

# The Meaning of the *Imago Dei*<sup>1</sup> (Gen 1:26-27) in Genesis 1-11

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## ABSTRACT

*The purpose of this article is to define the image of God in Gen 1:26-27 in light of Gen 1-11. Does Gen 1-11 define or imply a definition of the image and likeness of God? The biblical-theological (or canonical-chronological) approach will be used which looks at how the idea of God-likeness (Gen 1:26-27) is seen in Gen 2-11. The article argues that the image of God is both moral and relational in perspective: it involves a moral likeness to God and a relationship between God and humans like that between parent and child. This is such an important topic because South Africa is experiencing a state of moral decay. The statement of human kind's creation in the "image of God" clearly constitutes an important and positive affirmation about human's original place in the created order. Various NT passages such as Col 3:10 and Eph 4:24 also emphasise this theme as the goal of the Gospel.*

## A INTRODUCTION

Being aware of the critical issues regarding the unity, dating, multiple authorship, and sources of the books of the Pentateuch, I will be working from a finished product, the final canonical form of the text as it appears to us, and will not take into consideration hypothetical sources.<sup>2</sup>

The meaning of the *imago Dei* in Gen 1:26-27 is a matter of some controversy among biblical scholars and theologians. Three views have been suggested:<sup>3</sup>

- Some consider the image of God to consist of certain characteristics within the very nature of human kind, which may be psychological or

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<sup>1</sup> The image of God.

<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, many scholars have questioned the source critical approach and have expressed the difficulty of defining and identifying the sources used in Genesis. Because of this difficulty many have turned to an approach which sees the text synchronically as a work written, or at least coherently redacted, at a particular time. For more details see Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1-15* (WBC; Waco: Word Books 1987), xxxiv; John Barton, *Reading the Old Testament: Method in Biblical Study* (Westminster: John Knox Press, 1984), 163-165.

<sup>3</sup> See Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1983), 498.

physical or spiritual. This view is known as the "substantive view" of the image of God.

- Others regard the image of God not as something inherently or intrinsically present in human beings, but as the experiencing of a relationship between human beings and God or between two or more humans. This view is called the "relational view" of the image of God.
- Some consider the image of God as a function that humans performs. This view is called the "functional view" of the image of God.

In support of the functional view or interpretation of the image of God, David J. A. Cline<sup>4</sup> and Edward Mason Curtis,<sup>5</sup> among others, have suggested that the Ancient Near Eastern culture is pivotal to the interpretation of Gen 1:26-27, since there is nothing in the biblical text, in their view, which explains what is meant by the concept of the image of God. Curtis suggests that the idea of the image of God was introduced into Israel through her contacts with Egypt and the idea was transformed and adapted to Israelite theology or democratised.<sup>6</sup> The Israelites believed that all persons were created in the image of God, not only the king or the pharaoh, and that this image involved the function of dominion. Ian Hart thinks that this functional interpretation, which is based on the extra-biblical material, is also supported by the Bible. He translates Gen 1:26, "Let us make man in our image, according to our likeness, *so that* they may have dominion over ... the earth" (emphasis added), and says that the functional interpretation is also supported by Psalm 8.<sup>7</sup>

The book of Genesis is structured around the *toledoth*<sup>8</sup> formula (see Gen 2:4a; 5:1a; 6:9a; 10:1a; 11:10a; 11:27a; 25:12a; 25:19a; 36:1a, 9a and 37:2a). This formula demarcates the sections of the book and announces a new section of the narrative.<sup>9</sup> Many scholars<sup>10</sup> see Gen 2:4-4:26 as a continuation of Gen 1-2:3. The *toledoth* formula in Gen 2:4, "This is the account of the heavens and the earth when they were created" marks the beginning of a new section, but is

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<sup>4</sup> David J. A. Cline, "The Image of God in Man" *TB* 19 (1968): 80-81.

<sup>5</sup> Edward M. Curtis, "Image of God (OT)," *ABD* 3:389-91.

<sup>6</sup> Curtis, "Image of God," 3:391.

<sup>7</sup> Ian Hart, "Genesis 1:1-2:3 as a Prologue to the Book of Genesis," *TB* 46/2 (Nov 1995): 317, 320.

<sup>8</sup> The noun *toledoth* comes from "the verb *yālad* ('to father, to give birth to, bear') and must refer to that which is born, or produced, that is, the historical result." Victor P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis: Chapters 1-17* (NICOT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 9.

<sup>9</sup> Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, 55.

<sup>10</sup> E.g. John Skinner, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Genesis* (ICC; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1930), 41.

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somehow related to the first unit, Gen 1:1-2:3, "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth."

John F. A. Sawyer<sup>11</sup> also uses a similar approach when he looks at the meaning of the image of God. He views Gen 1-11 as the context in which **בצָלָם אֱלֹהִים** is to be examined because of the following factors:

- First, "in the Massoretic Text, biblical scholars are fortunate in having a closed corpus, ideal for linguistic research, and it is becoming increasingly clear that a considerable body of semantic information (which may or may not agree with and confirm the results of pre-critical research on the same data) awaits discovery when modern techniques and procedures are applied to the text as it stands."<sup>12</sup>
- Secondly, Gen 2-4 "obviously contain material which is relevant to the discussion of the term [image of God]."<sup>13</sup>
- Thirdly, "the original meaning of the final form of the text is a concept which not only permits fruitful study of a clearly defined corpus of lexical data, but also provides an obvious starting-point for theological discussion, since it was the final form of the text, not its separate component parts, that was canonised in all the religious communities for which it is an authoritative religious text."<sup>14</sup>

This article interprets the image and likeness of God in human kind in Gen 1:26-27 in light of Gen 2-11.<sup>15</sup> The biblical-theological (or canonical-chronological) approach,<sup>16</sup> from a Reformed tradition,<sup>17</sup> is followed. Critical issues will be noted where they are relevant to the subject under study.

When Gen 1 is treated as an introduction to Gen 2-11, it would be observed that the temptation involved a promise of God-likeness (Gen 3:5), which can be considered in light of the fact that according to Gen 1:26-27,

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<sup>11</sup> Sawyer, John F. A. "The Meaning of **בצָלָם אֱלֹהִים** (*In the Image of God*) in Genesis I-XI," *JTS* 25 (Oct 1974): 418-426.

<sup>12</sup> Sawyer, "The Meaning," 419.

<sup>13</sup> Sawyer, "The Meaning," 419.

<sup>14</sup> Sawyer, "The Meaning," 419.

<sup>15</sup> While it is possible to interpret the image and likeness of God in light of the book Genesis as a whole and all the eleven *tol edoth* but, in the interest of space, this article will focus only on the first 11 chapters.

<sup>16</sup> This approach looks at the development of certain themes or concepts in the Scriptures. See Geerhardus Vos, *Biblical Theology: Old and New Testament* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1948), 16. In relation to the present study, this method of study looks and examines Gen 1:26-27 and establishes the meaning of the *imago Dei*. This study looks at how the idea of God-likeness is seen in Gen 2-11.

<sup>17</sup> Vos, *Biblical Theology*, 5.

Adam and Eve already were in some sense like God. The idea of God-likeness, as well as the idea of dominion from Gen 1:26 seem to be a concern in chs. 2-11.

## B THE TEMPTATION, THE FALL AND THE IMAGE OF GOD

This section will assume that the tempter of Gen 3 is the devil, "the ancient serpent" (see Rev 12:9; 20:2), who speaks through an animal, a snake. The tempter appeared to Eve to be a snake or serpent. The snake was the simply the instrument of Satan.<sup>18</sup>

"You will not surely die... You will be like God,<sup>19</sup> knowing good and evil" (Gen 3:4-5). The tempter denied the consequences of breaking God's command (Gen 2:17), thus calling God a liar.<sup>20</sup> By telling Eve that God did not want them to be like him, the serpent insinuated that God was jealous of his position and was withholding something good from them. The serpent suggested that humankind could be better than what God made them.<sup>21</sup> This was an attack on the relational aspect of the image of God: the parent-child relationship (see *Section E*) based on faith, trust, dependence, love and obedience. By accusing God of being a liar and jealous of his position, the devil projected himself as good and God as evil. Meredith Kline supports this,

The devil painted a complete falsehood, a total distortion of reality, portraying God in his own devil-likeness and he was representing himself in guise of divine virtue and prerogative.<sup>22</sup>

Through his statements in vv. 4-5, the tempter sowed the seeds of unbelief, distrust, doubt, and rebellion in Eve, thus threatening her relationship with God. By denying the consequences of breaking God's command, the tempter lied to Adam and Eve because they died physically after the passage of time (Gen 5:5). The tempter told Eve that they would be "like God" when they ate

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<sup>18</sup> The interpretation that serpent is Satan, the fallen angel, is supported by passages such as Ezek 28:14-18, Rev 12 and 20. See Charles A. Briggs, *Messianic Prophecy: The Prediction of the Fulfilment of Redemption through the Messiah* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1886), 71-72; Ernst W. Hengstenberg, *Christology of the Old Testament and a Commentary on the Messianic Predictions* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1956), 14-17; Sidney Greidanus, "Preaching Christ from the Narrative of the Fall," *BSac* 161/643 (Jul-Sep 2004): 267 and John L. Ronning. "The Curse on the Serpent (Genesis 3:15) in Biblical Theology and Hermeneutics" (Ph.D. diss., Westminster Theological Seminary, 1997), 132-135.

<sup>19</sup> The KJV has "as gods."

<sup>20</sup> John D. Currid, *Genesis 1:1-25:18* (vol. 1 of *A Study Commentary on Genesis*; London: Evangelical Press, 2003), 119; Sidney Greidanus, "Preaching Christ from the Narrative of the Fall," 268.

<sup>21</sup> Sidney Greidanus, "Preaching Christ from the Narrative of the Fall," 268.

<sup>22</sup> Meredith G. Kline, *Kingdom Prologue* (Hamilton: n.p., 1993), 78.

from the fruit (Gen 3:5), and this was not true because already they were like God: they were created in God's image (Gen 1:26) and crowned "with glory and honour" (Ps 8:5). When Eve entertained doubts about God's character and goodness, she succumbed to sin.<sup>23</sup>

When Eve followed the advice of the tempter, she broke God's proscription in Gen 2:17. She acted like God by deciding for herself what is good and not good, thus usurping God's divine prerogatives. God alone had the right to define what is good and evil<sup>24</sup> and had defined the eating of the forbidden fruit as not good in Gen 2:17. Therefore, when Eve redefined what God had defined as not good, she challenged God's authority. This observation is further supported by the language used by the author of Genesis to describe Eve's act of disobedience.

Gordon Wenham observes that the language of Gen 3:6 echoes the language of Gen 1, "And the woman saw that it was good (הָאָשָׁה קָיַם טוֹב) וַתֹּרֶא)." This is an imitation of the language of Gen 1, "And God saw that it was good (וַיַּרְא אֱלֹהִים כִּי-טוֹב)" (Gen 1:10b, 12b, 18b, 25b).<sup>25</sup> This similarity shows that the woman's act of disobedience was an attempt to be like God in an illegitimate way. She puts herself on the level of God who pronounces what he sees or knows as good or not good. As Kline says,

She idolised herself as well as Satan, for she abrogated to herself the divine prerogative of final judgement in discerning between good and evil and in defining the meaning of reality in general.<sup>26</sup>

This was a direct rejection of the relational aspect of sonship to God. God had said that eating the fruit from the forbidden tree would lead to death, but Eve disobeyed God and she did not submit to his authority. She did what she thought was right in her own eyes, thus setting for herself "a norm of moral action contrary to God's designs for human nature."<sup>27</sup> She "usurped God's power to determine what is right and wrong in moral activity, an exclusively divine prerogative"<sup>28</sup> and she surpassed the bounds of her nature as Yahweh's subordinate image, assuming a divine self-sufficiency in all her acts as a human being. Therefore, she became, "as it were, too much like God- his rival."<sup>29</sup>

<sup>23</sup> Eve's decision to take and eat the forbidden fruit also gives "priority to pragmatic values, aesthetic appearance and sensual desires over God's Word," Bruce K. Waltke, and Cathi Fredricks, *Genesis* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 91.

<sup>24</sup> David T. Asselin, "The Notion of Dominion in Genesis 1-3," *CBQ* 16 (1954): 288.

<sup>25</sup> Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, 75.

<sup>26</sup> Kline, *Kingdom Prologue*, 78.

<sup>27</sup> Asselin, "The Notion of Dominion in Genesis 1-3," 288.

<sup>28</sup> Asselin, "The Notion of Dominion in Genesis 1-3," 290.

<sup>29</sup> Asselin, "The Notion of Dominion in Genesis 1-3," 290, 294.

"She also gave some fruit to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it" (Gen 3:6b). The text at the end of v. 6 suggests that Adam was with Eve during her conversation with the tempter. If he witnessed her encounter with the serpent, he was supposed to have taken a leading role in opposing the tempter and in this respect, he failed.<sup>30</sup> Thus, the man also rejected the relational aspect of sonship to God and decided it was good to follow the woman who was under his authority rather than God.

Therefore, the temptation involves an offer of illegitimate God-likeness,<sup>31</sup> in which the human beings decided on their own what is good and evil,<sup>32</sup> rejecting the relational aspect of the image of God, the father-son relationship, in which man and woman were created

### **C THE CONSEQUENCES OF THE FALL ON THE IMAGE OF GOD (GEN 4)**

Whereas Adam and Eve were created in the image of God, morally good, in a relationship of obedience, Gen 4 shows their son Cain to be morally and relationally like the tempter of Gen 3, although this thought may have occurred to Eve at his birth (Gen 4:1) as Gen 3:15<sup>33</sup> already mentions the enmity between the seed of the snake and the seed of the woman.<sup>34</sup>

Genesis 4 records a fulfilment of Gen 3:15.<sup>35</sup> There are two seeds with enmity between them: the righteous seed and the wicked seed. The righteous seed is the seed of the woman, therefore of God, those who are shown to be morally like God. The wicked seed is the seed of the serpent or tempter, those who are shown to be morally and relationally like the tempter of Gen 3.

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<sup>30</sup> Greidanus, "Preaching Christ from the Narrative of the Fall," 268.

<sup>31</sup> See Asselin, "The Notion of Dominion in Genesis 1-3," 288, 290, 294.

<sup>32</sup> Sidney Greidanus, "Preaching Christ from the Cain and Abel Narrative," *BSac* 161/644 (Oct-Dec 2004): 387.

<sup>33</sup> Martin Luther, "The Gospel for the Sunday After Christmas" in *Sermons II* (vol. 52 of *Luther's Works*; ed. Hans J. Hillerbrand; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1974), 127-128; Greidanus, "Preaching Christ from the Cain and Abel Narrative," 390.

<sup>34</sup> There is debate amongst OT scholars with regards to the identity of the seed of the woman. Conservative scholars (e.g. Hebert C. Leupold; Derek Kidner) view the seed of the woman as Christ, the Messiah who has victory over the devil. Critical scholars (e.g. Von Rad, Westermann, Skinner) do not see any promise of a Messiah in Gen 3:15; see Victor P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis*, 197. As Waltke points out, the noun "seed" can refer to an immediate descendant, a distant offspring, or a large group of descendants. In Gen 3:15, we infer both single and collective meanings. Since there is a struggle between the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent, we can infer that the term has a collective meaning. Since only the head of the serpent is crushed, we expect an individual person to crush the head and to be struck on his heel (Waltke and Fredricks, *Genesis*, 91).

<sup>35</sup> Greidanus, "Preaching Christ from the Cain and Abel Narrative," 388.

Cain is substantively or morally like the tempter and unlike God. Like the tempter, Cain lies, murders and is cursed by God, which identifies him as the offspring of the serpent mentioned in Gen 3:15.<sup>36</sup> As already observed, the serpent lied to the woman when he denied the consequences of eating from the forbidden tree (Gen 3:4; cf. 2:17). Cain also lies to God when asked the whereabouts of his brother (Gen 4:9). Like the tempter (who deceived Adam and Eve and led them to death), he deceives his brother (Gen 4:8) and he physically kills him. Like the tempter, Cain is also cursed (Gen 4:11; cf. 3:14). The NT seems to support this interpretation that Cain is morally like the tempter and unlike God when it refers to him as belonging to the evil one and whose works were also evil (1 John 3:12; cf. Jude 11).

Cain rejects the relational aspect of "family" with his brother. He also rejects the relational aspect of sonship to God and he shows himself to be the offspring of the devil. Cain rejects God's correction, "If you do what is good, will you not be accepted?" (Gen 4:7). Cain decides for himself what to do. He does not heed God's correction and he murders his brother. Like Eve, he does what he thinks is right in his own eyes, and this is also illegitimate God-likeness.

Cain takes his brother to a field and he kills his him, which shows that he was aware of the fact that God would not approve of what he was going to do to Abel. He tries to cover up his sin by lying to God about the whereabouts of his brother. The murder of Abel was a direct attack on the relational aspect of sonship to God because God alone, who has made man in his image, has the right to take life.

Cain's sonship to God is replaced by sonship to the tempter. God exhorts Cain to rule over sin which was encroaching at his door, "But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must master it" (Gen 4:7). Cain does not do the will of God (thus ruling over sin). He does the will of his father, the devil (John 8:44). Enslavement to sin is the consequence of this sonship.

#### **D RENEWAL OF THE IMAGE OF GOD AFTER THE FALL**

Abel is morally opposite to Cain. He is morally like God. He does what is good or right, which is implied when God says to him, "If you do what is good, will not your countenance be lifted up?" (Gen 4:7, literal translation). This means that God had accepted Abel and his offering because he had done what was good. Abel gave his best. He brought the fat portions of his flock to God (Gen 4:4a). God approved his offering (Gen 4:4b), but he did not accept Cain's

<sup>36</sup> Bruce K. Waltke, "Cain and His Offering," *WTJ* 48 (1986): 370; Currid, *Genesis 1:1-25:18*, 143-144; Greidanus, "Preaching Christ from the Cain and Abel Narrative," 393.

offering (Gen 4:5). The text does not offer an explicit reason why God did not approve Cain's offering but scholars and commentators have offered different explanations:

- Hermann Gunkel argues that Cain's offering was not accepted by God because he preferred shepherds than gardeners.<sup>37</sup> As Wenham observes, Gunkel's view seems improbable in light of Gen 2:15 where Adam was appointed by God to work and to take care of the Garden of Eden.<sup>38</sup>
- John Skinner also argues that Cain's offering was not accepted by God because animal sacrifices were more acceptable to God than vegetable sacrifices.<sup>39</sup> Cain's offering was rejected because it was bloodless.<sup>40</sup> As John Walton observes, this argument seems improbable because "fruit and vegetable offerings are as appropriate for a *minhâ* as animal offerings. Moreover...Abel's offering is described in terms of "fatty portions" with no reference to blood. Finally, blood is usually used in the sacrificial system to accomplish *kpr* (*atonement*). Genesis 4 neither mentions a need for *kpr* nor the procurement of it for Abel."<sup>41</sup>
- Gerhard von Rad argues that God's motives are enigmatic: his preference for Abel's sacrifice reflects his own free will or election.<sup>42</sup> As Wenham observes "this type of explanation should only be resorted to if the text gives no other motives for divine action."<sup>43</sup>
- Basing his argument on Heb 11:4, "By faith Abel offered God a better sacrifice than Cain did," John Calvin suggests that it was the different motives of Abel and Cain, known only to God that accounts for their different treatment. According to Calvin we can infer that God saw the heart of Abel, his offering was by faith, therefore more excellent than that of Cain.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Hermann Gunkel, *Genesis übersetzt und erklärt* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1922), 43.

<sup>38</sup> Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, 104.

<sup>39</sup> Skinner, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Genesis*, 106.

<sup>40</sup> Robert S. Candlish, *Studies in Genesis* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publishers, 1979), 94.

<sup>41</sup> John H. Walton, *Genesis: from Biblical Text to Contemporary Life* (NIV AC; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 263.

<sup>42</sup> Gerhard von Rad, *Genesis: A Commentary* (OTL; London: SCM Press, 1972), 104.

<sup>43</sup> Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, 104.

<sup>44</sup> John Calvin, *A Commentary on Genesis* (London: Banner of Truth Trust, 1965), 194-196.

- The most common view among the commentators is that Cain's offering was rejected by God because his fruit was not "first-fruit" and thus it was inferior to Abel's "firstlings" of his flock.<sup>45</sup>

Although different explanations have been given, the general description of Abel's offering "fat portions from some of the firstborn of his flock" (Gen 4:4) seems to indicate that Cain did not bring the best of his possessions as an offering, and that is the reason why God did not approve his offering.<sup>46</sup>

God gave up Abel, his favoured one, to death (not in the sense that there could be any payment for sin). Thus in giving his best as an offering, Abel is acting like God. This concept, in which God gives the best, is clearer in the NT, where God gives his one and only Son to die on the cross for the sin of human kind (John 3:16; Rom 3:25).<sup>47</sup> Later on, in the history of Israel, God gives Israel what is good. He gives them a good land, “a land flowing with milk and honey” (Lev 20:24; Num 13:27; Deut 11:9; 26:9, 15; Josh 13-19).

The language used to describe God's response to the offerings of Cain and Abel (Gen 4:4b-5a) is reminiscent of the language that God uses when naming light, darkness, dry land and the seas in Gen 1:5, 10. John Ronning observes that in both passages the author of Genesis uses a chiasm of indirect object. He points out that in Gen 4:4b-5a, "Abel is syntactically distinguished from Cain like light is syntactically distinguished from darkness and the dry land from the seas."<sup>48</sup> The table below illustrates Ronning's observation.

Separation	Verse indication of separation
Light/Darkness	1:4 1:5 וַיְבָרֶל אֱלֹהִים بֵּין הָאֹר וּבֵין הַחֹשֶׁךְ וַיְקָרָא אֱלֹהִים לְאֹר יוֹם וְלַחֹשֶׁךְ קָרָא לְלֵילָה
Waters above/ waters below	1:7 וַיְבָרֶל בֵּין הַמִּים אֲשֶׁר מִתְחַת לְرָקִיעַ וּבֵין הַמִּים אֲשֶׁר מֵעֶל לְרָקִיעַ
Dry land/ seas	1:10 וַיְקָרָא אֱלֹהִים לִבְשָׁה אֶرֶץ וְלֹמֶקְנָה הַמִּים קָרָא יָמִים
Abel/ Cain	4:4b-5a וַיַּשְׁעִיהָוָה אֶל-הַבָּל וְאֶל-מְנַחָתוֹ

<sup>45</sup> Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, 104.

<sup>46</sup> Waltke, "Cain and His Offering," 368.

<sup>47</sup> See John L. Ronning, "The Curse on the Serpent (Genesis 3:15)," 152-153.

<sup>48</sup> See John E. Ronning, "The Curse on the Serpent," 152-153.

וְאֶל-קַיּוֹן וְאֶל-מִנְחָה לֹא שָׁעַת

In the creation account, God sees light as good (cf. Gen 1:4), and he does not look at the darkness. In Gen 4:4b-5a, God sees Abel and his offering and he does not look at Cain and his offering. The implication here as Ronning observes, is that Abel and his offering are like God's creation which is described as good (cf. Gen 1:31). Abel is like light, God's new creation.<sup>49</sup> He is a righteous man.<sup>50</sup> He is seen as the regenerate man. Cain is likened to darkness and the seas, in an un-recreated state. He is seen as the fallen man, who is unregenerate.

Cain is identified as the offspring of the serpent. After rejecting the sacrifice Cain offered, God warns him (Gen 4:6-8), thus giving him an opportunity to repent, but he does not give the serpent the chance to repent because he has no hope of pardon.<sup>51</sup>

Ronning observes that the author of Genesis avoids calling Cain Eve's son. He notes that normally in the OT, where the naming is not described, or the reason for the name is not given, "son" is not used (e.g. Gen 5:9: "When Enosh had lived 90 years, he became the father of Kenan"). Where the naming is described, or the reason for the name is given, "son" or some equivalent is used (e.g. Gen 4:25a: "Adam lay with his wife again, and she gave birth *to a son* and *named* him Seth"). Genesis 4:1 is an exception to the above rules:<sup>52</sup>

Adam knew his wife Eve, and she conceived and *gave birth to Cain*.  
She said, I have created a man with the Lord (Gen 4:1) (own translation).

In Gen 4:1, the reason for naming Cain is given, but *son* is not used. Ronning suggests that the author of Genesis does this deliberately. He avoids calling Cain the son of Adam and Eve, not because he is not their physical son, but to point out that Cain is not of the "seed of the woman" or the offspring of God in the spiritual sense.<sup>53</sup> Eve is the physical "mother of all the living" (Gen 3:20), but in retrospect Cain is shown to be the moral or spiritual offspring of the serpent as already mentioned above.

## E GENESIS 4-5 AND THE IMAGE OF GOD

According to a strictly functional interpretation, the image of God consists of dominion over creation. Genesis 4 shows Cain and his offspring exercising dominion apparently according to Gen 1:28. Cain builds a city, and his descen-

<sup>49</sup> Ronning "The Curse on the Serpent," 152-153.

<sup>50</sup> Currid, *Genesis 1:1-25:18*, 144.

<sup>51</sup> Calvin. *A Commentary on Genesis*, 165; see also section C of this article.

<sup>52</sup> Ronning, "The Curse on the Serpent," 148.

<sup>53</sup> Ronning, "The Curse on the Serpent," 148.

dants bring about civilisation. They introduce technological, agricultural and cultural innovations (Gen 4:17-20). Yet Gen 4 shows that Cain and his offspring are morally unlike God but like the serpent.

Cain's offspring are not having dominion over sin. Lamech's song indicates this, "I have killed a man for wounding me, a young man for injuring me. If Cain is avenged seven times, then Lamech seventy-seven times" (Gen 4:23-24). Lamech is more wicked than Cain, so he thinks that he will have more protection. The song of Lamech shows that Lamech and the wicked in general are enslaved to sin, instead of ruling over sin (Gen 4:7). Sin is having dominion over their lives. On the other hand, the righteous seed (e.g. Abel, Seth and his offspring), who are being renewed in God's image, show little dominion over creation. Later on, God destroys Cain's offspring through the flood and this brings to an end their dominion.

The events of Gen 4 seem to disprove the strictly functional interpretation of the image of God because the wicked, Cain and his descendants, are exercising dominion while the righteous, Abel and Seth, who are being renewed in God's image, show little dominion over creation.

In Gen 5:3, "image and likeness" is a substitute for "son" which is not in the Hebrew text. "When Adam had lived 130 years, he fathered in his own likeness, according to his own image and he named him Seth" (Gen 5:3; own translation). As Curtis<sup>54</sup> and Kline<sup>55</sup> note, this verse suggests that the way in which Seth resembles his father, Adam, is in some sense analogous to the way in which humans are like God, their creator. To be created in the image and likeness of God means to be created as God's children. Adam and Eve were created as God's children. Kline further argues that the same notion is seen in Luke's genealogy (Luke 3:38), where Luke traces Jesus' lineage back to Adam, who is called the son of God.<sup>56</sup> Genesis 5:3 indicates that image and likeness imply sonship, therefore to be created in God's image means to be created as God's children.

The next section will discuss in what sense all humans may be said to be in the image of God.

## F APOSTASY AT THE TIME OF THE FLOOD

Genesis 6 describes further moral or spiritual deterioration of the human race resulting in God's judgement through the Flood. The whole earth was corrupt except Noah: "God saw the earth and behold it was corrupt" (Gen 6:12 cf. v.5, literal translation). This is in contrast with Gen 1:31, where "God saw all that

<sup>54</sup> Curtis, "Image of God," 390.

<sup>55</sup> Kline, *Kingdom Prologue*, 30.

<sup>56</sup> Kline, *Kingdom Prologue*, 30.

he had made and behold it was very good." From the creation of the world in Gen 1 to the time of the Flood the moral state of human kind has changed. This contrast shows that moral goodness was part of the overall goodness of God's creation in Gen 1:31. One may ask, what had brought about the moral change in humans? With the Fall of human kind, they took the moral likeness of the tempter. Therefore, the image of God is a moral image because human kind is still exercising dominion over creation. After the Fall, human are born with a tainted or corrupt image of God which is prone to evil (Gen 6:5, 12; 8:21).

The identity of "the sons of God" in Gen 6:2 is a thorny issue in OT interpretation. Three main kinds of interpretation have been suggested by scholars.<sup>57</sup>

- First, the "sons of God" are non-human, godlike beings such as angels, demons, or spirits;
- Second, the "sons of God" are superior men such as kings or other rulers;
- Third, the "sons of God" are godly men, the descendants of Seth as opposed to the godless descendants of Cain.

Those who hold to the angelic interpretation of "the sons of God"<sup>58</sup> argue that elsewhere in the OT the expression "sons of God" refer to angels (e.g., Job 1:6; 2:1; 38:7; Pss 29:1; 82:6; 89:7). Gleason Archer reacts against the argument that "sons of God" in Gen 6:2 refer to angels. He argues that the phrase "sons of God" in Gen 6:2 does not refer to angels because angels do not have physical bodies though they may occasionally appear in bodily form in the semblance of men and they are incapable of carnal relations with women.<sup>59</sup> He further argues that the children of gigantic stature, the *nephilim*, who resulted from these marriages, offer no evidence of angelic paternity. He says that there are no claims in Scripture that suggest that the sons of Anak, Goliath and his brothers were fathered by angels.<sup>60</sup>

According to Archer, the "sons of God" in Gen 6:2 are the descendants of the godly line of Seth.<sup>61</sup> As Victor Hamilton observes, the major weakness

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<sup>57</sup> See Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, 139.

<sup>58</sup> Gerald Cooke, "The Sons of (the) God(s)," *ZAW* 76 (1964): 22-47.

<sup>59</sup> Jesus states that angels do no marry in Matt 22:30 and Mark 12:25; Gleason L. Archer, *Encyclopaedia of Bible Difficulties* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1982), 79.

<sup>60</sup> Archer, *Encyclopaedia of Bible Difficulties*, 80.

<sup>61</sup> Archer, *Encyclopaedia of Bible Difficulties*, 80.

of this view is that "nowhere in the OT are Sethites identified as the sons of God."<sup>62</sup>

While there is considerable controversy among scholars<sup>63</sup> over the identification of the "sons of God" in Gen 6:2, by analogy with Gen 5:3, the sons of God are those who are in the image of God.

The language of Gen 6:2 echoes 3:6,<sup>64</sup> "The sons of God *saw* the daughters of men, that they were *good*" (Gen 6:2.). This is similar to what Eve does in Gen 3:6 "And the woman *saw* that it was *good*" (literal translation). This shows that the sons of God were repeating Eve's sin. They were deciding for themselves what is good and not good. This is illegitimate God-likeness. The sons of God ignore the moral or spiritual characteristics of the daughters of humans and they lust after their physical beauty.<sup>65</sup> They were to marry good wives just as Adam did. God created and brought to Adam a good wife (one in his image). Therefore, the sons of God were supposed to marry the daughters of God. Because of their disobedience, the whole earth became morally corrupt. The sinfulness of humans covered the inhabited earth, and the sinfulness was intense and deeply rooted (Gen 6:5). As Westermann puts it, man had reached "a state of corruption of massive proportions."<sup>66</sup>

As observed, after the Fall, humans are born with a corrupt image which is prone to evil (see Gen 6:5, 12; 8:12). How do we reconcile this with the fact that some Scriptures (e.g. Gen 9:6; 1 Cor 11:7; Jas 3:9) indicate that all people are in the image of God? The image of God in human kind was not totally lost at the Fall but corrupted; part of the image of God still remains in humans. After God rejects Cain's offering, he gives him the opportunity to repent. God exhorts him to rule over sin, which was encroaching at his door (Gen 4:7). After Cain kills his brother, God asks him a question: "Where is your brother?" (Gen 4:9). This question is rhetorical because God knew where Abel was. This question was intended to give Cain the opportunity to confess and take responsibility for his sin. But, Cain does not confess his sin nor take responsibility for his sin. He is punished by God and he complains to God that he will be a restless wanderer and fears that he will be killed (Gen 4:10-14). Cain's fear of retribution implies that he was conscious of sin and he probably thought God would execute his justice by sending somebody to kill him. God responds to Cain's complaint by protecting his life (Gen 4:15).

<sup>62</sup> Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis*, 264.

<sup>63</sup> For example Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, 140; Archer, *Encyclopaedia of Bible Difficulties*, 77-78.

<sup>64</sup> See Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, 140.

<sup>65</sup> Waltke and Fredricks, *Genesis*, 117.

<sup>66</sup> Claus Westermann, *Genesis 1-11: A Commentary* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1987), 410.

Unlike Cain, whom God gives an opportunity to repent by asking him questions, God does not give the tempter the chance to repent. He does not interrogate the devil because he has no hope of pardon.<sup>67</sup> There is no possibility of salvation for the tempter.<sup>68</sup> This shows that the tempter's level of apostasy is not the same as the fallen children of Adam and Eve like Cain. This is the reason why God gives them the opportunity to repent and shows his special care to them (see Gen 4:15; cf. 3:21). This shows that after the Fall, humans still possess the image of God, although not in the same way as Adam and Eve did prior to the Fall. Humans have a corrupt image of God (cf. Gen 6:12; 8:21). They are morally unlike God, but they are morally like the serpent. This does not mean that they are no longer God's children or in God's image. This interpretation is further supported by the fact that some Scriptures seem to indicate that all people are in God's image (see Gen 9:6; 1 Cor 11:7; Jas 3:9). This also means all humans are God's children because image implies sonship (see *Section E*). John Calvin,<sup>69</sup> Charles Feinberg<sup>70</sup> and Meredith Kline<sup>71</sup> also make the same observation that the image of God in humans was corrupted by the Fall but part of the image still remains in them. The basis for their interpretation is not from the OT Scriptures, but from the NT Scriptures. Believers are re-created after the image of God in true knowledge, righteousness and holiness (see Eph 4:24; Col 3:10). Feinberg also argues that after the Fall humans are still human.<sup>72</sup>

## G THE IMAGE OF GOD AFTER THE FLOOD

The situation after the Flood is as before. We see the two seeds: the righteous and the wicked seed. Noah, Shem and Japheth are seen as the righteous seed. They are shown to be morally good and their relationship with God is based on faith and obedience. On the other hand, Ham is seen as the wicked seed. Morally and relationally, he is like the tempter of Gen 3.

Like Abel, Noah finds favour in the eyes of God (Gen 6:8). God destroys the whole world with the Flood but he spares Noah and his family. Like Adam and Eve before their Fall, Noah is blessed by God and is given the creation mandate (Gen 9:1-3); this indicates that he is in the image of God. Noah is morally shown to be like God: he is righteous and blameless (Gen 6:9). Relationally, Noah is portrayed as the son of God; his relationship to God is based on faith, trust, dependence and obedience. God commands Noah to build

<sup>67</sup> Calvin. *A Commentary on Genesis*, 165.

<sup>68</sup> Herbert C. Leupold, *Chapters 1-19* (vol. 1 of *Exposition of Genesis*; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1942), 161-162.

<sup>69</sup> John Calvin, *The Institute of the Christian Religion* (ed. J. T. McNeill, Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960), 189.

<sup>70</sup> Charles L. Feinberg, "The Image of God," *BSac*. 129/515 (Jul 1972): 245.

<sup>71</sup> Meredith Kline, *Images of the Spirit* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1980), 32.

<sup>72</sup> Feinberg, "The Image of God," 245.

an ark, and he fully obeys God (Gen 6:22). After the Flood, Noah fell: he drank wine, became drunk, and lay naked in his tent. As Ronning observes, the fall of Noah is parallel to the Fall of Adam and Eve in Gen 3, however, the parallels are not exact, but typologically related.<sup>73</sup>

Ham shows disrespect to his father. He sees his father's nakedness and he uncovers it to his brothers (Gen 9:22 cf. 3:7). From this incident, he acts like the serpent: the serpent had uncovered the nakedness of Adam and Eve.<sup>74</sup> In contrast to Ham, Shem and Japheth act like God, they cover the nakedness of their father (Gen 9:23 cf. 3:21). Because of their act, Shem and Japheth are blessed. This reminds us of the blessing that was given to Adam and Eve prior to the Fall (Gen 9:27 cf. 1:28). Like the serpent's seed, Cain, Ham's son Canaan is cursed<sup>75</sup> (Gen 9:25 cf. 3:14; 4:11-12).<sup>76</sup>

## H GENESIS 10 AND THE IMAGE OF GOD

Just like Cain and his offspring, Ham and his offspring in Gen 10 appear to be exercising dominion and fulfilling the creation mandate according to Gen 1:28.

As observed (*Section G*), Ham was shown to be a wicked man and his two brothers, Shem and Japheth, were shown to be righteous men. But Ham and his children seem to be fulfilling the creation mandate.<sup>77</sup> Nimrod the son of Cush, son of Ham, is described as a mighty warrior and hunter (Gen 10:8-10). He also founded cities in Shinar and Assyria (Gen 10:11-12). Ham has more sons listed than Shem or Japheth. Ham has 30, Shem has 26 and Japheth has 14 sons. Great nations such as the Egyptians are the descendants of Ham (Gen 10:13-14). The Canaanites which include the Sidonians, the Hittites, the Jebusites, the Amorites, the Girgashites, the Hivites and the Phonecians are all descendants of Ham (Gen 10:15-19).

Later on, Ham's children, the Canaanites are destroyed because of their wickedness. Therefore, Gen 10 shows that Ham and his children appear to be fulfilling the creation mandate of Gen 1:28, but in actual fact they are enslaved to sin. Sin is having dominion over their lives; this is the reason why God destroys some of Ham's children such as the Canaanites and the inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah later on in history.

<sup>73</sup> Ronning. *The Curse on the Serpent*, 180-182.

<sup>74</sup> Kline, *Kingdom Prologue*, 161-164.

<sup>75</sup> Why did Noah curse Canaan, Ham's son, and not Ham himself? This question has baffled commentators and OT scholars for centuries and there is no obvious answer. Various suggestions have been given; see Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, 201-202; Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis*, 264-265; Waltke and Fredricks, *Genesis*, 150.

<sup>76</sup> Currid, *Genesis 1:1-25:18*, 227.

<sup>77</sup> Ronning. *The Curse on the Serpent*, 180-181.

The events in Gen 10, like in Gen 4, seem to disprove the strictly the functional interpretation of the image of God because the wicked, Ham and his descendants, are exercising dominion over creation while the righteous, Shem and Japheth and their offspring, who are being renewed in God's image, show little dominion over creation.

## I APOSTASY AFTER THE FLOOD

Like Gen 6, Gen 11:1-9 describes further moral and spiritual corruption of human kind. Leupold says that this account serves to be a "reminder of the inclination of man's heart to arrogance and disobedience."<sup>78</sup> Humans ignore God's command to fill the earth (Gen 1:28; 9:1-2) and they take divine prerogatives upon themselves: firstly, by building a tower to reach heaven (Gen 11:4). By trying to build a tower to reach heaven, they are making an effort to become like God. Wenham supports this when he says, "For the sky is also heaven, the home of God, and this ancient skyscraper may be another human effort to become like God and have intercourse with him" (Gen 3:5; 6:1-4).

Secondly, by congregating in a city, to make "a name" for themselves (Gen 11:4), humans ignore God's command to multiply and fill the earth (Gen 1:28; 9:1-2) because they congregate in one place. This is seen as an indirect rejection of the relational aspect of sonship to God. Wenham echoes the same point when he says, "Possibly the desire to congregate in one place should be seen as a rejection of the divine command to be 'fruitful, multiply and fill the earth.'"<sup>79</sup> The desire of human kind to make a name for themselves is ungodly. They wanted to achieve fame for themselves.<sup>80</sup> As Wenham points out, this is an attempt to usurp divine prerogatives because God alone has the right to make a name for humans who in this case decide to make their own name.<sup>81</sup>

Therefore, in Gen 11, humans do not submit to God's authority and do what they think is right in their own eyes. This is illegitimate God-likeness. Because of humans' disobedience, God "comes down" for judgment and he brings about confusion of languages which resulted in their scattering all over the earth (Gen 11:5-9), thus fulfilling his command (Gen 1:28; 9:2).

## J SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The temptation involves an offer of illegitimate God-likeness or God rivalry in which humans decide on their own what is good and evil, rejecting the relational aspect of the image of God in which they were created. Cain is seen to be

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<sup>78</sup> Leupold, *Exposition of Genesis*, 382.

<sup>79</sup> Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, 240.

<sup>80</sup> Leupold, *Exposition of Genesis*, 387.

<sup>81</sup> Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, 240; God is the one who makes a great name for Abraham, see Gen 12:2.

morally and relationally like the tempter of Gen 3, while Abel is shown to be morally like God which indicates that he is in the image of God. The events of Gen 4 and 10 seem to disprove the strictly functional interpretation of the image of God, because the wicked, the offspring of Cain and Ham, are exercising dominion over creation and seem to be fulfilling the creation mandate of Gen 1:28.

On the other hand, the righteous such as Abel, the offspring of Seth, Shem and Japheth who are being renewed in God's image, show little dominion over creation. The moral state of the world in Gen 6 is in contrast to the state of God's creation in Gen 1, which implies that the moral goodness was part of the overall goodness of God's original creation. The sons of God repeat the sin of Eve by deciding for themselves on what is good and evil, thus rejecting the relational aspect of the image of God in which they were created, which leads to universal moral corruption.

Before the Flood, Noah is shown to be morally like God and relationally, he is portrayed as the son of God. But after the Flood he fell into sin just like Adam and Eve. Ham is seen to be like the serpent morally. He uncovers the nakedness of his father to his brothers, but Japheth and Shem are morally opposite to him. They act like God by covering the nakedness of their father. After the Flood (Gen 11), human kind repeats the sin of Eve and the sons of God by deciding for themselves on what is good and evil; they are rejecting the relational aspect of the image of God in which they were created, which leads to God's judgment.

In the light of Gen 2-11, we can conclude that the image of God in Gen 1:26-27 is both moral and relational in perspective: it involves moral likeness to God and a relationship between God and human kind like that between parent and child. Humans' relationship to God was based on trust, faith, love, dependence and obedience. They were tempted and they fell into sin, the moral and relational aspects of the image of God were corrupted. Morally, human kind is like the serpent, for example Cain and Ham. Relationally, human kind is seen as the offspring of the serpent and enslaved to sin (e.g. Cain and the wicked in general). However, human kind is also renewed into the image of God through a creative act of God. Abel is like light, God's new creation. He is a righteous man. He is seen as the regenerate man. The image of God was not totally defaced by the Fall, yet despite the corruption part of the image of God still remains in human kind.

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