinions, but without reaching any definitive conclusions.

I believe that the difficulty here does not lie in these Hebrew words themselves, as much as it does in the fact that none of the translators actually understand **what information God intended to convey**, when God used two of these three words in Genesis 1:26.

[Comment: We can ignore “mareh” here in our discussion, other than recognizing that there is in fact another Hebrew word that focuses explicitly on looks and on appearance, but which word God chose **not** to use in this verse. But for the meaning conveyed by our English word “likeness” God could readily

have used this Hebrew word “mareh”. But God didn’t do that, implying that God wanted to convey **something other than what we think of as “likeness”** or “appearance”.]

It is primarily not a case of arguing over philological distinctions between “tselem” and “demuwth”, though I will point out a few technicalities. It is really a matter of realizing that in Genesis 1:26 God was speaking about **two completely different things**. That is why God used two completely unrelated words. And we need to identify those two “different things”.

But this is something the translators have not really understood. And so translators have mostly chosen the two English words “image” and “likeness”, with the implication that these words should be viewed as being largely synonymous. And unfortunately that is precisely how very many people view these two words “image” and “likeness” in this verse; they view them as if both words somehow refer to the same thing. But that is misleading!

The Hebrew word “tselem”, translated as **“image”, refers to looks, to outward appearance**, very much like the Hebrew word “mareh”. Regarding “tselem” the Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament (TWOT) says: “The word basically refers to **a representation**, **a likeness**.” So “tselem” could equally correctly be translated as “likeness”. But this would make the word “demuwth” redundant, if “tselem” in this verse also refers to “likeness”.

This in turn already implies that “demuwth” must here surely refer to something other than “likeness”. God would **not** have said **twice** “in Our likeness”.

Anyway, the first statement in Genesis 1:26 thus tells us that in our outward appearance we human beings look like God. Outwardly God’s spirit body, invisible to human eyes, has the same form as the human body. That is what the statement “in Our image” means.

This should be the easier part to understand. But it should also set us up to expect the word “demuwth” to refer to something different from “image” or “likeness”.

The key to understanding this verse correctly is to recognize that the Hebrew word “demuwth”, translated as “likeness”, has **in this verse** nothing to do with looks or appearance. This Hebrew word “demuwth” tells us nothing whatsoever about what God looks like to other spirit beings who are able to see God (i.e. to the angels).

Hebrew scholars don’t understand the correct meaning with which God used the word “demuwth” in Genesis 1:26. For example, TWOT says the following for “demuwth”:

“The more important word of the two is ‘image’ but to avoid the implication that man is a precise copy of God, albeit in miniature, **the less specific and more abstract *demût*** was added. ... No distinction is to be sought between these two words (i.e. between “tselem” and “demuwth”) . **They are totally interchangeable** ... Man is the visible, corporeal representative of **the** invisible, **bodiless God**.” (TWOT on “demuwth”)

Some important things to notice about this quote from a scholarly work. First of all, these scholars do not really see a distinction between these two Hebrew words. They view them as synonymous. That's why they say "they are totally interchangeable". They also believe in a "**bodiless**" God. That is absurd! If God does not have "a spirit body", then anything could be "in the image of God" ... a fish, a goat, the moon, etc.

I mention these things to show that **we cannot extend any credibility** at all to these scholars when it comes **to theological explanations** about God and God's plan for mankind. Their theology is totally flawed.

However, this does not mean that they may not have a good understanding of many aspects of Hebrew grammar. **Grammar is not theology**. So let's note a grammatical statement which has been made just in passing.

TWOT tells us that "**demuwth**" is "**less specific and more abstract**" than "tselem".

That's exactly right!

Where "tselem" refers to "form, shape, appearance, likeness", the word "demuwth" is less specific. In other words "demuwth" does in various contexts refer to "form, shape, appearance, likeness", yes; but it actually refers **far less** to these things than "tselem". In fact "demuwth" is "**more abstract**". Again correct! "Character, personality, likes and dislikes" are all "abstract things". And they are the things the word "demuwth" is intended to convey here in Genesis 1:26.

God's "likeness" with the Genesis 1:26 meaning is completely independent of what God actually looks like. Here the Hebrew word translated as "likeness" doesn't tell us whether God looks like a human being, or like some animal, or like some bird (i.e. appearances that pagan religions have adopted). The Hebrew word translated as "image" has already told us what God looks like, that God has the form and shape we identify as "the human shape". But "likeness" in this context refers to something completely different.

The Hebrew word translated as **"likeness" tells us what God is like!**

Here the word "demuwth" refers to what kind of **character** God has, what kind of **personality** God has. It includes things like **what God likes, what God dislikes**. It includes **how** God thinks and reasons, **what standards** underlie God's way of thinking. The attribute addressed by the word "likeness" goes far deeper than just the acceptance of, and adherence to the laws of God.

Yes, "demuwth" is indeed a "more abstract" word. This means that there are places where the literal physical meaning is not intended, where something "more abstract" is intended.

Now all the abstract things included in the term “likeness” in Genesis 1:26 are totally dependent on **the mind** that God has. All these things are expressions and manifestations of **the spirit of God**.

To put it plainly: **It is the spirit of God that defines “the likeness of God”**.

Note!

This statement (that the spirit of God defines the likeness of God) is true for God who has (to human beings) an invisible body. But this statement is not necessarily true when the word “demuwth” is used to compare two or more human beings with one another. In other words, when a son is in the “likeness” (“demuwth”) of his human father, then this statement is not necessarily defined by the spirit in man in those two human beings (the father and the son), although it could be. In that situation the word “demuwth” is mostly used with its non-abstract meaning.

Let’s continue.

For God to achieve the creation of man “in the likeness of God” meant that when God created Adam and Eve back in Genesis, then God gave each one of them “**the spirit in man**”.

It is the spirit in man which empowers us human beings to function on the human level, as the Apostle Paul explained in 1 Corinthians 2:11. And the spirit in man provides **the potential** for human minds to unite with the spirit of God. And such a potential union of the spirit in man with the spirit of God then makes it possible for us human beings **from then onwards to develop our minds** to eventually be “in the likeness of God”.

Consider this contrast:

1) To be made in God’s **image** was **instantaneous**. Adam and Eve were created instantaneously “in the image of God”. This is a reference to the mature human form God gave to man.

2) But in the Genesis 1:26 context to be made in God’s **likeness takes a lifetime**! This attribute requires a developmental process. Adam and Eve were not created “in the likeness of God”. They were only created with **the potential** to achieve “the likeness of God”. In fact, it was God’s intention that in the process of living their lives, Adam and Eve would in time attain to “the likeness of God”.

“The likeness of God” requires us human beings to at some point receive God’s holy spirit, to unite with our own spirit in man, and to then develop a mind that thinks and reasons along the same lines as the mind of God. And therefore God made provision for Adam and Eve to have **ready access to God’s holy spirit**. That is why God provided “**the tree of life**” in Genesis 2:9.

Had Adam and Eve not sinned, and instead eaten the fruit from the tree of life, then they would have

received God's holy spirit, and they would have been on the road to achieving "the likeness of God".

But instead they ate the fruit of the tree of the perception of good and evil, and they sinned; and then their access to the tree of life was cut off. And therefore Adam and Eve never achieved the condition of being "in the likeness of God". Without access to the holy spirit no human being can attain to the condition of being "in the likeness of God". None of the people who drowned in the flood were "in the likeness of God", with the meaning God intended in Genesis 1:26. All of them were only "in the image of God".

Understand the following:

None of the people who will eventually end up in the lake of fire will ever have attained the condition of being "in the likeness of God". Any human being that attains the condition of being "in the likeness of God" will have immortal life. Notice what God said after Adam and Eve had sinned.

And the LORD God said, Behold, the man is **become as one of Us**, to know good and evil: and now, lest he put forth his hand, and take also of the tree of life, and **eat**, **and live for ever** ... (Genesis 3:22)

So in one specific regard we human beings can in this life become like God. And that is in regard to understanding what is good and what is evil, understanding what is right and what is wrong. No other part of God's physical creation has this capacity to understand the difference between right and wrong. No animal is capable of comprehending the difference between good and evil. Understanding the distinction between good and evil is a godly attribute, and in God's physical creation only mankind has this specific attribute.

Notice also that having this godly attribute of being able to distinguish between good and evil elevates us in one regard to be like God. But even though we human beings are "become as one of Us", that still has not given us access "to live for ever". It takes more than just becoming "one of Us" to achieve immortality. Access to immortality is totally dependent on access to God's holy spirit. So when access to the holy spirit is denied, then it is impossible for a person to achieve immortality.

It is only after we have received God's holy spirit, and used it to help change our minds, our character, our personality and our likes and dislikes, that then we can come to be "in the likeness of God". To be in the likeness of God is not something that happens when we are born, as far as God's intended meaning in Genesis 1:26 is concerned.

So God intended the Hebrew words translated as "image" and "likeness" in Genesis 1:26 to refer to two completely different things.

Now let's take a look at another part of the Hebrew text for this verse. In the statement "**let Us make man** in Our image after Our likeness", the Hebrew verb translated "let Us make" is "asah". Here the verb "asah" is used in **the imperfect tense**. [To be more precise, this is actually the cohortative form of the imperfect. The cohortative is used primarily for additional emphasis.] In Hebrew grammar the

imperfect tense expresses **an action, process or condition which is incomplete**.

In Genesis 1:26 God tells us that **what God "is intending to make" represents a condition that is incomplete**. In other words, the "something" (i.e. human beings) that God "is planning to make" in this verse is not yet complete. **It will require further development** before it (the "something") will be complete. The human beings God "planned to make" in this verse were not made complete. They would require further development before they would be complete "in the likeness of God".

Understand that Genesis 1:26 is **an emphatic statement of intent** to do something. It is not a statement that addresses the actual creation of mankind. It is only a statement of intent. Now the next verse identifies how God acted on that statement of intent. Here is verse 27.

So God created man **in His *own* image**, **in the image of God** created He him; male and female created He them. (Genesis 1:27)

This verse uses the Hebrew verb for "created" (i.e. "bara") three times. And it only speaks about "the image of God". There is no question that being made "in the image of God" was an instantaneous process. Verse 27 confirms this. But we should also notice that verse 27 **does not say that God created man "in the likeness of God"**.

The omission of such a statement is not an oversight. Such a statement (i.e. "created in the likeness of God") is deliberately left out. **God did not "create" us in His "likeness".** Rather, the state of being "in the likeness of God" is a process that takes a lifetime to achieve.

Being endowed with the spirit in man at birth is only the very start of the developmental process towards eventually being in the likeness of God. That process takes time and experiences, and exposure to tests and to trials.

To become a person "in the likeness of God" refers to our character and our personality and our disposition and our likes and our dislikes. It refers to **becoming like God in all these things**. It is in all these things that God the Father and Jesus Christ are "one".

SOME OTHER VERSES THAT USE "DEMUWTH"

Let's consider certain verses to which someone may refer, to question this explanation. Let's start with Isaiah 40:18.

ISAIAH 40:18

To whom then will you **liken** (Hebrew verb "**damah**") God? or what **likeness** (Hebrew noun "**demuwth**") will you compare to Him? (Isaiah 40:18)

The Hebrew noun “demuwth” has in fact been formed from the primitive root verb “damah”. **The meaning of “demuwth” is derived from the verb “damah”**. Isaiah 40:18 asks the question: to whom will we **compare** God? “Liken” is not a reference to what God looks like, but to God’s attributes.

Yes, a comparison can focus on looks and appearance. But a comparison can also focus on any number of things other than appearance. Isaiah 40 has before verse 18 already presented a number of other comparisons. For example, compared to God all human nations are like “a drop in a bucket” and like the very fine dust that has settled on a scale to weigh things (see verse 15). Implied is that the minute quantity of dust has no effect at all on whatever weight may be established for some object.

In other words, compared to God we human beings are totally insignificant. In fact, before God all nations are “less than nothing” (see verse 17). This is the focus of the comparisons presented in Isaiah 40.

Notice that the comparisons before verse 18 have not at all focused on looks or on appearance. What God actually looks like hasn’t entered the discussion. The total focus of this section is on God’s might and God’s unlimited power.

I don’t mean to imply that in this context in Isaiah 40 “demuwth” could not perhaps include looks and appearance, even though that is not the focus. It could include appearance. But **the point is that “likeness”** (“demuwth”) **includes far, far greater parameters than the one small area of “appearance”**.

Comparing all of humanity to “less than nothing” is a comparison to the staggering, humanly incomprehensible power that is vested in the Almighty God.

Notice one other thing about Isaiah 40:18.

The two questions posed in this verse imply the answer:

There is nothing and nobody whom we could “liken” to God! And there is no likeness anywhere that we could possibly compare to God!

Can you see that these are the correct answers that are implied in verse 18? So based on the questions presented in verse 18, we human beings are “not yet” in the likeness of God, **regarding the meaning that is attached to the word “likeness” here in Isaiah 40:18**.

Can you possibly imagine answering the question “what likeness will you compare to God?” with the words: “well, actually all of us human beings are **already** in the likeness of God. **So we can safely compare God’s likeness to the human form**”?

Do you think that that is the correct way to answer the questions in verse 18? After we have been told that all human nations are less than nothing, is the above statement the answer verse 18 expects? Or is the implied answer "**at this point in time there is no human being in the likeness of God**"?

Verse 22 tells us that God "sits upon the circle of the earth", and that to God we human beings are like "grasshoppers". In verse 25 God Himself then said:

To whom then will you liken ("damah") **Me**, or **shall I be equal**? says the Holy One. (Isaiah 40:25)

Notice that in this context God uses the verb "to liken" with the sense of **being made equal to God**. And with this meaning here in verse 25 obviously **no human being is like** (Hebrew "damah") **God**. With the meaning God Himself attached to the verb "damah" in this context, it means that here "likeness, form, appearance" don't in any way enter the picture.

Elsewhere the noun "demuwth" may well refer to appearance and likeness; but in verses 18 and 25 of Isaiah 40 the words "damah" and "demuwth" most certainly do not at all refer to physical appearances. In the context of these specific verses these Hebrew words focus on God's attributes, specifically on God's unlimited power. And in these verses God is the Speaker.

When we carefully read all of chapter 40, it becomes very clear that it cannot be otherwise. The correct answers to God's questions are not difficult to establish. And **the correct answers to these questions** in verses 18 and 25 **also apply to the meaning with which the word "likeness" is used in Genesis 1:26**. That is, the meaning God Himself attached to "damah" and to "demuwth" in these two verses in Isaiah 40 is the meaning God also attached to the word "demuwth" in Genesis 1:26.

Now let's look at two verses in Genesis 5.

GENESIS 5:1-2

This *is* the book of the generations of Adam. In the day that God created man, **in the likeness of God made He him**; male and female created He them; and blessed them, and called their name Adam, in the day when they were created. (Genesis 5:1-2)

In Genesis 5 the story goes back to the time of Adam's and Eve's creation, for the purpose of establishing a genealogical record. These verses record how God carried out His statement of intent in Genesis 1:26.

Here in these two verses the expression "in the image of God" is not used. Instead, verse 1 uses the word "likeness" to include the meaning of "image". So yes, the Hebrew word for "likeness" can be used to also refer to appearance, as it does here in Genesis 5.

However, when we compare Genesis 5:1 with Isaiah 40:18,25 and then ask the question: "**who has the**

likeness of God?", then Genesis 5:1 will give us one answer, and Isaiah 40:18,25 will give us a different answer. The context is the key.

This simply indicates that this Hebrew word "demuwth" has a range of meanings, which meanings always depend on the context in which this word is used. This is not an unusual feature. Quite a number of other biblical Hebrew words can likewise convey a range of different meanings.

[One example of another Hebrew word that has a wide range of meanings is the word "halal". This word "halal" is examined in great detail in my article "The Name Lucifer Has Never Belonged to Satan!". I mention this only to illustrate that it is not unusual for some biblical Hebrew words to have different meanings in different contexts.]

Where Genesis 1:26 presents **two distinct features** in reference to God (i.e. "image" and "likeness"), Genesis 5:1 presents **only one feature** (i.e. "likeness"). So Genesis 5:1 is a more general statement, a reference to what was stated earlier. Here the focus is not on godly character attributes.

Now let's look at verse 3.

GENESIS 5:3

And Adam lived an hundred and thirty years, and begat *a son* **in his own likeness** ("demuwth"), **after his image** ("tselem"); and called his name Seth: (Genesis 5:3)

So what is this verse telling us?

For a start, this is the only other verse in the whole Old Testament in which the Hebrew words "tselem" and "demuwth" are used together. So Genesis 5:3 establishes some kind of reference back to Genesis 1:26. It is when these two Hebrew words are used together in the same context that "demuwth" takes on "the less specific and more abstract" meaning.

However, we should also note that here in Genesis 5:3 the order of these two Hebrew words is reversed. Genesis 1:26 mentions "tselem" first and "demuwth" second. But Genesis5:3 mentions "demuwth" first and "tselem" second. And after Genesis 5:3 these two Hebrew words are never again used together.

Now Seth was not born "in God's likeness". No, **Seth was born in Adam's "likeness"**. In other words, as far as character is concerned, Seth followed in the footsteps of Adam.

While the line of Seth is by some people referred to as "the righteous line", the fact is that from after the death of Abel up to the flood, apart from Noah (Genesis 6:9) the only other person who "walked with God" was Enoch (Genesis 5:22,24).

Neither Seth himself, nor any of his descendants, other than Enoch and Noah, are recorded to have "walked with God". This means that Seth and all of his descendants (apart from Enoch and Noah) lived their lives **in the "likeness" of Adam**. This expression is a strong contrast to the expression "in the likeness of God". It is not a good thing to be "in the likeness of Adam", not when we understand Genesis 1:26 correctly.

Understand that Genesis 1:26 tells us God's intention that not only Adam and Eve were to become "in the likeness of God", but also that **all of their descendants were to eventually be "in the likeness of God"**. However, Genesis 5:3 tells us that **that didn't happen**. Even "the good line" of Seth didn't achieve that condition (except for Enoch and Noah); **even Seth's line only achieved "the likeness of Adam"**.

This tells us that from the pre-flood world only Abel and Enoch and Noah will in due time be in God's Kingdom. And so these three individuals are the only people from the pre-flood world that Paul mentions in the faith chapter, in Hebrews 11. Nobody else from the pre-flood world will ever be in God's Kingdom.

That is why "likeness" is mentioned before "image" in Genesis 5:3. The character which human beings developed was more important than the physical appearance those human beings had. And the reversal of these two words in Genesis 5:3 directs the focus onto **the character and mind-set of Adam**, as opposed to developing "the likeness of God".

When we understand these things correctly, then the meaning of "likeness" in Genesis 5:3 should also become clear. In other words:

In Genesis 1:26 and in Genesis 5:3, the only two places where the Hebrew words "tselem" and "demuwth" are used together, the Hebrew word "demuwth" has the exact same meaning.

In **Genesis 1:26** God expressed **the intention** that human beings would work towards achieving the same character and personality, the same standards and same likes and dislikes, and the same way of thinking as God Himself (i.e. "in God's likeness"). **That is what is required in order to eventually become "one" with God the Father and with Jesus Christ** (see John 17:21).

And **Genesis 5:3** tells us that this intention (i.e. to come to be "in the likeness of God") **was never achieved** before the flood (except for Abel and Enoch and Noah). And because that intention was never achieved before the flood, therefore God's plan for mankind had to be modified in some ways after the flood. And that is precisely what happened.

So rather than challenging the explanation I have given for "demuwth" in Genesis 1:26, the use of "demuwth" in Genesis 5:3 actually reinforces the explanation for Genesis 1:26.

But don't expect any Hebrew scholars to agree with me. Now let's go back and take another look at Genesis 1:26.

GENESIS 1:26 AGAIN

Here is this verse once more.

And God said, Let Us make man in Our image, after Our likeness: **and let them have dominion over** the fish of the sea, and **over** the fowl of the air, and **over** the cattle, and over all the earth, and **over** every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth. (Genesis 1:26)

It is not the statement "in Our image" that enables us human being to have this dominion. It is the fact that we are created with the potential to in time be "**in the likeness of God**" that **enables us to exert such dominion** over the physical creation around us. It is the spirit in man, which God gives to every human being at birth, that makes this dominion possible.

Yes, certainly, one very significant part of coming to be in the likeness of God is total obedience to all of God's laws. That is extremely important; but **that is only the start** for the "likeness" process.

Let's consider our own human circumstances. Amongst all the other people to whom we are exposed in our daily lives, there are some people whose company we really enjoy. We like being around those people. But for almost all of us there are also other people, whose presence we prefer to avoid, and whose company makes us uncomfortable. **There are certain things that we just don't like about certain people**.

Now does that mean that the people, whose company we personally prefer to avoid, are evil? Are they bad people? Do they reject God's laws? Perhaps that may be true for some of the people whose company we try to avoid. But that is surely not true for all of the people whose company we would much rather avoid.

Some of the people in this category may well be law-abiding upright people. But we just feel uncomfortable with their personality or their particular personal ways of behaving. Some of the things they typically say or do, or certain of their mannerisms make us uncomfortable. And so **when we have a choice, we avoid their company**.

That's true for me, and that's true for you, right? What we need to realize is that **the same thing is true for God**!

Apart from obedience to God's laws, there are certain other traits and characteristics that God does not like, and that God therefore will not accept in His presence. And these other traits or attributes are clearly spelled out in various statements in the Bible. So we don't have to guess or speculate regarding personality / character traits that are not acceptable to God.

And, as I have explained in my recent article "CAN SOMEONE SIN

WITHOUT BREAKING THE LAWS OF GOD?", these personality and character traits are also identified as "sins" before God.

SOME EXAMPLES

Let's consider some examples.

1) How does God view people who meticulously obey all of God's laws, but who have **a rather fearful disposition**? They are easily afraid of any number of things. But they always strive to keep all of God's laws. Their obedience is in fact motivated by a spirit of fear. How does God look upon such law-keepers?

But **the fearful**, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, **shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone**: which is the second death (Revelation 21:8)

That's pretty blunt, isn't it? And those are not my words.

We need to understand that being fearful is not something we do! Being fearful is not law-breaking. Being fearful is not the same as being evil. Being fearful is an expression of **what we are like**. It is an expression of **how our minds work**, and what motivates us to do the things we do. The fearful can be nice people, kind people, helpful people. But the way their minds work is totally unacceptable to God. And therefore God will destroy people with a fearful mind-set in the lake of fire. That is what Revelation 21:8 tells us.

Fearful people have not achieved the condition of being "in the likeness of God", because God does not have and does not like a spirit of fear. Fearful people have in fact accepted a way of thinking that originated with Satan. The ultimate fear is the fear of death (see Hebrews 2:15), and so fearful people think like Satan and not like God. And God will destroy that way of thinking in the lake of fire, even if such people are not actively breaking any of God's laws.

2) How does God view people who meticulously obey all of God's laws, but who do not have any faith in God? A lack of faith is not law-breaking but it is still a sin. A lack of faith in God is a specific expression of the way a person's mind works and thinks and reasons. Now we all know Hebrews 11:6.

But **without faith *it is* impossible to please *Him***: for he that cometh to God must believe that He is, and *that* He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him. (Hebrews 11:6)

That statement means that God does not like it when we human beings do not have faith in God. And God not liking a lack of faith automatically means that a lack of faith is sin. And therefore the unbelieving (i.e. those who lack faith) will also be thrown into the lake of fire (Revelation 21:8 again). And people who lack faith have not attained unto the likeness of God.

3) Jesus Christ told us that “My Father works hitherto ...” (John 5:17). Diligently working is a part of God’s likeness; it is one of God’s major attributes. So it should be no surprise that **God hates laziness**. And while slothfulness does not directly break any of God’s laws, it is nevertheless “sin” in God’s sight. And therefore slothful servants of God will also be thrown into the lake of fire (see Matthew 25:24-30).

So God clearly avoids the company of people who are fearful, unbelieving or lazy. We could examine a number of other personality and character traits, things like pride, vanity, a lack of mercy for others, etc., that would show the same picture. They would all show that all of these attributes are also sins, even when they don’t directly break any of God’s laws, because God emphatically does not like them. And they all stand in stark contrast to “the likeness of God”. See the article mentioned above for more examples of things that are in conflict with “the likeness of God”.

So to summarize:

Let’s understand that the expression “in the image of God” refers to us human beings looking like God in our outward appearance. Now God created Adam as a full grown adult man, and Eve as a full grown adult woman. So Adam was from the very start of his existence “in the image of God”. But all of us were born as babies. And for us coming to be in “the image of God” was a process that took 20 or more years. The expression “the image of God” refers to adult human beings. There is nothing immature about God, and a physically immature human being (e.g. a baby) is still in the process of coming to be “in the image of God”.

So the condition “in the image of God” is something that takes another 20+ years after birth to be fully achieved.

The Hebrew text for the expression “in the likeness of God” does not refer to our outward appearance or likeness. This expression refers to specific attributes of character and personality; and it requires us to receive access to God’s holy spirit. It then requires a lifetime of using God’s spirit to change our character and personality and disposition, etc. to be in full agreement with God in all these things. Only when we are resurrected by God will we have fully attained unto “the likeness of God”.

So let’s note that both expressions, “in the image of God” and “in the likeness of God”, refer to processes that take time; one process takes 20+ years and the other process takes an entire lifetime. For all of us who were born as babies (i.e. all people except for Adam and Eve) neither of these two expressions refers to attributes that we possess spontaneously at birth.

MY PREVIOUS STATEMENTS ABOUT “THE LIKENESS OF GOD”

The following articles on my website provide additional information about the term “the likeness of God”. In the Mistranslated Scriptures Articles section of my website there are three articles that discuss “the likeness of God”. Those three articles are:

A) Genesis 1:26 is discussed in the 150 Mistranslations in the Bible, Part 1. It is Scripture #7 in that article.

B) Romans 1:23 is discussed in Part 6 of the 150 Mistranslations article. It is Scripture #108 in that article.

C) Revelation 9:7 is discussed in Part 7 of the 150 Mistranslations article. It is Scripture #149 in that article.

When you look at those articles you will see that **my understanding** of this expression “the likeness of God” **was still somewhat incomplete**. I was on the right track. I basically thought that “the likeness of God” depended on us human beings having the spirit in man. But that is only half the picture.

The spirit in man is one key to making the state of being “in the likeness of God” possible. But the spirit in man is not enough for a human being to be “in the likeness of God”. Why did I come to that conclusion?

I realized that any person who has **a mind that is “enmity against God”** (Romans 8:7) **cannot possibly be “in the likeness of God”**! These two states are simply not compatible. Someone who is “in the likeness of God” cannot at the same time be “enmity against God”. The condition “in the likeness of God” refers to a specific type of character; and the condition of “enmity against God” also refers to a specific type of character. And these two types of character are opposites.

So I realized that the state of being “in the likeness of God” must be the end result of a process. That process has to overcome the initial state for every human being, the state of “enmity against God”.

So we human beings are absolutely required to have the spirit in man, in order to make that process possible. But without the addition of God’s holy spirit that process cannot really get going. Without the addition of God’s holy spirit that “enmity against God” cannot be fully overcome. It is only when a human mind has both, the spirit in man and the added holy spirit of God, that then the process of working towards coming to be “in the likeness of God” can actually proceed. Only then can the “enmity against God” be confronted and dealt with.

This understanding has led to the explanation I have provided in this present article. So when you see any of my earlier discussions of “the likeness of God”, realize that I wrote those articles when my understanding was on the right track, but still incomplete.

This present article expands on, and to some degree corrects the explanations provided in the earlier articles.

Anyway, as I said before, so I say again: don’t expect Hebrew scholars to agree with me regarding this explanation for “the likeness of God”.

Frank W Nelte