

God Created Man in His Own Image (Illusion or Likeness)

Chapter 1: (IMAGE / Likeness). Offered by Ron Lively, M.Div., M.A. - MedicalMobilizers.org/Resources

Resource: In His Image by Dr. Paul Brand & Philip Yancey. Zondervan Publishing House, Grand Rapids, MI. (1984).

In his two companion books, Fearfully and Wonderfully Made and In His Image, Dr. Brand with the good help of Yancey, places an emphasis on the individual human cells in our body and their varying roles within the body for the sake of the body as a whole. He then points to the Body of Christ (the Church) and makes thoughtful analogies. He writes of the connections and forces that unite and guide our human bodies (and the Body of Christ). These two books can become your best devotional resources as you study the Scriptures.

Genesis 1:27 – “So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him.”

Note: This Study Guide (which I initially called Chapter Summary plus Commentary) is intended to highlight the value and applications of Dr. Paul Brand’s great books. I discovered I was eager to summarize the key points and to share what I was re-learning by reading these books again. I was encouraged to write down my thoughts (my commentary). My hope is that these guides can be used for personal applications but mainly for small group discussions. I had to develop similar summaries with discussions questions while serving as a campus minister / chaplain for CMDA overseeing bible study / discussion groups of medical and dental students in fifteen schools from 1983 to 1993. These are obviously not short devotionals but rather some detailed information that a serious student of the human body and of the Body of Christ (Church) should find helpful. Most of the content is from Dr. Brand but some of the guides include my commentary or stories that relate to the subject.

The first section of In His Image with three chapters is titled Image. After that the sections are titled: Blood, Head, Spirit and Pain. I aim to produce summaries for all of the chapters in Fearfully and Wonderfully Made.

Dr. Brand shared about the way his medical interns resembled his own medical chief in his training simply because his students naturally conveyed his image (his instincts, expressions, and smiles, sitting down by a patient’s bed – even the act of warming his hands secretly before touching a patient). Personally, I had Dr. Paul Brand speak for several of my CMDA conferences for doctors and students. What a treat to get to know him personally. It was intriguing to watch participants continue to learn from a master as he shared what he had learned from his chief in his personal training.

This book reinforces the original meaning of Image as an exact likeness NOT a deceptive illusion. The point is when we talk of man being made in the image of God it is not an illusion but rather the essence – the likeness. However, since God is an invisible Spirit, how do we express the image of God in our bodily form? To complicate matters even more, God has also been declared to be the ability to reason, as the spiritual faculty, capacity to make moral judgments and even as the ability to be creative in an artistic fashion.

Brand writes that even after God created all things except man, He (as triune God) announced that the plan to make man in His own image (Gen. 1:26) and that no other creature received the “image of God”.

Dr. Brand shared information about a personal visit to the Sistine Chapel in Rome and watching people look up to the ceiling for the first time to see the great paintings of Michelangelo including the painting of the creation of man (Gen 2:7). Interestingly, we tend to look down too much and fail to see the bigger picture.

We read that God breathed into Adam's nostrils the breath of life and man became a living being. Most believe that this breath of life give Adam biological life as well as a spiritual reality. However, Dr. Brand's point is that all of the animals and maybe even Adam needed no special puff of oxygen, nitrogen or carbon dioxide to start breathing. He thinks that Adam probably could breathe as well but at that time possessed only an animal vitality. He writes that it is at the point when God breathes into him a new spirit, man was filled with God's image. Thus Adam, and all mankind since then, becomes a living soul. My sense is that man doesn't just possess a living soul but he is a living soul that can be open to be led by the Holy Spirit.

Brand indicates that animals possess a distinct biological shell but not the breath of life – not the image of God. Our bodies like it or not, are a repository for His Image. When we look at a particular person, we need to look for the temple of the Holy Spirit not for cellular constructs of proteins arranged by DNA. How else could we relate to strangers if not by our own spirits embodied by the Holy Spirit? Brand says that we are no “mere mortals” but that “we, all of us, are immortals”.

We are special to God as His image bearers. David, the Psalmist asked God - *“What is mankind that you are mindful of them, human beings that you care for them? You have made them a little lower than the angels and crowned them with glory and honor. You made them rulers over the works of your hands; you put everything under their feet.”* - Psalm 8:4-6 (NIV)

So – like the TV commercial - what is in your wallet? Is there a card that says you are a mere human being or a temple of God's Spirit? Are you an image of your Creator or just a biological creature like any animal with no soul and thus no hope of life into eternity? Are you a bearer of God's likeness in this world?

Brand concludes this first important chapter by declaring that “God as Spirit remains invisible on this planet and that He continues to rely on us to give flesh to that Spirit – to bear the image of God.”

Questions for Personal Applications or Group Discussions:

1. Describe what it means to you personally to be made in the image (likeness) of God.
2. What are some of the ways we can sense that our lives are just a deceptive illusion or an exact likeness of God? What are the differences?
3. How does our likeness (our essence) to God separate us from all other creatures? For example, how is it different to kill a human being than to kill an animal?
4. Do you agree with Dr. Brand that the “breath of life” in Gen. 2:27 is a spiritual reality – not biological life? That is, that man may have lived biologically like an animal prior to this special act of God.
5. Explain in your own words what it means that you are a temple of the Holy Spirit and how that affects your thoughts and actions.