



Imago Dei

Part 1 – Personally Autographed by God

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Today, we start a brand-new series called *Imago Dei*. *Imago Dei* is Latin for image of God. This is a foundational message, it's going to lay the foundation for the rest of the month, as we get into a lot of issues that we are dealing with. This is a core doctrine of our faith. Understanding the doctrine of the *imago Dei* is going to settle, for many of us, the struggles that we've seen in our culture and in our world over the last couple of years. And it's going to bring us back to a place where we look eyes with people every single day and start with this first thought. Foundational doctrine of *imago Dei*, rather than the way many of us approach people.

How many of you, when you meet someone, your first question to yourself – you don't ask it out loud – is *I wonder if they are vaccinated? I wonder what they think of the virus. I wonder if this is a democrat. Do you think I'm talking to a democrat right now or is this a republican that I'm dealing with?* You see, we're constantly asking ourselves questions about people because those questions, and the way we answer them, are often times how we value them. *Are they worth my time?*

The doctrine of the *imago Dei*, simply stated, is every single human being is created by God and in the image of God. That gives them automatic, intrinsic value. Every democrat and republican in the room now is created in the image of God and has automatic, intrinsic value. If you come from a red state or a blue state, every single human being is created in the image of God, personally autographed by God, and has automatic, intrinsic value.

We're going to start in Genesis 1. If you have your bibles, turn there. We're going to jump right into Verse 26. These verses are going to lay the foundation for the rest of the month as we look at what it means to be created in the image of God. Two words if you're taking notes. I encourage you to write these in the margin of your Bible – Reflect and Rule. The simplest definition I know of being an image bearer of almighty God is we are called to reflect his glory on earth. We are made to reflect his glory on earth and rule with authority over all creation. We are to reflect, resemble his glory on earth and rule with authority over all creation.

Genesis 1 – **26 Then God said, "Let us make mankind in our image..."** In the creation narrative or the creation story, all the way up to Verse 26, you get this language of let there be, let there be, let there be, as God creates the heavens and the earth. When he gets to Verse 26, it changes, and many believe it's because this is the pinnacle of the text. We read in Verse 26, **"Let us make mankind in our image..."** So, *us* here is referring to the Triune God, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. **"...in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea..."** That's my favorite part of Verse 28. **"...and the birds in the**

sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.”

27 So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God (imago Dei) he created them; male and female he created them. 28 God blessed them and said to them, “Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it.” Men and women, we have dominion over creation. “Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground.”

Do you know the first thing that jumps out at us from this text? It's that humanity, human beings are more valuable than animals. They say it clearly. We're more valuable than animals, but we are called to care for animals. We're more valuable. It means every time I release a 15-inch Rainbow trout into Taneycommo, I'm practicing dominion, I'm ruling over it. Because we are told we are not allowed to keep fish between 12 and 20 inches. I should probably remind you of that. You're not allowed to keep fish between 12 and 20 inches. You have to throw them back in the slot.

The imago Dei is so important for us to grasp because it brings to us, humanity, the answers to the questions that we ask that animals don't ask. I love this time of year going down to Taneycommo, and my favorite thing to do is to try to find eagles. They are back in the area and every time I drive by Taneycommo, I'm looking for them. I've had a couple of times in 20 years where they've kind of come over the car and I kind of keep with them and I pace with them. These are great moments. But let me tell you something. As majestic as the eagle is, the eagle does not wake up in the morning, if they do sleep, I didn't research this enough to know everything about the eagle, but the eagle doesn't get up in the morning and question like, "Why am I here?" "What is my purpose in life?" What are the eagle's concerns? Food. I'm just going to eat.

The imago Dei answers for us the big questions of life. Why am I here? What is my purpose? As an image bearer of Almighty God, you were made by God, so all the birds of the air and the fish in the sea, they were made by God, but the difference between them and us is we were made in the image of God, which gives us automatic, intrinsic value. We have worth.

We are called to rule over creation with God's authority and rule as he would rule. This is why when we talk about the environment... And I know climate change is a conversation that's on the news all the time and sometimes when I talk to Christians about the environment and about caring for the earth, I get this look like, "Are you crazy?" Christians should be leading out on this conversation because of the foundational truth, this foundational doctrine of the imago Dei. They say, "Are you a tree hugger?" I'm an image bearer. That's what I'm called to be and that's what you are called to be. We're called to care for God's creation with wisdom and rule as God would over creation. We've been placed here to reflect his glory on the earth and rule with authority over all of creation.

I think when it comes to human rights, we should be leading out on this conversation with the imago Dei. It's what I consider first-thought theology, that when I see all that's going on in the world and I see all that people are dealing with and I see all the different nations and all the struggles and the wars and everything, my first thought is... Every time I see a person on the news, no matter what they believe, I

want my first thought to be, *made in the Image of God*. It will change the way I view them. It will change the way I respond to them.

See, the imago Dei starts with let us make man in our image, in our likeness, so it's talking about our relationship with God. In Ecclesiastes 3: 11, it says that God has placed eternity in the human heart. He has not placed eternity in the animals' heart. He's placed it in the human heart, so it affects my relationship with God, it affects my relationship with others and how I view others.

Francis Shaeffer wrote extensively on the image of God in man. He said the problem with secular humanism is that we see people constantly trying to find their value and worth somewhere else. We find it in our job, we find it in our gender, we find it in our sexual orientation. And you hear this term in culture like "I now identify as..." It's people seeking greater value. The bottom line is you cannot find greater value because you have all the value you'll ever have because you're created in the image of God... period. It doesn't come to you based on what you do. It doesn't come to you on where you were born. It doesn't come to you on your race or your nationality. It comes because you are an image bearer of Almighty God.

Here's what Francis Shaeffer says. *"The ironic fact is that humanism, which began with man's being central... "You want to find worth in life? You find it, look deep inside. You make decisions that will determine your worth." You can't do it. ...eventually had no real meaning for people. On the other hand, if one begins with the Bible's position that man is created by God..."* As all creation is, but humans are different because we are also created in the image of God. *"There is a basis and in the image of God, there is a basis for that person's dignity."*

Your dignity, your worth, your value comes from being created in the image of God. And honoring the image of God in men and women means we see every single human being, from red states and blue states, from other countries, whatever the fact. We see every single human being as personally autographed by God and highly valuable.

Today, we want to talk about the practical side of worth and value and what that means, and give some very clear handles on what you can take through the rest of this series, but hopefully through the rest of your life. Can you think of time more than now where we need to be treating people with care and treating them as highly valuable? I haven't been on Twitter since November and the primary reason is because it's a toxic cesspool. The way people are talking to each other, the way pastors are talking to pastors, the way Christian authors are talking to Christian authors. You have forgotten this core, foundational doctrine that every single person, whether you agree with them or not, is created in the image of God with automatic, intrinsic value.

This is from one of the founding elders of our church, Gary Smalley... it's his definition of honor. He says, "Honor is a decision we make to place high value, worth, and importance on another person." I would probably add to this that honor is a decision we make to place high value, worth, and importance on every person, every person we lock eyes with.

How do we value people? We tend to value people based on their age. We see small children, we see children in the womb as well that are not born yet, they haven't done anything, they don't have value, we don't need them, and society can rid themselves of this child.

But then you go to the other side. I talked to a lady after the first service who said, "I gotta tell you where I've been the last couple of years." I didn't realize how much learning about the imago Dei was going to help with this, but she said, "Ted, when you get older..." And my senior adults in here can amen any of this that you want. "...you think slower, you talk slower, I've been stumbling more. I don't feel I bring a lot to even family gatherings." Think about this for a second. She said, "And you begin to get in your mind, do I have less worth?"

Here's the bottom line. Your age does not determine your value. The fact that you are an image bearer of Almighty God, there's where all your value will ever be.

How about income? What question do we love asking people when we meet them? "So, what do you do?" It's because we want to know what you do because then we're going to start to figure out how much you make. And when we figure out how much you make, then we might be able to decide, *Okay you're worth my time. You're somebody I need to get to know. You're someone I need to spend some time with.*

Race. We're going to be talking about that next week. Political party. Do we agree? If we agree on these things, then you matter more to me, and I'll stick around for the conversation. Marital status. Single or married. Immigration status. Do you know what the imago Dei tells us? Every time you turn on the news and you see people coming across our southern border, the imago Dei says every single person crossing our southern border is made in the image of God, and has automatic, intrinsic value whether they are coming across documented or undocumented. Some hear that as a statement of immigration policy. No, it's an imago Dei theological statement. Every person who crosses our southern border, whether legally or illegally, is created in the image of God and has automatic, intrinsic value. Abilities, disabilities, and intelligence. Honoring the image of God in men and women means we see those who don't look like us, talk like us, believe like us, or vote like us, as personally autographed by God and highly valuable.

Why? Because your value comes from God, not me. Your value has been established, your worth is established. And when I honor you or when I dishonor you, it does nothing to your value. Honor, esteeming you as highly valuable, recognizes value, but it does not set value.

Some of you have had a rough year. Some of you were just fired from a job. Have you ever been fired from a job? Don't raise your hand. But you've been on a job where the boss thinks you're trash. They send you out and you sit in your car, and you're frustrated. Have you ever felt that type of worthless feeling? Let me tell you a firing, being let go from a job, does nothing to your value. Your value has been set. And when I honor you, I recognize that. When I dishonor you, I'm just not recognizing that.

Let's get very practical. Your value is not based on your spouse's thoughts, feelings, words, or actions. If you're having a tough time now in marriage, your husband or wife does not determine your value. God determined it already; it's been established because you are an image bearer.

Some of you might be able to amen this. Your value is not based on your ex-spouse's thoughts, feelings, words, or actions. I was recently at a church that made that point. A guy stood up and clapped his hands. I said, "See the prayer team down front after."

Some of you are carrying around worthless feelings for years and years. The imago Dei for you today is a reminder that Almighty God created you to reflect his glory upon this earth and rule over creation with authority. When people walk away from you, that does nothing to your value.

Some of you like, I'm unlovable, I'm unworthy. Why would anybody want to be around me? Listen, you're created in the image of God. Nothing I say or do can add to or take away from your value. I either honor you or dishonor you. Either way, your value doesn't change.

In the weeks to come, here's what we are going to be covering with the imago Dei. Honoring the image of God in men and women means we see every human being from every nation, tribe, and tongue as personally autographed by God and highly valuable.

I hope this affects the way you go into the next election cycle. Next week, we're going to be covering this right here. I hope God does a work on your heart and on my heart to see this is the value of people. A couple of weeks after that, honoring the image of God means we see every human being born and unborn as personally autographed by God and highly valuable. We'll cover that on Sanctity of Life Sunday. I feel it's important to say because I know a big decision is being made this year. The Supreme Court of the United States of America recognizes the value of human life, it does not set the value. It may be the highest court in the land, but it is not the highest authority. I am praying that this year they recognize it, and they see it and they see the unborn as a human being with automatic, intrinsic value and highly valuable. That they see every unborn child as personally autographed by God. But remember, whatever happens, highest court, not highest authority.

Then we're going to cover this... You're like, *You are going where angels dare to tread with this imago Dei*. We are. Teaching your children to embrace their biological sex and marry the opposite sex honors the image of God in men, women, and marriage. We see it all the time. I've read the articles this week about the transgender athletes. I need you to hear this clearly from Woodland Hills Family Church, you won't find greater value by switching your gender because your gender doesn't give you value, God does. When God created you in his image, he personally autographed you. You don't get your value from your biological sex, your sexual orientation, or your gender identity, you get it from Almighty God.

That's the problem with secular humanism today. It's like no, I'm going to go out... I identify as... You can identify as whatever you want, but do you know what it will never remove from you? The fact that you are an image bearer of Almighty God. And you won't find greater worth or greater value outside of that. Teaching your children to embrace their biological sex and marry the opposite sex honors the image of God in men, women, and marriage.

Let's get very practical with this. Those are the implications of it, but let's get practical. Proverbs 22: 1 says, ***A good name is more desirable than great riches to be esteemed...*** to be honored, to have your name lifted up ***...is better than silver or gold.*** Going back to the age thing for a second, for the seniors in the room, I've seen this with so many senior adults, especially at Christmastime. They don't want anymore stuff. They have enough stuff. They've spent the last 10 years trying to get rid of stuff. They are downsizing. Every time you leave your mom and dad's home, you get a box of stuff. They just don't want to burden you upon their death.

How many of you had a Christmas where mom and dad gave you stuff as you came home? They told you, "My funeral is covered, and I even have that paid off this year." They are just preparing for the end. Let me tell you, silver or gold, they don't want anymore; they've had it. They've got plenty. But do you know what they'll never get enough of? Being esteemed as highly valuable. That's what the Proverb is saying. It's great or it's better than silver or gold.

James 3: 9-10 talks about this. ***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. 10 Out of the same mouth come praise and cursing. My brothers and sisters, this should not be.***

So, how do we teach our kids who are watching, listening, remembering, and repeating. How do we teach them to honor people.? How do we teach them to esteem every nation, tribe, and tongue as highly valuable? How do we get them to esteem their brother and sister? I love the parents who are like, "Why won't my kids just get along?" Because they see Mom and Dad always going at it. One of the best ways to teach your children to honor God, others, and you is to honor each other. Honor begins at home.

If we can give you two very practical ways to do this. Many of you, if you've been at Woodland Hills for any length of time, you know these are practical ways, and we love to share these ways.

The first one is an honor list that Gary gave us 20 years ago. It's just simply taking out a piece of paper, listing, writing down all the reasons why your spouse, your child, your parent, your co-worker, your boss, your friend, is highly valuable. Write it down, gift it to them. Better than that, speak it out loud in front of family and friends.

The first time I saw Gary's, it was all the reasons why Norma Smalley is highly valuable. I asked him what he was doing with it. He said, "I've been keeping track for years about her value because honor makes decisions and then it looks for the evidence to back it up. So, after we get into a fight, I like to come in here and pick up this list. It's not the time to edit. It's the time to be reminded of her value." He goes, "I usually don't have to leave the first page before I am reminded of her value, and it changes."

This is what we want with the imago Dei. You begin to change the way you treat people because you see them as image bearers, not someone from another color state. Write it down, speak it.

Another way to do it is the honor bombardment. I love this one. We do this in our home. It's a great activity at birthday parties that go a little boring. Anybody been to a birthday party where it's like, *We*

have to pick this party back up a little bit? Say, “Hey, why don’t we go around the room and speak one word or story or sentence of high value over this person.” I always like to have someone take out their phone and keep track of it and text it to that person at the end of the night. Write it, gift it, speak it.

Do this at today at lunch. Gather around as a family. You don’t have to do it for every single member all the time but pick one member and speak words of high value over them. Just keep going around the table. If it’s a smaller group, its even more fun. Keep going around the table, bombarding this person with words of high value because it’s better than silver or gold, recognizing their worth and their value, not setting it but recognizing it.

So, something we need to do in worth and value and the practical is make an invitation in all of this. We want this invitation to be clear as we go throughout this series. Through creation, as we’ve learned today in Genesis 1: 26 – 28, I bear the image of God. That’s true of every single human being, but it’s through salvation, faith alone in Christ alone, that I become a child of God. What we need you to see today is the difference between being made in the image of God and becoming a child of God.

Years ago, at Liberty University... I guess it’s 25 years ago now or more than that. I was a student at Liberty and a couple of weeks after Newt Gingrich became the Speaker of the House, he came to Liberty to speak. It was this conference. They had Newt Gingrich setup to speak, and then one of the strongest, stand on top of the pulpit, fist-banging preachers you’ve ever met from the independent, premillennial, King James Version only Baptist church was speaking after him. I knew this was not going to go well.

I’ll never forget Newt Gingrich going up... And I see this with a lot of politicians, and we have to make sure we use discernment and understanding, theologically, when we watch the news and all that. But Newt Gingrich got up and he said... And it was a theme throughout his whole talk. And he’s a scholar, a brilliant guy, but he kept referring to the fact that we are all God’s children. I could see this fundamentalist preacher behind him just kind of squirming in his seat, just going crazy. You could see it in the whole student body like *oh, man, this is going to get good.*

I don’t know what he was prepared to preach after Newt Gingrich spoke, but we got an entirely different message, I can tell you that. This is how the preacher stood up. And could he have had more tact? Yes. Could he have been kinder? I think so. I’ll never forget him standing up... The whole message was geared toward Newt Gingrich. It was so awkward. There were thousands of us in this auditorium. He goes, “Mr. speaker, we are not all God’s children.” And then we got 30 minutes of this point here that I hope to deliver with a little more kindness and compassion as we move through it. What he was saying... I know what Newt was trying to say, but I was actually glad that Newt was able to hear the difference between being and image bearer and being a child of God.

We need to be discerning. Yes, you have automatic, intrinsic value. People will ask the question, What about Genesis 3? What about sin? What did sin do to the image of God in man. Sin marred the imaged of God in man, but it did not remove it. Sin distorted the image of God in man, but amen to this, Jesus restores the image of God in man... fully restored.

And that's why when you understand the foundational doctrine of the imago Dei, it brings new light when you read that when you accept Christ as your Savior, you are a new creation in Christ Jesus. Through creation, I bear the image, but through salvation, I become a child of God.

The passage that we used at Christmas and during our Christmas service... Again, I just want to say thank you to our whole team that put last week together for us to celebrate online. They put a couple of months into that, and it showed, so we are grateful for it. But I shared John 1: 9-12. And just to see how that plays into and how that speaks into the imago Dei.

9 The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world. 10 He was in the world, and though the world was made through him... Jesus is the Creator and Sustainer of all life. Let us, God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. **...the world did not recognize him.** Though the world, though every human being is an image bearer of Almighty God, not all image bearers recognize him. **11 He came to that which was his own...** The nation of Israel. **...but his own did not receive him.** Image bearers, made in the image of God, created in Jesus did not receive him.

Verse 12 says it clearly. **12 Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name...** This is Romans 10: 13 – Everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. **...he gave the right to become children of God— 13 children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God.** And the invitation throughout this whole series is that every image bearer who attends, every image bearer that watches online will understand their need for a savior, will repent of their sins, will cry out and place faith alone in Christ alone, will call on Jesus as their Lord and Savior, believe in their heart that he has been raised from the dead, will declare him as Lord and be saved.

Yes, the image of God was marred by sin, distorted by sin, but Jesus completely restores that in us, and we are grateful.

Some of you, we could give several examples on the way out, but I just know some of you are coming into the new year. I don't know what you've been seeking for your value. I don't know what you've been looking to. You've been tying it to a job. I know a lot of message today are going to be on resolutions and New Year's goals, but if you would start this year not tying your worth and value to what you do, not tying your worth or value to your bank account, not tying your worth or value to silver or gold, not tying your value to what you have or don't have, not tying your value to the relationship that's forming or the relationship that went away, not tying your value to a family or group of people, but understanding clearly you were created by God and for God. You were created in his image, which means you were created for his purposes. There are many ways that seem right to a man, but in the end, they lead to destruction.

For some, you've been living on the path to destruction, that today you would get on the path of understanding who you are as an image bearer of almighty God, place faith alone in Christ alone and become a child of God.

Our prayer team is going to be down front afterwards. We'd love for you to meet with them and spend time with them so you can understand more. But that you would understand that about you, but I just have to say, followers of Jesus, I hope this series changes our tone and our approach to people we don't like, people we don't agree with, people who don't vote like us. We're coming into another election cycle and I'm like, "Oh, Father, save us, Lord Jesus, please return to this earth as quickly as possible." I don't think I can handle another election if I'm being really honest with you.

We should be leading out with grace and kindness and love and understanding, and so many conversations that we are leading out in with anger and bitterness and frustration and a win at any cost attitude. The imago Dei says no. The imago Dei says people have value. We're going to see them as valuable, we're going to approach them as valuable. If they don't agree with us, they're coming against us, they're fighting our way of life, their fighting our values, but they are created in the image of God and have automatic, intrinsic value and I will speak to them in that way.

I know many of us need the imago Dei to understand who we are, but we also need the imago Dei to better approach and to better care for our neighbors and to move forward into the new year with that. I hope you plan on being a part of this series. I have to warn you. This series is going to go places that I know some of you are going to be like, *oh boy*. Can I just ask that you allow the Holy Spirit to call you by name in areas of your life where the imago Dei is not the foundation?

Next week, we're talking about Every Nation, Tribe, and Tongue. And I know June 2020 was a rough month. We spoke on racism in this church. I hope you see next week that racism is so anti gospel. It's so anti imago Dei. Allow the Holy Spirit to call you by name in that. Work through that.

I remember when we did the message on Black Lives Matter and people were up in arms, ready to... Some tell me, "I won't be showing up for that..." You need to show up for that. This is what I hope for us. I hope it's true of our church. We should be leading out on these conversations because of the imago Dei. These should be conversations that we invite people to the table to have the conversation, rather than show up ready to fight. Imago Dei, personally autographed by God.

Father, convict us that the Holy Spirit would call us by name and call out these areas of our lives where we do not treat people well. We look disrespectfully at people, we are unkind to people, we look at other people from other nations, tribes, or tongues as lesser than us, that we would be convicted of that. Trying to create our own identity and find our own identity and deciding who we are and what we're going to be outside of the imago Dei, convict us of that, that we would fully embrace the image of God in man.

For the one who has never placed faith in Jesus, that today would be the day of their salvation. That they would say Jesus is Lord. We know that everyone who calls out that name will be saved.

We pray all of this in the name of Jesus, and everyone agreed and said... Amen.