

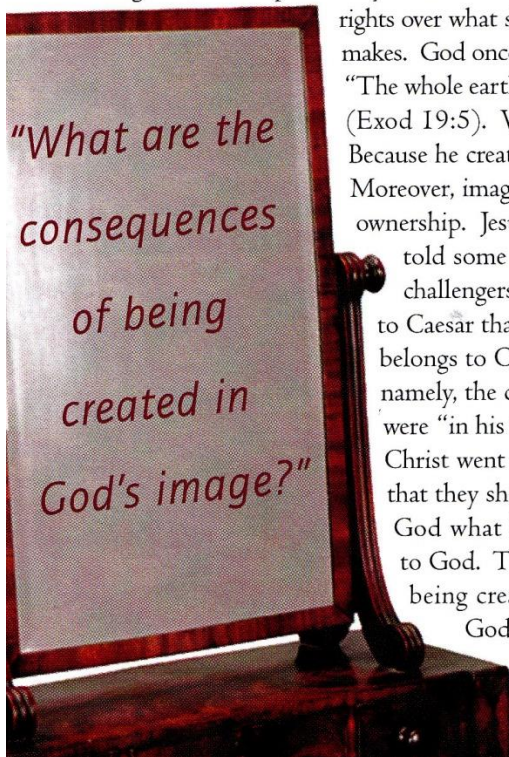
Built-in Responsibility

by Gary E. Schnittjer

What does it mean to be created in the image of God? Answering this question requires considering two related questions: What are the consequences of being created in God's image? And where does humankind fit in relation to God and his creation? Answering these will give us a good idea of what it means to be created in God's image. The answers to both are bound up in Genesis 1:26-27; the underlined phrases relate to the first question and the bold phrases to the second.

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

First, what are the consequences of being created in God's image? One is responsibility to God. A maker has



rights over what she or he makes. God once declared, "The whole earth is mine" (Exod 19:5). Why? Because he created it. Moreover, image implies ownership. Jesus once told some of his challengers to give to Caesar that which belongs to Caesar—namely, the coins that were "in his image." Christ went on to say that they should give God what belongs to God. Therefore, being created in God's image implies

his ownership of all humanity and our consequent responsibility to him.

Second, where does humankind fit in relation to God and his creation? According to Genesis 1:26-27, the relationships can be mapped out vertically and horizontally (see Figures A and B).

Figure A: The Vertical Orientation of Humankind

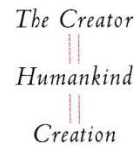


Figure B: The Horizontal Orientation of Humankind



Figure A presents the distinction and relationship among the Creator, humankind, and the creation. Human beings are not God—they are creatures. Yet humanity is not grouped with the rest of creation. Instead, human beings are placed above the rest of creation to rule over it. Figure B depicts the reality that all members of society are created in God's image: "male and female *he created them*" (emphasis mine). Thus, we have a responsibility to all other people within society, because they, too, are created in God's image.

Responsibility to our Creator is a result of being made in his image. The scope of that responsibility is delineated by where human beings fit among creation. Specifically, we owe our allegiance and devotion—our very selves—to our Creator. Moreover, we are responsible to society at large.

What does it mean to be created in the image of God? It means we are designed to love God with all of our heart, all of our soul, and all of our strength, and to love others as ourselves. The responsibility to love God and to love others is built-in.

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