

Gospel and the Kingdom of God — 1

(Image of God)

Outline

1. Image of God
2. Kingdom of God
3. How did Jesus bring the Kingdom of God on earth?
4. Importance of the Image of God truth
5. Conclusion

1. Image of God

*Gen 1:26-27 Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them **rule** over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground." ²⁷ So God created man in his own image, in the **image of God**, he created him; male and female, he created them.*

*Gen 2:7 "Then the LORD God formed a man from the **dust of the ground** and **breathed into his nostrils the breath of life**, and the man became a living being."*

In Gen 1:27, we see God creating a wonderful world full of life and potential. Then God created human beings, male and female, to rule over His creation in the image of God Himself. God put humans in charge of a garden. A garden has immense potential to grow; if left unattended, it will grow wild. Humans are to care for the garden and make it look beautiful, reflecting God's beauty.

The word "**rule**" is an action that kings do. It's a royal task. An image is something you see in a mirror that is a reflection of yourself. Humans are made in the **image of God** basically to reflect God-like rule over God's creation.

Traditionally, many people say ethics, the ability to forgive, intellect, consciousness, etc., make humans **unique** from animals.

In Gen 2:7, God created us with an earthly component like animals (*dust of the ground*) and a spiritual component (*God breathed into his nostrils the breath of life*).

Taking Gen 1:27 & 2:7 together, God created humans as a unique species, made in the image of God to **reflect** God-like rule (rule as God's **representatives**) over the earth. God planned to **share His world with humans** and to have His rule (kingdom) and His will done on earth through humans. Humans, made in the image of God, are a **reflection and representation** of God on earth—like viceroys.

Being created in the Image of God makes us unique in all creation in four ways:

- i. We can have a relationship with God, who is spirit.
- ii. We are creative (though not creating something from nothing). We can make sophisticated machines,

music, cities, etc., from the material God has created.

- iii. Significantly, God placed humans in a garden to rule and subdue. A garden has the potential for explosive growth. A gardener harnesses that growth to make it beautiful and productive for food.
- iv. Humans are eternal.

2. Kingdom of God

The word “kingdom” means an action (to rule) and, secondarily, a place where a king rules. God rules in heaven but not on earth because our first parents, Adam and Eve, listened to Satan and turned away from God. The image of God in humans got fractured, like an image in a cracked mirror. **Since then, Satan has ruled the world through humanity and caused human misery, sin and death.** Therefore, Jesus taught us to pray, “Our Father in heaven, hallowed be Your Name, Your kingdom come on earth as it is in heaven.”

When Jesus said, “The kingdom of God is near”, He meant God has come in Jesus Christ to remove Satan’s rule from His world. Jesus brings harmony and partnership between God and humans, thus establishing God’s kingdom on earth as it is in heaven. The characteristics of God’s kingdom are righteousness, peace and joy produced as Christians yield to the leading of the Holy Spirit (Rom 14:17).

Here is a biblical principle — God can do everything without us, but He chooses to do nothing without us. Instead, He wants to do everything through us. This principle runs through the Bible. All prophecies and miracles follow this principle in the Old and New Testaments.

Amos 3:7 Surely the Sovereign Lord does nothing without revealing his plan to his servants, the prophets.

Exodus 14:15-16 Then the LORD said to Moses, “Why are you crying out to me? Tell the Israelites to move on. ¹⁶ Raise your staff and stretch out your hand over the sea to divide the water so the Israelites can go through the sea on dry ground.

Even the whole principle of prayer is, firstly, we seek God’s will for something and then ask Him to do His will for that thing.

1 John 5:14-15 This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. ¹⁵ And if we know that he hears us —whatever we ask — we know that we have what we asked of him.

God revealed to His prophets that He would send the Messiah. God then inspired intercessors to pray for His coming (Simeon, Anna and others— Luke 2:25-38). (see also Matt 7:7, James 1:6-7, 4:2-3).

3. How did Jesus bring the Kingdom of God on earth?

- a. God transforms the heart of the believer through the gospel. The gospel is the good news that God loved us so much that He sent His Son Jesus to become man, die for us on the cross and rise again so that He paid for our sins and conquered death. When we believe the gospel, God forgives our sins and puts His perfect righteousness into our hearts. We have peace with God. (2 Cor 5:21 *God made him who had no sin to be sin for us so that in him we might become the righteousness of God*).

Furthermore, God gives us a new heart and spirit that makes us want to obey God. (Heb 10:15-17 *The Holy Spirit also testifies to us about this. First, he says:¹⁶ “This is the covenant I will make with them after that time, says the Lord. I will put my laws in their hearts and write them on their minds.”¹⁷ Then he adds: “Their sins and lawless acts I will remember no more.”*)

- b. Jesus reveals the true image of God to us through His life. In John 14:9, Jesus answered: “Don’t you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen

the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father'?

- c. The Holy Spirit transforms us to be like Jesus, the true image of God. 2 Cor3:18 *And we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.* (Also read Rom 8:29)

The more you look at what Jesus did for you on the cross, the more your selfish heart will break, yielding to Him and becoming like Him. You become the Image of God you were meant to be. You can reflect and represent God on earth. That's a great honour and privilege. You glorify God by living life in the image of God.

4. Importance of the Image-of-God truth

Humans created in the image of God is an exclusive biblical truth. Whether Greek, Egyptian, Assyrian, Babylonian, Indian or Chinese, no other religion has this concept. Consider three cases where we disrespect this image-of-God truth:

- i. Image-of-God truth is damaged when making false images (*idols or statues*). Idols or false images of God are forbidden in the Bible because God has already made humans in His image to reflect His glory on earth. Statues can never reflect God's glory. In Egyptian, Assyrian and Babylonian cultures, kings were considered divine. So, when they say "image of God", they describe **their king** as the Image of God. But God created all humans in His image, irrespective of our social status. Therefore, all human beings must respect each other. There are no classes or castes. And all humans have a God-given royal task to rule the earth.
- ii. Image-of-God truth is damaged in bad human relationships — whether in thought, word, or deed. James 3:9 With the tongue, we praise our Lord and Father, and with it, we curse human beings, who have been made in God's likeness). God says to curse a human being goes against the image of God.

Matt 5:21-22, "You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, 'You shall not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.' ²² But I tell you that anyone who is angry with a brother or sister will be subject to judgment. Again, anyone who says to a brother or sister, 'Raca,' (you are nobody) is answerable to the court. And anyone who says, 'You fool!' will be in danger of the fire of hell.

Deut 10:17-18 "He shows no partiality... He defends the cause of the fatherless and the widow and loves the foreigner residing among you, giving them food and clothing".

1 John 4:20-21 *If anyone says, "I love God," yet hates his brother, he is a liar. For anyone who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom he has not seen. ²¹ And he has given us this command: Whoever loves God must also love his brother.*

We sin when we treat other human beings with anything less than respect, and love, neglect to protect them and neglect their upliftment—because God made us all in His image. Christians have always been leading in education, medical care, and social justice issues because of the image-of-God truth.

- iii. It is important to note that neglecting the environment can hurt the truth of our image of God. We must ensure that we take care of our surroundings to maintain the integrity of our beliefs. God made humans in His image to rule the earth, subdue its wild growth potential (Gen 1:28) and make something beautiful to glorify Him. Because we rebelled against God, we became slaves of the devil who, through our greed, is destroying God's creation, causing climate change, famines, etc. The image of God in our hearts is damaged and fractured—like an image in a cracked mirror. Through Jesus, God's image is renewed in us, and we must genuinely care for the environment. After He fed the multitudes using a few loaves and fish, Jesus instructed His disciples to pick food scraps in baskets (Mark 14:20, 5:37). Christians are responsible for keeping the environment clean and not polluted, not wasting the earth's resources. A Non-Profit Christian Organization named "A Rocha" is an example of a Christian

Environmental Protection Organization. There are many others.

5. Conclusion

Jesus came to bring the kingdom of God on earth as it is in heaven. He does this through the gospel, whereby He transforms our hearts to be the true image of God — to reflect and represent God on earth properly. Discipleship is becoming like Jesus, who is the perfect image of God. Discipleship will bring glory to God. Without the gospel, humans will live with a fractured and damaged image of God and can never have righteousness, peace and joy on earth.

Here are some questions:

1. Feeding the poor, running hospitals and orphanages, working against sex trafficking—are all these only social work or kingdom work?
2. Can Christian organisations collaborate with non-Christian organisations on issues mentioned in Question 1?