

## Leading in the Image of the Triune God

***“Let us make man in our own image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea, and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth and over the creatures that move along the ground.” So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created them, male and female he created them.***

Genesis 1:26-27

***He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation.***

Colossians 1:15

***Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices and put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator.***

Colossians 3:9-10

I was raised in the church and spent my entire life in it. I was baptized as an infant in the Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod. As a faithful young Lutheran I attended confirmation classes when I turned twelve and prepared to go before the board of deacons to affirm my faith and proclaim my understanding of the basic tenets of the Christian doctrine according to Luther’s Small Catechism. I did well. Later I became a youth director, went on to graduate biblical studies after my college years and prepared for doctoral work in theology. Along the way I served my church as an elder, taught Bible study classes and preached on occasion. Despite all this time in the church, in formal study and in Scripture, it wasn’t until one day in a doctoral-level seminar that I embraced the radical idea (radical to me, at least) that I had been created in the image of a triune God.

Now, you can think I don’t learn things easily, but over the years I have tested this same idea with a good number of committed, intelligent and well-read Christian brothers and sisters, and the response has been the same.

Most everyone said that they “always sort of understood that,” but few had ever stopped to consider its transformational implications.

If you are willing to consider this concept and its implications for your life and work, join me in thinking theologically for a few moments. I want to define stewardship by going back and thinking about God’s intention for his beloved creation.

We begin with a central tenet of the Christian faith: you and I were created in the image of the God we know in Jesus Christ, who has revealed himself to us as the triune God of grace. That may be the most profound statement human ears have ever heard. The implications are massive, affecting everything in our lives.

Here is the fruit of this amazing truth: when we know with certainty the nature of our Creator God and the image that we bear as his children, we can know with equal certainty the purpose for our existence. This certainty leads us to a life that has meaning as we live out that purpose, bearing God’s image in community. It is an invitation to a new kind of life, to contentment, to real joy and to freedom.

Let me explain this truth in a little more detail. God’s self-revelation to us in Jesus Christ is the core of our faith, giving it direction and substance. It is in God’s self-revelation to us in Jesus Christ that we can know the heart of our God, and know it with certainty.

The good news of the gospel of Jesus Christ is that we have been invited into a relationship that assures us of the knowledge of God that is sufficient for a life of meaning, purpose, freedom and joy.

Jesus Christ came to us to reveal the heart of God, the character of God, the Word of God and the will of God for us (see Colossians 1:15-20; John 12:25-26; 14:6-7; 17:6-10). What a marvelous and incredible truth: we know the heart, the character, the words and will of God, and we know them with certainty. While this knowledge is conditional, fragmented and always “but a

poor reflection” (1 Corinthians 13:12 “For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known.”), it is nonetheless sufficient. That is, we are not left searching in the dark for some additional knowledge of God that is important and essential for our lives but remains unavailable to us. [We always have available to us, what we need]

This is a critical and foundational position for us, given the scriptural affirmation that we have been created in the image of God. We are created to reflect God’s image in our world through what we say and do.

Imagine how foolish or difficult it would be to try to reflect the image of a God who chose never to reveal himself, or itself to us in any trustworthy way. God would be a deceiver if he called us to reflect his image as our primary purpose in life but remained so hidden that we were constantly trying to figure out what that image really looks like.

The implication for us is that we were created and have been redeemed to bear the image of a God who is in His very nature community, fellowship and interdependence. God did not reveal himself as a single, solitary, distant being up there somewhere in the universe.

Our God is a God in relationship. That is not just his choice; it is the very content of his being. We cannot respond to this God by bearing an image that is individualistic (reflecting a singular, monarchical God), singularly self-reliant (reflecting a detached, deistic God) or distrusting and cynical (reflecting an absent and changeable God).

Our knowledge of the nature of our triune God gives certainty not only to his nature, but also to our own nature, calling and purpose.

Reflect on these two fundamental questions of the Christian faith before we move on:

First, do you really believe that you can (and do) know the heart and nature of your Creator with sufficiency and certainty in and through Jesus Christ? A steward must know the heart and will of the Master. There is no reason to live

another moment in uncertainty. Our Creator is a God who loves us, is for us and created us to live in relationship with him. We know this in Jesus Christ, and therefore we know it with certainty.

Second, if you know this certainty for yourself, does your life reflect the image of a God who is, in his very nature, relationship, fellowship and community? Have you bought into the individualism of much of our culture, or do you witness to a calling that enmeshes your life with those around you?

A steward must represent the heart of the Master. My prayer at this early moment in our journey together is that your spirit is at peace in the knowledge of the heart of your Creator and that your life is a testimony to the triune nature of a God in relationship, who was revealed to us in Jesus Christ.

Rodin, R. Scott. *The Steward Leader: Transforming People, Organizations and Communities* (p. 33). InterVarsity Press. Kindle Edition.