

Made in the Image of God: God's Commandments and the Formation of His Children

A unified biblical narrative on humanity's creation, Christ as the perfect image of God, and the commandments as God's means of forming His likeness in His children.

This study follows the biblical story from creation to new creation. It traces how God made humanity in His image, how sin damaged that image, how Christ revealed the image perfectly, and how the commandments of God function as a school of formation for His children. The goal is not only to understand doctrine, but to see the narrative of Scripture as one unified movement: the Father forming sons and daughters who bear His likeness through union with Christ and the work of the Holy Spirit.

As a Bible study, this document may be read devotionally, taught in a group, or used as a framework for personal discipleship. Each major section develops a movement in the story: creation, distortion, revelation in Christ, restoration by the Spirit, formation through commandments, and final glorification. The repeated question throughout is simple: What kind of people is God forming, and how do His words shape that people into His likeness?

Introduction: Created to Reflect God

The Bible opens with one of the most profound statements about humanity: "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness" (Genesis 1:26). This declaration shows that mankind was not created merely to exist, rule, or survive, but to reflect the character, will, nature, and glory of God in the earth. Human beings were made to represent God within creation and to bear a family resemblance to the One who made them.

The image of God should therefore be understood as more than outward form. Scripture shows that God's purpose reaches into the spiritual, moral, relational, and ultimately glorious destiny of humanity. God created human beings to become His children, to share His likeness, and to reflect His character. This purpose is fulfilled through Jesus Christ, who is the perfect image of God, and it is worked out in believers through the commands, words, Spirit, and transforming power of God.

The theme is therefore both theological and practical. It begins with what God declared over humanity in Genesis and moves toward what God accomplishes in Christ. It also presses into daily life, because the restoration of God's image is not abstract. It touches speech, desires, relationships, worship, mercy, justice, holiness, forgiveness, and obedience. God's children are not merely informed by His commandments; they are formed by them.

The Original Purpose: Image, Likeness, and Sonship

Genesis 1:26–27 records God's foundational purpose: humanity was made in God's image and according to His likeness. God also gave mankind dominion over creation, showing that human beings were placed in the world as representatives of God's rule. Yet the language of image and likeness points beyond function alone. It suggests resemblance, representation, and relationship.

Genesis 5:1–3 helps clarify this idea. When Adam had a son, Scripture says that he begot him “in his own likeness, after his image.” This family-language parallel shows that image and likeness are connected to sonship and shared resemblance. Humanity was created to bear God's family likeness, not merely as creatures under His authority, but as children intended to reflect the Father's nature.

Even after sin entered the world, Genesis 9:6 shows that human life still carried sacred value because mankind was made in the image of God. The image was not erased, but it was distorted by sin and therefore needed to be restored, renewed, and brought to fullness. The rest of Scripture reveals that this restoration is accomplished in and through Jesus Christ.

Study Focus: What Does “Image” Mean?

In Genesis, image and likeness include representation, relationship, and resemblance. Humanity is called to represent God's rule in creation, live in relationship with Him, and reflect His character. Genesis 5:1–3 strengthens this by using image and likeness in the language of father and son. This means the image of God is not only a status but a calling: human beings were made to live as children who show what their Father is like.

- **Read:** Genesis 1:26–28; Genesis 5:1–3; Genesis 9:6; Psalm 8.
- **Observe:** What responsibilities are connected to being made in God's image?
- **Reflect:** How does sonship deepen the meaning of image and likeness?
- **Apply:** In what area of life do you most need God to restore His likeness in you?

Jesus Christ: The Perfect Image of God

Jesus Christ is the complete and perfect revelation of the image of God. Colossians 1:15 says that He is “the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation.” Because God is invisible, Christ makes Him known. He reveals the Father’s nature, words, works, love, holiness, authority, mercy, justice, and glory.

Hebrews 1:3 describes the Son as “the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person.” Jesus is not merely a teacher of God’s ways; He is the exact expression of God’s being. When He speaks, acts, forgives, heals, judges, loves, and obeys, He reveals what God is like. This is why Jesus could say in John 14:9, “He who has seen Me has seen the Father.”

The glory of God is therefore seen most clearly in the face of Jesus Christ. Through Him, believers come to know the Father and to understand the true pattern of humanity. Christ is not only the revelation of God; He is also the pattern into which God’s children are being transformed.

This means that believers do not discover their true humanity by looking first at fallen Adam, surrounding culture, or personal desire. They discover it by looking at Christ. Jesus shows what obedient sonship looks like. He loves the Father perfectly, obeys without rebellion, speaks truth without deceit, shows mercy without compromise, and bears glory without pride. In Him, the image of God is not damaged, confused, or incomplete; it is fully revealed.

- **Read:** Colossians 1:15–20; Hebrews 1:1–4; John 14:6–11; 2 Corinthians 4:6.
- **Observe:** What attributes of the Father are revealed in the Son?
- **Reflect:** Why is Christ the only safe pattern for human transformation?
- **Apply:** Choose one trait of Christ from the Gospels and ask how it should reshape your conduct this week.

Christ the Firstborn Among Many Brethren

Romans 8:29 directly connects God’s purpose for humanity with the image of Christ: those whom God foreknew, He predestined “to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren.” This verse gathers the whole biblical theme together. God’s goal is not merely to improve human behavior, but to form many sons and daughters into the likeness of His Son.

Christ is called the firstborn because He is preeminent and because He stands as the leading Son in God’s family. He is not an isolated example admired from a distance; He is

the pattern, forerunner, and elder Brother of many brethren. Hebrews 2:10–11 says that God is bringing many sons to glory and that Christ is not ashamed to call them brethren. The image of God is therefore deeply connected with God’s family purpose.

This makes Romans 8:29 one of the key interpretive verses for the entire biblical narrative. God’s saving purpose is not limited to pardon, though forgiveness is essential. It is not limited to heaven, though glory is promised. God’s purpose is conformity to Christ. Salvation restores the family likeness that sin distorted, and Christ stands at the head of this restored family as the firstborn among many brethren.

- **Read:** Romans 8:28–30; Hebrews 2:10–18; Galatians 4:4–7.
- **Observe:** What does God predestine His people to become?
- **Reflect:** How does thinking of Christ as “firstborn among many brethren” affect your view of discipleship?
- **Apply:** Identify one place where God may be using difficulty to conform you to Christ.

The Image Restored Through Spiritual Transformation

The image of God in humanity is restored through inward transformation. Second Corinthians 3:18 teaches that believers, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory by the Spirit of the Lord. This shows that the image is not merely a possession given at birth, but a continuing work of God within His people.

Colossians 3:9–10 says that believers have put on the new man who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of the Creator. Ephesians 4:22–24 describes the new man as created according to God in true righteousness and holiness. Romans 12:2 commands believers not to be conformed to this world, but to be transformed by the renewing of the mind. Together, these passages show that God’s image is renewed through knowledge, righteousness, holiness, and a mind reshaped by God.

Spiritual transformation is therefore both inward and visible. It begins with renewed knowledge and a renewed mind, but it produces a renewed life. A person being restored in God’s image learns to recognize sin as distortion, holiness as beauty, obedience as freedom, and Christlikeness as the true goal of human life. The Spirit does not merely restrain outward behavior; He reshapes the inner person so that obedience increasingly flows from love.

- **Read:** 2 Corinthians 3:18; Colossians 3:9–10; Ephesians 4:22–24; Romans 12:1–2.
- **Observe:** What words describe the process of change?

- **Reflect:** Why must transformation include the mind, not only outward actions?
- **Apply:** What thought pattern needs to be renewed according to God's truth?

Children of God and the Family Likeness

Through Christ, believers are brought into the family of God. John 1:12–13 says that those who receive Christ are given the right to become children of God, born not merely by human will, but of God. Romans 8:14–17 teaches that those led by the Spirit are sons of God, have received the Spirit of adoption, cry “Abba, Father,” and become heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ.

This family relationship is not only a title but a transformation. Galatians 3:26 says that believers are sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. First John 3:1–2 declares that believers are now children of God, and that when Christ is revealed, they shall be like Him, for they shall see Him as He is. The present reality is sonship; the future goal is full likeness.

The language of adoption is central to this study because it shows that God's work is deeply relational. Believers are not merely servants who obey commands from a distance; they are children drawn near to the Father through the Son and by the Spirit. The commandments are therefore not cold regulations imposed on strangers. They are the household instruction of a Father forming His children in the way of His own character.

- **Read:** John 1:12–13; Romans 8:14–17; Galatians 3:26; 1 John 3:1–3.
- **Observe:** What privileges belong to the children of God?
- **Reflect:** How does sonship change the way you understand obedience?
- **Apply:** Pray through Romans 8:15 and consider where you need to trust the Father more deeply.

God's Commandments as Instruments of Formation

If humanity was created to bear God's image, then the commandments of God must be understood as more than external rules. They are divine instruments of formation. God's commands reveal what He is like, expose what sin has distorted, and train human beings to think, desire, speak, and act according to His own character.

God does not command what is contrary to His nature. He commands what flows from His nature. Therefore, when God commands love, forgiveness, mercy, holiness, justice, truth, and goodness, He is calling mankind to participate in His own character and to become a visible reflection of His likeness.

This gives the commandments a formative purpose. They expose areas where fallen humanity no longer resembles God, and they call His people back into alignment with His nature. The command not to lie trains the tongue to reflect the God of truth. The command to forgive trains the heart to reflect the God of mercy. The command to love trains the whole person to reflect the God who gave His Son. Obedience, rightly understood, is image-bearing in action.

How to Use This Section as a Bible Study

For each command below, ask three questions: First, what does the command reveal about God? Second, what distortion of sin does the command confront in humanity? Third, what family resemblance does the command form in God's children? This pattern helps move the commandments from mere duty into discipleship, showing that God's law is a mirror of His character and a pathway of formation.

God Commands Love Because God Is Love

Jesus taught that the greatest commandment is to love God with all the heart, soul, and mind, and that the second is to love one's neighbor as oneself. He also commanded His followers to love one another as He loved them. This command forms humanity into God's likeness because love is not merely something God requires; love is what God is. First John 4:8 declares, "God is love."

God demonstrates the love He commands. John 3:16 declares that God loved the world by giving His only begotten Son, and Romans 5:8 says that God showed His love while humanity was still in sin. When God commands man to love, He is calling man to reflect the self-giving love revealed in Himself and in Christ.

- **Study Question:** How does Christ define the measure of love in John 13:34–35?
- **Heart Examination:** Where is my love selective, conditional, or self-protective?
- **Practice:** Show deliberate, costly love toward one person this week.

God Commands Forgiveness Because God Forgives

God commands His people to forgive others. Jesus taught that those who forgive others will be forgiven by the Father, and Paul commanded believers to forgive one another even as God, for Christ's sake, has forgiven them. The command to forgive is grounded directly in God's own action.

God practices the forgiveness He commands. First John 1:9 says that if we confess our sins, God is faithful and just to forgive us and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. Ephesians 1:7 teaches that in Christ we have redemption and forgiveness of sins.

Forgiveness is therefore not merely a human courtesy; it is a divine trait being formed in God's children.

- **Study Question:** How does God's forgiveness in Christ become the pattern for forgiving others?
- **Heart Examination:** Am I withholding from someone what God has freely given me?
- **Practice:** Pray for grace to release bitterness and pursue reconciliation where possible.

God Commands Mercy Because God Is Merciful

Jesus commanded, "Be ye therefore merciful, as your Father also is merciful." This command makes God Himself the standard. Man is not told to show mercy according to human preference, but according to the mercy of the Father.

Scripture repeatedly reveals God as merciful. Exodus 34:6 declares the Lord to be merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth. Psalm 103:8 says the Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy. God's mercy toward sinners becomes the pattern by which His children learn to be merciful toward others.

- **Study Question:** What does Luke 6:36 teach about the Father as the standard of mercy?
- **Heart Examination:** Where am I more eager to judge than to restore?
- **Practice:** Look for one opportunity to respond with mercy instead of harshness.

God Commands Holiness Because God Is Holy

God commanded Israel, "Ye shall be holy: for I the LORD your God am holy," and Peter repeats the same principle in the New Testament: "Be ye holy; for I am holy." Holiness means being set apart for God, purified from evil, and devoted to righteousness.

God does not command holiness as something foreign to Himself. He is holy in His being, judgments, purposes, and works. Isaiah heard the seraphim cry, "Holy, holy, holy, is the LORD of hosts." When God commands holiness, He calls His children to reflect the purity and separation from sin that belong to Him.

- **Study Question:** Why does Scripture ground holiness in God's own holiness?
- **Heart Examination:** What habit, desire, or influence pulls me away from being set apart to God?
- **Practice:** Choose one concrete act of separation from sin and devotion to God.

God Commands Justice Because God Does Justice

The Lord commands man to practice justice. Micah 6:8 says that the Lord requires man to do justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with God. Isaiah 1:17 commands, “Learn to do well; seek judgment, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the widow.” These commands train human conduct to align with God’s righteous order.

God Himself is just. Deuteronomy 32:4 says that all His ways are judgment and that He is a God of truth, without iniquity, just and right. Psalm 89:14 says that righteousness and judgment are the foundation of His throne. Since God rules in justice, He commands man to practice justice so that human life may reflect divine rule.

- **Study Question:** How do righteousness and justice reveal the foundation of God’s rule?
- **Heart Examination:** Where do I ignore wrong because it is inconvenient to confront?
- **Practice:** Act with fairness, advocacy, or integrity in one specific situation.

God Commands Truth Because God Is Truthful

God commands man not to bear false witness, and Paul commands believers to put away lying and speak truth with their neighbors. Truthfulness is essential to the image of God because falsehood belongs to corruption, while truth belongs to God’s own character.

God Himself is truthful. Numbers 23:19 says that God is not a man, that He should lie. Titus 1:2 speaks of God as One who cannot lie. Jesus declared, “I am the way, the truth, and the life.” Therefore, when God commands truthfulness, He calls man to reflect His faithfulness, honesty, and reliability.

- **Study Question:** Why is truthfulness essential to reflecting God’s character?
- **Heart Examination:** Where am I tempted to exaggerate, hide, manipulate, or misrepresent?
- **Practice:** Speak truth with humility and love in a conversation where honesty is needed.

God Commands Goodness Because God Does Good

Scripture commands man to do good. Galatians 6:10 says that as we have opportunity, we should do good to all. Jesus commanded His followers to do good even to their enemies. Such commands lift human conduct above natural retaliation and teach God’s children to act according to the goodness of the Father.

God Himself does good. Psalm 145:9 says that the Lord is good to all and that His tender mercies are over all His works. Acts 10:38 describes Jesus as one who went about doing good. God's goodness is active, generous, and life-giving, and His children are called to make that goodness visible.

- **Study Question:** How does God's goodness move outward toward His creation?
- **Heart Examination:** Do I do good only when it benefits me or when others notice?
- **Practice:** Do one hidden act of goodness for someone who cannot repay you.

The Fruit of the Spirit and the Walk of Christ

God's character is formed in His children not merely by human effort, but by the work of His Spirit. Galatians 5:22–23 describes the fruit of the Spirit as love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. These qualities are the visible evidence of God's nature being produced within believers.

Ephesians 5:1–2 commands believers to be imitators of God as dear children and to walk in love as Christ also loved us. First John 2:5–6 says that whoever abides in Christ ought to walk just as He walked. The commandments, the Spirit, and the example of Christ all work together to form God's family likeness in His children.

The Narrative Movement of Formation

The fruit of the Spirit shows that God's likeness cannot be produced by self-effort alone. The commandments reveal the shape of godly life, Christ embodies that life, and the Spirit produces that life within believers. The Christian walk is therefore not law without Spirit, nor Spirit without obedience, nor admiration of Christ without transformation. It is the Spirit-led life of children learning to walk like the Son.

- **Read:** Galatians 5:16–26; Ephesians 5:1–2; 1 John 2:3–6.
- **Observe:** What fruit does the Spirit produce, and how does it relate to the commands of God?
- **Reflect:** Why must imitation of God happen as “dear children” rather than as strangers?
- **Apply:** Choose one fruit of the Spirit and ask God to form it in a practical relationship.

The Final Completion: Bearing the Heavenly Image

God's purpose for humanity reaches its final completion in glory. First Corinthians 15:45–49 contrasts Adam, the man of dust, with Christ, the heavenly Man, and concludes that as believers have borne the image of the man of dust, they shall also bear the image of the heavenly Man. The image that was distorted in Adam is brought to fullness in Christ.

Philippians 3:20–21 says that Christ will transform the lowly body of His people so that it may be conformed to His glorious body. Romans 8:30 completes the chain of God's purpose: those whom He predestined, called, and justified, He also glorified. The destiny of God's children is not merely moral improvement, but full conformity to Christ in spirit, character, relationship, and glory.

This final hope keeps the study from becoming merely moral instruction. The Bible does call believers to obey, grow, and imitate Christ now, but it also promises that God will complete what He began. The same God who created humanity in His image will bring His children into the fullness of that image in Christ. Formation begins now, but it reaches completion when believers see Him and are made like Him.

- **Read:** 1 Corinthians 15:45–49; Philippians 3:20–21; 1 John 3:2; Romans 8:30.
- **Observe:** What parts of human life will be transformed in glory?
- **Reflect:** How does future likeness to Christ encourage present obedience?
- **Apply:** Write one sentence of hope based on the promise that God will finish His work.

Unified Conclusion

The biblical narrative begins with God's declaration, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness." It continues by showing that humanity was created to represent God, bear His family resemblance, and live as His children in the earth. Though sin distorted that image, God did not abandon His purpose. Instead, He revealed the perfect image in Jesus Christ, the Son who fully displays the Father and stands as the firstborn among many brethren.

In Christ, God is forming a family of children who share the likeness of His Son. This likeness is spiritual, moral, relational, and ultimately glorious. It includes renewed minds, righteous conduct, holy character, Spirit-produced fruit, love like the Father's, mercy like the Father's, truthfulness like God's own faithfulness, justice that reflects His throne, goodness that mirrors His works, and final transformation at Christ's appearing.

The commandments of God serve this purpose. They are not arbitrary rules for outward behavior alone. They reveal God's own character and train His people to reflect Him. God commands love because He is love. He commands forgiveness because He forgives. He commands mercy because He is merciful. He commands holiness because He is holy. He commands justice because He is just. He commands truth because He is truthful. He commands goodness because He is good.

Therefore, the final purpose of humanity is not merely to imitate God from a distance, but to be brought into His family and formed into His likeness through Jesus Christ. God's commands, God's Spirit, and God's Son all work together to fulfill the word spoken in the beginning. As man obeys God, beholds Christ, and is transformed by the Spirit, he increasingly reflects the character and glory of God, fulfilling the divine intention that humanity should bear His image in the earth and ultimately share in His glory.

Bible Study Guide for Group or Personal Use

Lesson Aim

To understand that God created humanity to bear His image, that Christ is the perfect image of God, and that God's commandments are tools of spiritual formation by which His children are trained to reflect His character.

Key Scriptures

- Genesis 1:26–27 — Humanity created in God's image and likeness.
- Genesis 5:1–3 — Image and likeness connected to sonship and family resemblance.
- Colossians 1:15 — Christ as the image of the invisible God.
- Romans 8:29 — Believers conformed to the image of the Son.
- 2 Corinthians 3:18 — Transformation from glory to glory by the Spirit.
- Ephesians 5:1–2 — Imitating God as beloved children.
- 1 John 3:2 — The promise of final likeness when Christ appears.

Discussion Questions

1. What does it mean that humanity was created in the image and likeness of God?
2. How does Genesis 5 help connect image and likeness with sonship?
3. In what ways does Jesus reveal the Father perfectly?
4. Why is being conformed to Christ more than becoming morally improved?
5. How do God's commandments reveal His character?
6. Which command discussed in this study most directly confronts an area where you need growth?

7. How does the Holy Spirit produce what the commandments reveal?
8. How does the promise of future glory encourage present transformation?

Memory Verse

“For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren.” — Romans 8:29

Closing Prayer

Father, You created humanity in Your image and called us to bear Your likeness. Thank You for revealing Yourself perfectly in Jesus Christ, Your Son. By Your Spirit, renew our minds, purify our hearts, and train us through Your commandments so that love, mercy, holiness, justice, truth, forgiveness, and goodness may be formed in us. Make us look more like Christ today, and keep our hope fixed on the day when we shall see Him and be made like Him fully. Amen.