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The Imago Dei as Rebuttal to Homosexual Advocacy



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The practice of homosexuality does not express the *imago Dei* of Genesis 1:26–27. In fact, homosexual practice attacks the very heart of God’s image in humankind.

A convergence of circumstances in my own life, and in the lives of both friends and acquaintances of mine, drew me to three specific chapters in John Stott’s book, *Decisive Issues Facing Christians Today*.¹ A friend and ministry associate’s revelation of his homosexual involvement led me to Stott’s chapter 16, “Homosexual Partnerships?” The acquaintance was yet another Christian headed for divorce, and so I read Stott’s chapter 14, “Marriage and Divorce.” Finally, my own struggle with understanding my role as a woman who felt called to minister in the church drew me to chapter 13, “Women, Men and God.” Stott brought each of these chapters together under a section entitled, “Sexual Issues.” By the time I finished reading, I was profoundly struck by the idea that *the answer to the error of homosexual advocacy lay in the church’s renewed understanding of the image of God in humankind, as put forth in Genesis 1:26–27 and 5:1–2*.²

In the chapter titled, “Women, Men and God,” Stott reasons that the Hebrew parallelism of Genesis 1:27 is more than poetic, having “a deliberate emphasis here, which we are intended to grasp.”³

And God created man in His own image,
in the image of God He created him;
male and female He created them.⁴

Stott explains: "Twice it is asserted that God created man in His own image, and the third time the reference to the divine image is replaced by the words 'male and female.'"⁵

Stott asks, "Is it too much to say that since God, when he made humanity in his own image, made them male and female, there must be within the being of God himself something which corresponds to the 'feminine' as well as the 'masculine' in humankind?"⁶

"What we should do," says Stott, ". . . is give full weight to those passages of Scripture which speak of God in feminine—and especially maternal—terms."⁷ As one example, Stott refers to Deuteronomy 32:18: "You neglected the Rock who begot you, and forgot the God who gave you birth."⁸ And though Stott did not mention Isaiah 46:3–4, it too is an equally "remarkable statement":

Listen to Me, O house of Jacob, and all the remnant of the house of Israel, you who have been borne by Me from birth, and have been carried from the womb; Even to your old age, I shall be the same, and even to your graying years I shall bear you! I have done it, and I shall carry you; and I shall bear you, and I shall deliver you.⁹

Still further, Stott reminds us that Jesus "used feminine imagery, likening God to a woman who had lost a coin [Luke 15:8–10] . . . and likening himself in his anguish over impenitent Jerusalem to a hen [Matthew 23:37] wanting to gather her chicks under her wings."¹⁰

Genesis 2 tells us that, out of the solitary Adam, God "creatively extracted," so to speak, the woman. Thus, by the hand of God, out of one being, a second being was drawn out—bone of Adam's bone, flesh of Adam's flesh. Immediately God instituted marriage, "for this cause," wherein "a man shall leave his father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife; and

they shall become one flesh." The one being, which became two, again becomes "one flesh" through their heterosexual intercourse in God-ordained marital union.¹¹ It is only in the sexual union of monogamous, heterosexual marriage that the creation story is dramatically recalled, echoing God's decision to make humankind in his image, male and female. No other sexual union can do that! Their union became the "sign and seal" of a relationship that was to be a visible witness to the highest, fully human expression of the image of God.¹²

Because the one was made into two, neither the man, Adam, nor the woman, Eve, individually bore God's image in human fullness. Both the male *and* the female were needed to "complete" it in this earthly expression. Thus, two men in sexual union do not express God's image, because the female counterpart is missing. Two women in sexual union do not express God's image either, because the male counterpart is missing.

Advocates of homosexual practice, as well as participants in all sexual activity outside the boundary of heterosexual, monogamous marriage, make the grave mistake of thinking that a sexual relationship is for fulfilling personal desires or happiness rather than for fulfilling God's primary purpose in our original design, which is to express his image in us through that of male *and* female. The marriage ceremony is intended to cement that expression, as the two become one. Jesus said, "Therefore, what God has joined together, let man not separate."¹³ Besides the many other ways that male/female imagery is employed in Scripture to portray God and his creation, it is found even in the picture of Christ as the Bridegroom and his church as the bride, a picture foreshadowed by the male/female marriage relationship.

Those who practice homosexuality have erroneously latched onto the women's liberation issue as that which mirrors their own cries for justice and equality.¹⁴ But this association is completely negated by understanding the *imago Dei* of Genesis 1:27. Indeed, it is the truth of God's image as male *and* female, along with Christ's treatment of women in his earthly life, which truly authorizes the liberation of women

and begins the restoration to their rightful position on this side of the cross.¹⁵

A relationship to God, and with God, is the fundamental purpose of our entire human existence. He made us "in his image" for that very reason. And though the fall grossly altered that image in us, it is the Father's goal to now conform us to the image of his Son, Jesus Christ (Romans 8:29). And while monogamous, heterosexual marriage remains a very high expression of God's image in humankind, and Christian marriage higher still, those who remain unmarried, and thus celibate, find full participation in God's image through their membership in the body of Christ, i.e., the church, which consists of male and female, and which has now become the highest human expression of God's image on the earth. The true *agape* Christian fellowship of men and women, fellowship which respects and values the opposite gender as gifted persons with God-ordained ministry abilities and callings, expresses the reality that it is the blend of male and female that is *required* in order to faithfully begin to express God's image to each other and to the world.¹⁶ And just as the male and female are "one" in the marriage relationship, so Jesus prayed to the Father with the request that the church would be one too, both within the body of Christ, and with him and the Father.¹⁷

The reality of the *imago Dei* in our creation makes it very clear that advocates of homosexual practice cannot truthfully assert that God "created" anyone as homosexual when the image of God in humankind is clearly shown to be fully expressed only in that of male and female *together*. Indeed, no sexual union outside of heterosexual, monogamous marriage can proclaim the *imago Dei* of Genesis 1:26–27. Thus, it is *impossible* for the "image of God" to be expressed in homosexual practice.

Author

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ministering in song with The Praise Symphony Orchestra for twenty years, and has written articles for online publication at *Worship Leader* magazine and ASSIST News. She also maintains a website encouraging the church to pray, www.christiansunitedinprayer.org, and another to minister to Vietnam veterans, www.thankyouvet.net. Susan and her husband, Barry, live in Irvine, California, and are the parents of two grown children.

Notes

1. John Stott, *Decisive Issues Facing Christians Today* (Grand Rapids: Fleming H. Revell, 1990); this is the revised and expanded edition to his earlier work, *Issues Facing Christians Today* (Basingstoke, UK: Marshall Morgan & Scott, 1984).
2. I am convinced that a clearer understanding of God's image as male and female in humankind will also enrich and strengthen the church, marriages, and, subsequently, society in general.
3. Stott, *Decisive Issues*, 258.
4. This and all subsequent Scripture references herein are from the *New American Standard Bible*, © Copyright 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977 by The Lockman Foundation, La Habra, Calif.
5. Stott, *Decisive Issues*, 258.
6. Stott, *Decisive Issues*, 258.
7. Stott, *Decisive Issues*, 259.
8. Stott, *Decisive Issues*, 259.
9. Stott also refers to other Scriptures that reveal the "feminine" or "maternal" aspects of God's nature, e.g., Isaiah 49:15; 66:13; and Psalm 131:2. Isaiah 42:14 is yet another such example.
10. I agree with Stott that the National Council of Churches has gone too far when they advocate calling God "the Father (*and Mother*)", because both Jesus' example and teaching contradict this.
11. See Stott's discussion of this on page 346, "Homosexual Partnerships?"
12. Jesus is, of course, the ultimate expression of the image of God (Colossians 1:15–20; Hebrews 1:1–3ff.).
13. Matthew 19:6; Mark 10:9. In this teaching context, Jesus referred to the "male and female" of Genesis 1:26–27.
14. Homosexual practitioners have also claimed that the former slavery issue, especially in Europe and North America, is analogous to their situation; but this is an erroneous assertion. The atrocity of slavery occurred because one group of persons willfully chose to subjugate other persons perceived by them to be less than fully human. All racial and general human relationships, good or bad, are by-products of how the *imago Dei* is understood to be present in humanity. Only humankind bears any part of God's image. That simple fact mandates

that we treat *all persons* with respect and dignity. In that act, we honor God.

Though slavery, per se, is not denounced in the Bible, slave trading is (see 1 Timothy 1:10). Obviously then, slave traders and those who accepted and purchased their suffering human cargoes closed their eyes, both to the biblical denunciation of slave trading and to the *imago Dei* in those whom they took by force. The historical rationalization of error by some cannot be used as an excuse or justification for other errors in theology today.

The fundamental proposition in the *imago Dei* is God's image addressed as male and female in relationship together. Modern crimes of slavery often have their roots in the distortion of gender relationships, wherein females (common victims of contemporary slavery) are considered to be "less than" males. This is another instance of denying the *imago Dei*, specifically with regard to women.

15. I say, "begins the restoration," because though Christ's work is "finished," there are still practical issues that will not be overcome until his return. Like everything else in creation, there are still negative residual effects from the fall in this earthly sphere (Romans 8:22-23).
16. We *begin* in the male/female relationship as established by God in creation. In our post-fall reality, God is now at work through Christ to reestablish and fulfill his image in us (Colossians 3:10; 2 Corinthians 3:18). All forms of sin, not just sexual, work against that end.
17. See John 17:20-26. As a reminder, see also the Scriptures referencing the gifts and ministries given to each one in the body of Christ for the purpose of strengthening us and working toward unity in him, specifically Romans 12:4-8; 1 Corinthians 12-14:12; and Ephesians 4:11-16. See also 1 Corinthians 14:26, wherein "each one" can make a contribution for the purpose of edifying the whole assembly.

*I wish to acknowledge my indebtedness to, and thankfulness for, the writings of John Stott.