

## The Doctrine of Mankind: Part 1

### The “Image of God” in Human Beings

Human beings were created in the “image,” Hebrew *tselem* and “likeness,” Hebrew *demuth* of God (Gen 1:26). These two words are always used to refer to the physical appearance of something or someone. For example, the same two words *tselem* and *demuth* are used in Genesis 5:3 to tell us that Adam had a son that looked just like him, see Gen 5:3. These two words *tselem* and *demuth* also appear in passages describing the appearance of idols (see Ex. 20:4; Deut. 4:16, 23, 25; 5:8).

While God is a spiritual and not a physical being he has no physical form. But it also is true that He, and every spiritual being that appears in the Bible did have a form or a “likeness.” For example, Genesis 18 says that the “Lord appeared” to Abraham. When Abraham looked up “three men stood by him” (v. 2), but it was clear that these were not ordinary human beings. The captain of the Lord’s host appeared in Joshua 5:14 described in v. 13 as a “man.” The angel Gabriel appeared in Daniel 8:16 and 9:21 where he is called “the man Gabriel.” That human beings are made in the *image* and *likeness* of God suggests that the physical form of human beings is like that of God’s spiritual form and that the human form also resembles that of spiritual beings like angels.

The fact that our physical *image* and *likeness* resembles the spiritual form of God is, in fact, the basis for the statement in Genesis 9:6 that makes capital punishment mandatory for killing another person. The reason is stated very clearly, “Whoever sheds man’s blood, By man his blood shall be shed, **“For in the image (*tselem*) of God, He made man” (human beings).** Jesus also made this same point in John 14:9 when, after telling the disciples He was going away Philip said, “Lord, show us the Father and it is sufficient for us”(v. 8). Jesus made a stunning reply, “Have I been with you so long, and yet you have not known Me, Philip? **He who has seen me has seen the Father; so how can you say, ‘Show us the Father?’**” (v. 9). That human beings are made in the image of God gives value, worth and dignity to human life that far exceeds that of any other creature in all of God’s creation. This is reflected in the creation story of Genesis 1:1-31 where human life was the crowning work of God’s creative acts.

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