

In your image
Leviticus 19:1-18
October 26, 2008

When you look in the mirror, what do you see?

Do you see someone, do you see a person, who resembles ... God? When you look in the mirror, do you recognize something, anything, that reminds you of God?

If you don't, if you deny seeing in that mirror a person who, in some way, resembles God, then you make God out to be a liar! Because when God made people, God said: *Now we will make human beings! They will be like us and resemble us!*

We believe in you, O God, Eternal Spirit, Father of our Lord Jesus Christ and our Father, and to your deeds we testify: You call the worlds into being and you create persons in your own image ...

How? How are we created in God's image? That's a matter of considerable debate!

Maybe it's our creativity. Maybe we are like God when we use imagination and skill to invent and create and bring something new and beautiful into existence.

Maybe it's our power, our ability to exercise powerful influence over the rest of the created world, and our responsibility, like God's, to use our unique power and influence to preserve and protect and provide for creatures and things beyond ourselves.

Maybe it's our capacity for relationship, our capacity for love, that makes us like God.

Maybe it's our moral sensitivity, our capacity to discern and choose between what is good and what is evil.

Maybe it's some of these things, maybe it's all of these things, but in the end what really matters is not how we are made in God's own image, but that we are made in God's own image! Simply by being yourself, simply by being your self, simply by being human, simply by being what you were made to be, you resemble God.

What an honor! What an extraordinary privilege! What a great blessing! You, you are made in God's own image! Believe it! It is the devil, that great serial liar, who whispers in your ear that you are worthless, unattractive, undesirable, unimportant, expendable. You matter, because you bear in your self the likeness of God!

So be who you are! Gladly be who you are! Lift your head and show the world the face of God!

Show the world the face of God! When you look at me, what do you see? When people look at you, what do they see? You and I are made in God's own image. We are made to reflect God. It's a fact, but it is also an awesome and surely intimidating responsibility. But that's who we are and that's our calling, nothing less.

Be holy, because I, the Lord your God, am holy.

Because God is holy, because God is distinctive, different, not like all the other gods, we who bear God's image are called to be holy, called to be distinctive, different, not like everybody else, not like everything else, not like all the other creatures.

We are called to be holy, not to live by instinct alone, acting on impulse, reacting by impulse, to the push and pull of life around us.

We are called to be holy, not to live with self-preservation as our first and highest priority, but, like God, be able to choose against our own benefit to benefit another, like God be able to choose sacrifice, like God be able to choose love

We are called to be holy, to be like God, and because we are made in God's own image, what we do and what we are reflects on God, to God's great honor, or to God's great dishonor. That's the urgency of our calling to be holy.

Each of you must keep the Sabbath ... I am the Lord your God!

Do not make gods of metal and worship them ... I am the Lord your God!

When you harvest your fields, do not cut the grain at the edges ... I am the Lord your God!

Do not steal or cheat or lie ... I am the Lord your God!

Do not rob or take advantage of anyone ... I am the Lord your God!

Be honest and just ... I am the Lord!

Do not bear a grudge or take revenge or continue to hate, but love your neighbors as you love yourself ... I am the Lord!

These are not arbitrary rules or religious duties we discharge to curry favor with God, but the very ways we show the face of God to the world.

Keep the Sabbath ...

We keep Sabbath because God keeps Sabbath. God rests! Rest is not a time-out from life, but an essential element of life. God pauses, to look and to enjoy the goodness of creation. God takes time, not just to do, but to appreciate.

When we are not holy, when we are like everybody else, when we regard every day the same, as one more day to do what we want to do, one more day to get what we want to get, do more, get more, no one sees God, no one stops long enough to really see anything at all. And both the simple goodness of all that is and the glory of the One who made all that is, go entirely unappreciated.

Do not make gods of metal and worship them ...

We still make gods of metal: a coin, a B2 bomber, a laptop computer. When we are not holy, when we are like everybody else, entrusting our well-being, entrusting our future, to the accumulation of military power or economic wealth or technological prowess, no one sees God's power, no one sees the wealth with which God has already provided us, no one sees God's glory.

When you harvest your fields, leave some of the harvest for poor people and foreigners ...

Be like God! Be holy, be different, not sucking every last drop of profit from your work, but setting aside some of it for someone else's benefit.

Be like God! Be holy, be different, treating the poor people and foreigners among you with compassion, not disdain.

Be like God! Pay special attention, make special consideration, for the needs of those among you who are poor, for the needs of those among you who are strangers, immigrants, legal or otherwise! When you do, you show the face of God to the world!

Do not steal or cheat or lie, do not make a promise you don't intend to keep ... I am the Lord your God!

And may all the politicians tremble!

When we lie, we dishonor God. When we make empty promises, we bring disgrace on God's name, because we are made in God's image, and any witness we might have been able to bear to the faithfulness and trustworthiness of God is made silly and unbelievable.

We are called to be holy, to be different, not to use words to serve our own purposes, but to tell the truth, not to do what works because it works, but to do what is right. And when we do, people will notice, and the word of God will become flesh once more.

Do not rob or take advantage of anyone ...

Quite simply, when you have an advantage -- in ability or power or opportunity -- don't take it! Use it! Use it to serve those at a disadvantage. Do not bring any insult or cause any injury to those in your debt, to those under your power. God has always shown special concern for those who are more vulnerable, and when you do the same, you are like God, you reflect God's image.

Be honest and just when you make decisions, and speak out if your testimony can help someone ...

If something you could say could help someone else get justice, what possible reason could you have for keeping quiet? Only this: to protect yourself by staying out of it, whatever "it" is, to protect your reputation or your income or your social standing or your life.

To what lengths will God go, what is God ready to put on the line, for the sake of justice? *For God loved the world so much that he gave ...*

Do not bear a grudge or take revenge or continue to hate, but love your neighbors ...

What is God's most distinctive feature? What is God's most extraordinary trait? What is it that sets apart Yahweh, the Lord, the God of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and our God, from all other gods?

Is it power? Our God is surely powerful, but a god in any shape or form would be expected to be powerful.

Is it glory? The Lord, our God, is glorious indeed, but glory would surely be an attribute of any being worthy of being called a god.

Is it righteousness? There certainly have been gods painted as arbitrary and capricious, exercising will at will, following no law, preserving no order, but doing what they please. Our God is a law-giver and a promise-keeper, just and right in all he does, and yet, it seems to me that the very best of all the gods we might imagine would be defenders of justice and enforcers of righteousness.

What sets our God apart is mercy. Mercy is the divine trait we would never have imagined or hoped for. *The Lord is merciful and loving, slow to become angry and full of constant love.*

When we are not holy, when we are like everybody else, when we nurse our anger, hold on to our hurts, plot revenge, we shame the image of God in us. But when we show mercy, people see God! People see the likeness of God in us! There is nothing more Christian, nothing more God-like, nothing more human, than showing mercy.

So go do it! Show mercy! Be holy! Bring honor to God's name! You are the mirror! You are the mirror in which people will see the image of God. You are the mirror in which people will see the image of God in themselves.

We believe in you, O God, Eternal Spirit, Father of our Lord Jesus Christ and our Father, and to your deeds we testify ...

You call the worlds into being, and you create persons in your own image ...