

## Heart of the *Living* God

# Love, Free Will, Foreknowledge, Heaven

A Theology on the Treasure of Love

A Grasshopper Challenges Classical Theism



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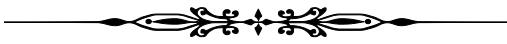
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*Special Thanks*


This book is for all of the precious people in my life, as well as for any other person interested in God's living and heartfelt Love. So then, a special thanks goes to my mother J. J. Bush, father Roy Lee, brother Roger; Wiley Cantrell, Steven Hyles, Stacey Hyles, Kathy Sue Brackin, Bessie Smith, Kyle Brackin, Katy Brackin, all of the Smith family, and the rest of my family; Jack Lewellen, Will Duke, David Rust, Ebbie Smith, David Currie, Vance Drum, Rudy Kauntze-Cockburn, Ray Reed, Troy Richardson, Keith Bellamy, Norman Turner, Gertheen Pierce, Willena Moore, Debbie Hodges, Gertha Rogers, Jacqueline Honora, and many other friends over the years; to all of the Gib Lewis State Prison staff, some very special men, William Carr, Billy Heath, Eddie Dotie, George Napier, Rockland Nixon, Andre Scott, Chester Raglin, Michael Duncan, and countless others that I have been honored to serve with for the last decade at the prison.

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I stand on the shoulders of so many.

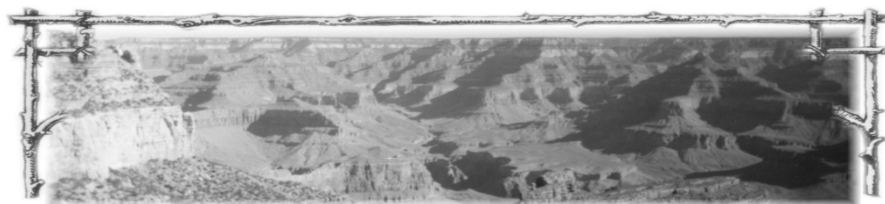
I thank Clark Pinnock for his boldness and Christian spirit; I thank Karl Barth, Paul Tillich, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Jürgen Moltmann, Millard Erickson, William Lane Craig, John Sanders, and several other titanic theologians who together—though I've not met any of them yet—have helped define theology in the 20th century and have given hope for the 21st century. I thank them all for the adventure.

In heaven we shall be able to know one another by our first names on our *first* meeting—so I believe. What an adventure in relationships God has in store for us in our heavenly home.



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<sup>4</sup> William Estep's *Renaissance & Reformation* (Eerdmans, 1986) is a masterpiece.



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## Grand Canyon Panorama



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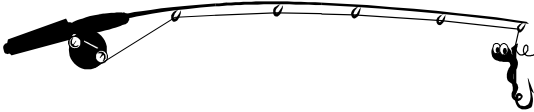


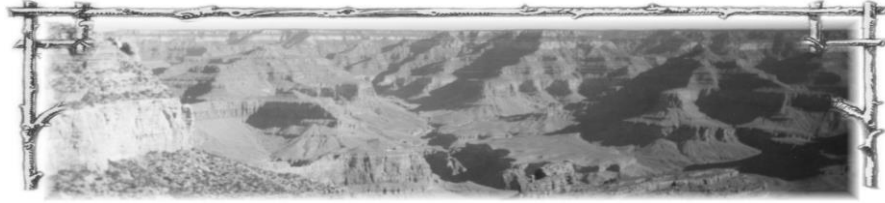
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## 7. *Imago Dei*—God the Source of Our Relationships

In the long history of the world, only a few generations have been granted the role of defending freedom in its hour of maximum danger. I do not shrink from this responsibility—I welcome it.... The energy, the faith, the devotion which we bring to this endeavor will light our country and all who serve it. And the glow from that fire can truly light the world.

John F. Kennedy, Inaugural Speech, 01-20-1961<sup>440</sup>

### Bridge Building 201: We Have a Beginning

- A. Our *Imago Dei*—the Quintessence of Genuine Relationships
  1. Our *Imago Dei*—the Spark of God in Our Ability to Relate
  2. Our *Imago Dei*—Love's Labors
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- B. God's Love Is Dynamic ... Alive
  1. What Changes for God? Not the Same 1,000 Years Ago as Today
  2. Can God's Perfected Love Grow?
  3. What's the Difference Between God's Foreknowledge & Experience
  4. God's Love Steadfast, Dynamic, Crimson Shades to Infinity
- C. Going Home—Free At Last
  1. Where Time, Free will, Sovereignty, & Foreknowledge  
Will Be Swallowed Up in Glory, & the Classical Theist Burden
  2. Going Home—Where Seeing God's Heart Dissipates Sovereignty

### Bridge Building 201: We Have a Beginning

We have seen the canyon strata of God's Omniscient-Omnipresence. We have looked at the mighty Colorado River torrent running deep and wild, ever cutting up new ground, how the divinely empowered Christ-Freedom Dynamic runs deep in the life of the Christian in resurrection power. Best of all, we have observed the changing hues and the blessedness of the colors of the canyon strata, earthy to the uttermost, radiating with the movement of the *Son*—always unique and yet of the same essence—the Shadow Dynamic of Prayer.

<sup>440</sup> See <http://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/johnfkennedyinaugural.htm>.

We are closer to a bridge between the North and South Rims of the Grand Canyon than ever before, just not there yet. Yet we do know some of the elements that will entail a solution, elements that are unambiguous and very clear. Classical Theists threaten to close the issue before its time, even shut off solid biblical insights, even refuse the obvious, and block the supply lines for decent and sincere Christian fellowship (this is painfully obvious in appendices 1-8). Some Classical Theists not only block the supply lines of fellowship but sabotage the railways with ugly insinuations of heresy, evil, and satanic allusions to Open Theism, rather than do the more honorable thing and defend the genuineness of their own relationship.

Makes you want to cry, it does. Cricket, cricket.

Even so and no matter the portended obstructions, that does not stop and *cannot stop* the grandeur and splendor of the Grand Canyon from inspiring those who will look.

Even mule-shoving theologians acknowledge the two dynamic truths, that our freedom in Christ and prayer are certainties in the very *life* of the Christian. Would that those same persons would allow those truths their rightful place as instructive about the dynamism of our living God.

We have two stakes driven deep down on both sides of the Grand Canyon, as each side believes their relationship with God to be genuine. These two stakes held the first few strings we sent across the canyon, like the the Omniscient-Omnipresent Attribute of God and the Foreknown Response Quotient. And the Craig-Pinnock Dilemma helped get our sights across the canyon correct. These were clear lines of concurrence, and from these we were able to pull *two strong cables* across the breadth of the canyon abyss. Lashed to the stakes of our genuine loving relationship with God on both sides of the canyon are two very strong cables of concurrence between the North and South Rims of the Grand Canyon. The two cables are the two dynamic truths of the Christ-Freedom Dynamic and the Shadow of Prayer Dynamic.

With these two cables we have the beginning of a substantial bridge across the Grand Canyon with several areas of concurrence between Open and Classical Theism that make up the north and south rim of the abyss.



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## **A. Our *Imago Dei*—the Quintessence of Loving Relationships**

### **1. Our *Imago Dei*—the Spark of God Is Our Ability to Relate**

Better than all of the above, there is still more to see in the Grand Canyon. There is another element that ties all of the above together—mysteriously—another element that makes all of the above possible.

There is another certainty or high truth in this struggle that will not be circumvented without great loss that is tied to God's own life, and we know that both sides share this truth to a large degree. Our *Imago Dei*, the Image of God that we bear, is in part the substance of the dynamics already mentioned.<sup>441</sup> *Imago Dei* appears only three times in the Bible, all in Genesis, the most significant in 1:26-27:

Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over ... and over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground. So God created man in His image, in the image of God he created him: male and female he created them.

5:1, This is the written account of Adam's line. When God created man, he made him in the likeness of God.

9:6, Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed; for in the image of God has God made man.<sup>442</sup>

John Calvin indicated that our ability to relate to ourselves and to God are interrelated, and this is because we bear the image of God.

In knowing ourselves we come to know God, since he has made us in his Image. Conversely, we come to know ourselves by measuring ourselves against his holiness. While all things, in a sense, display the image of God, humans particularly do so, most notably in our ability to reason.<sup>443</sup>

Harry Boer said,

That Man as the image of God retains a spark or glimmer or residuum of the full life given him in creation is unquestioned in all evangelical Christian theology. It is the existence of this life which constitutes Man as Man, which makes him human, which makes him the image of God. Sons or daughters in alienation from their parents do not cease to be the image of those who gave them birth.... So, too, with Man in his relationship to God. He remains *Imago Dei*—a fallen and sinful image, an offspring to which the parental heart stands open for forgiveness and reconciliation.<sup>444</sup>

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<sup>441</sup> See Genesis 1:26-27, 5:1, 9:6; Acts 17:28; Rom. 8:29; 1 Cor. 11:7; 2 Cor. 3:18; Eph. 4:23-24; Col. 3:10; James 3:9. See J. Richard Middleton, "The Liberating Image? Interpreting the *Imago Dei* in Context" *Christian Scholar's Review* 24 (1994).

<sup>442</sup> NIV. The Hebrew for *imago dei* is *tselem elohim*.

<sup>443</sup> Millard Erickson, *Christian Theology* 2nd (Baker, 2003): 523; referencing John Calvin's *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (bk 1:1) and Calvin's *Commentary on the Gospel According to John* (v1, p32 on John 1:4).

<sup>444</sup> Harry R. Boer, *An Ember Still Glowing: Humankind as the Image of God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990): 85, and Boer reflected that this was "central thesis" of his book: "There is only the possibility of responding to a salvation already achieved, but not yet recognized and embraced. This possibility arises from the substratum of fallen Man's essential nature or being—his *existence as imago Dei*."

We—both sides of the Grand Canyon—share much, yet perhaps there is no more a coalescing element than the uniqueness and dignity of our essential human nature captured in the term, *Imago Dei*. Almost every good Christian (Open or Classical, indeed Catholic or Protestant) would affirm that our essential human dignity and value derive from us being made in God's Image. Augustus Strong said, "The dignity of human nature consists, not so much of what man is, as in what God meant him to be, and in what God means him yet to become."<sup>445</sup> Truly, we only come to know ourselves in our relationship with God, and truly the best is yet to come.



## 2. Our *Imago Dei*—a Liberating Image in Middleton

In a masterful way, J. Richard Middleton outlined the recent history of the interpretation of *Imago Dei*. He indicated the obvious: that it is impossible to discern exactly what is meant, and the word *image* was used for idols and copies. Though impossible, it clearly signifies humanity's dignity and special relationship with God. The reformers leaned to a "dynamic, relational notion" that equated it with an "obedient response to God"; Karl Barth and Emil Brunner proposed that it refers to the "capacity of human beings to be addressed by and to respond to God's word."<sup>446</sup>

Middleton lamented the ignorance in biblical scholarship of the vast Old Testament studies. Today, the consensus of Old Testament scholars subscribe to the *royal* flavor of the text, indicating that the royal "we" mandate means that "we" were created to be "sovereign over the cosmos, ruling by royal decree" and that the wealth of comparative studies of Israel and the ancient Near East have led to the *Imago Dei* as,

the royal function or office of human beings as God's representatives and agents in the world, given authorized power to share in God's rule over the earth's resources and creatures.<sup>447</sup>

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<sup>445</sup> Augustus Strong, *Systematic Theology* 3v. (Fleming H. Revell, 1976 [1st 1907]: 517).

<sup>446</sup> J. Richard Middleton, "The Liberating Image? Interpreting the *Imago Dei* in Context," *Christian Scholar's Review* 24 (1994): 9. See also, John Hall, *Imaging God: Dominion as Stewardship* (Eerdmans, 1986); Paul Ramsey, *Basic Christian Ethics* (NY: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1950); G. C. Berkouwer, *Studies in Dogmatics: Man: The Image of God* (Eerdmans, 1975; 1st 1962); Emil Brunner, *Man in Revolt: A Christian Anthropology* (London: Lutterworth, 1939); Anthony A. Hoekema, *Created in God's Image* (Eerdmans, 1986); David Cairns, *The Image of God in Man* (London: Collins, 1973).

<sup>447</sup> J. Richard Middleton, "The Liberating Image? Interpreting the *Imago Dei* in Context," *Christian Scholar's Review* 24 (1994): 12. Middleton lamented the ignorance of many theologians on the vast O.T. scholarship on *Imago Dei*, and pointed to the seminal dissertation by Gunnlaugar A Jónsson, *The Image of God: Genesis 1:26-28 in a Century of Old Testament Research* (trans. Lorraine Svendsen; Lund: Almqvist and Wiksell, 1988).



Middleton showed the unique context of the passage: Israel only had one God and kingship was often a contingency.<sup>448</sup> This led to a noteworthy observation.

What is particularly worth exploring about the Old Testament's critique of both idolatry and kingship is how they are seen as usurpation of Yahweh's rule, which inevitably leads to injustice and oppression, and how this impacts the *imago dei* texts in Genesis. Could it be that some notion of "democracy" and the sharing of power is an essential implication of biblical monotheism, an implication consonant with our human status as creatures....

Of course, this leads to the New Testament with Christ as the Messiah and "Jesus as the image of God *par excellence*."<sup>449</sup> Therefore,

The life and characteristic teaching of Jesus, and especially his paradoxical *enthronement on the cross*, point to a ... trajectory from rule to compassionate service.... Jesus explicitly exemplifies what is at least implicit in Genesis 1 and often explicit in the Old Testament, namely that the right to use power is not oppressive control of others, but their liberation and empowerment....

Since Christ is the head of the church, this community of faith inherits his revelatory, representative task.... Just as Christ is sent by and discloses God, so the church as the new humanity, renewed in the *imago Dei* (Ephesians 4:24; Colossians 3:9-11; II Corinthians 3:17-18), is sent by Christ and called upon to imitate his paradigm of self-giving, thus witnessing to God's rule in the concrete shape of their communal life.... [From Phil. 2:5-11, Paul] argues that if Jesus, as the unique *imago Dei*, used his divine power and sovereignty not for his own interests, but to serve others, even unto death, then the Christian community, following the its Lord's footsteps, should have ... the same "mind" of compassionate self-giving. In the New Testament, *imago Dei* as rule becomes *imitatio Christi*.

What ties together this whole trajectory from Genesis to the New Testament is the consistent biblical insight that humanity from the beginning—and now the church as the redeemed humanity—is both *gifted* by God with a royal status and dignity and *called* by God actively to represent his kingdom in the entire range of human life, that is, in the very way we rule and subdue the earth.<sup>450</sup>

The *Imago Dei* that we bear is a liberating image *in* our relationship with God in the Old Testament as well reaching our fuller and spiritual liberation in the New Testament *in* Christ.



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<sup>448</sup> Based on Israel's early anti-monarchical strain in Israel's tribal confederacy in the Judges and Samuel's opposition to kingship.

<sup>449</sup> J. Richard Middleton, "The Liberating Image? Interpreting the *Imago Dei* in Context," *Christian Scholar's Review* 24 (1994): 23. For Christ the Messiah: Mark 8:29, Matt. 26:62-64, and Acts 2:36; for Christ as *Imago Dei*, 2 Cor. 4:4-6, Col. 1:15, Heb. 1:3.

<sup>450</sup> J. Richard Middleton, "The Liberating Image? Interpreting the *Imago Dei* in Context," *Christian Scholar's Review* 24 (1994): 24.

### 3. Our *Imago Dei*—Shell of Love’s Labors for All Human Beings

In many ways the image of God that we bear is the shell of Love’s labors for all human beings, as all share in the ability to Love (if they would). Yet the utmost abilities in Love can only be appropriated after one is born again, as only then can one avail themselves of the Spirit’s help in Love and only then is one in a full and proper relationship with God—the originator of Love, master lover, and true authority on proper Love. And we learn by experience, and who better to learn from than from our heavenly Father loving us. Read 1 John in that light.

We cannot distinguish between unsaved and saved Love, and we should not. Yet we have been given instruction that as a believer born of God, and only as a believer born of God, there are capacities of Love that are only freed after our resurrection; most importantly, the post-resurrection ability to Love God is called a freedom to approach His throne as a son or daughter where that ability is egged on by two great commands—the greatest commands.<sup>451</sup> Therein and only therein and before God and *in* Christ does Love and Love’s labors find their highest capacities in our living and loving relationship with God, and the genuineness of our real-time loving relationship is the First Doctrine in the theology of God.

Said in another way, an unsaved and non-resurrected person bears the *Imago Dei* as a human and can Love and Love in many ways just like a Christian. But a Christian can Love in a resurrected ability: that resurrection ability to Love connects the Love of the loved one to both of their everlasting lives at the least. Love in and through the Holy Spirit and as part of our own new nature are captured in a kingdom not of this world. We are born into a household of fellowship that transcends this world, whose maker and builder is God and whose head is Jesus Christ.

Sadly, a lost person who certainly bears the *shell* of Love’s labors in his or her own *Imago Dei* is *still* truly lost. For though the abilities of eternal Love are meagerly experienced in tempered form among their own family and friends—and as great as Love is in this person’s life—nevertheless, Love’s abilities never reach their potential on earth and even turn upon the lover—*I do think*—and proceed to wreak a havoc all its own in the hereafter. In the hereafter much worse happens, when in a sense—according to this understanding—Love becomes a burden and perhaps even a parasite instead of the positive energy it was on earth. When a lost soul goes to hell and is permanently pushed away from God, that person is forever torn from the ability to see Love’s consummation and severed from ever seeing and feeling the highest manifestations in the gift of eternal life and the ongoing

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<sup>451</sup> Heb. 4 and Matt. 22:37-40 (Love God with all of the heart & others as self).

Love of saints in heaven. Though Love might be resident in the heart of a lost person, Love might pine on without hope of reciprocation for evermore. Yet, perhaps God shall be merciful there too, and in the condemned darkness God might retrieve the spark of Love itself as part of the condemned person's sentence. Who truly knows for sure?

What we do know is that in Love we seek to anchor ourselves to God, to His Word, to each other, and even to steady our own hearts in the world; Love is work that impels us to cross relational boundaries in personhood. Harry Boer said,

The glory of Man is that he is the image and likeness of God. He is not an angel, he is not an animal, he is not a thing. He is person. She is person.... Man acts today, he is accountable for yesterday, he plans for tomorrow. He uses time to schedule all that he does. The whole world is his to examine, to use, to enjoy, and to develop. Nowhere is he forbidden entrance....

It is my personal judgment that the central characteristic of Man as image of God is the quality of personhood. It is the characteristic of God as sole deity, and it is equally and radically distinctive of the three members of the trinity....

It is personhood that distinguishes Man from the higher animals....

With these considerations ... We can say that God created Man to exist *in a structure of relationships*. Formally this structure is *unchangeable*. Materially it is *altogether* changeable. In creating Man, God placed him in four basic and enduring relationships: to God, to fellowman, to the world around him, and to himself.<sup>452</sup>

On Love's abilities in endurance, Charles H. Spurgeon said,

If once taught in the school of Christ to turn Love to every point of the compass, and so to meet every assault against our heart, we have learned the secret of victory.... Love conquers in all stages of her life. She begins in conversion, and straightway those that mark her birth are angry, and the powers of evil are at once aroused to seek her destruction. Then she "beareth all things." Let them mock, Love never renders railing for railing: Isaac is not to be provoked by Ishmael's jeers.

She gathers strength and begins to tell out to others what she knows of her Lord and his salvation. She "believeth all things," and so she confesses her faith, and her fellow Christians are confirmed by her witness. It is her time of energy, and so she tries to woo and win others, by teaching them the things which she believes.

She advances a little farther; and, though often disappointed by the unbelief of men and the coldness of her fellow Christians, she nevertheless "hopes all things," and pushes on in the expectation of winning more of them. Her dove's

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<sup>452</sup> Harry R. Boer, *An Ember Still Glowing* (Eerdmans, 1990): 1, 8-9; and Boer quotes Karl Barth (*Church Dogmatics*, Vol. 3 [Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1958]: 184-87), "So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; *male and female he created them.*"

eyes see in the dark, and she advances to victory through evergrowing conflict....

Ay, and when infirmities thicken upon her, and old age comes, and she can do little else but sit still, and bear and believe and hope, she still perseveres, and accepts even the stroke of death itself without complaining, for Love “endureth all things.”

The last victory of Love is in enduring all things, by which I understand a patient perseverance in loving. This is perhaps the hardest work of all, for many people can be affectionate and patient for a time, but the task is to hold on year after year. I have known some men earnestly check their temper under provocation, and bear a great many slights, but at last they have said, “There is an end to everything: I am not going to put up with it any longer. I cannot stand it.” Blessed be God, the Love that Christ gives us endureth all things, as his Love endured to the end, so does the Love which the Spirit works in us endure to the end....

Stand fast in Love; endure not some things, but all things, for Christ’s sake; so shall you prove yourself to be a Christian indeed....

If you desire to see the mirror and the paragon of persevering endurance, look you there! I wish you could see it. I wish these eyes could see the sight as I have sometimes seen it. Behold the cross! See the patient Sufferer and that ribald multitude: they thrust out the tongue, they sneer, they jest, they blaspheme; and there he hangs, triumphant in his patience, conquering the world, and death and hell by enduring “all things.” O Love, thou didst never sit on a throne so imperial as the cross, when there, in the person of the Son of God, thou didst all things endure. Oh that we might copy in some humble measure that perfect pattern which is here set before us. If you would be saviours, if you would bless your generation, let no unkindness daunt you; let no considerations of your own character, or honor, or peace of mind keep you back, but of you may it be said, even as of your Lord, “*He saved others, himself he could not save.*”<sup>453</sup>

What are Love’s labors? God’s heart is Love, and Love is the greatest with the Cross of Christ the greatest Love deed. Christian hearts are indeed a treasury in the minting and exchange of Love. Truly, Love is a dynamic and living concern for another, even the greatest *spiritual* gift. God is Love. We Love God because He first Loved us. The two greatest commands are to Love God and Love others. God so loved the world that He gave us—*labored* to the uttermost—His only Son, Jesus Christ. How could God have been clearer? And extraordinarily, undeservedly, and magnificently, we were made in the Image of God, and our Love shall be made perfect in heaven. Robert Southey wrote a beautiful poem about Love maturing in heaven, called appropriately, “Love Indestructible”:

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<sup>453</sup> Charles H. Spurgeon, *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit* Vol. 27 “Love’s Labors: 1 Cor. 13:7”; 9-4-1881: 641, 648-649, 650-651.

In heaven ambition cannot dwell;  
Nor avarice in the vaults of hell;  
Earthly these passions of the earth,  
They perish where they have their birth.  
But Love is indestructible.  
Its holy flame forever burneth,  
From heaven it came, to heaven returneth;  
Too oft on earth a troubled guest,  
At times deceived, at times opprest,  
It here is tried and purified,  
Then hath in heaven its perfect rest.  
It soweth here in toil and care,  
But the harvest time of Love is there....<sup>454</sup>

In heaven, our dynamic Love shall not become less dynamic but shall mature. In heaven we shall come of age. Our dynamic Love is empowered by our resurrection freedom and shall continue throughout our everlasting and loving lives.

Love flows from the heart. Truly, Love is best experienced when Love is mutual. When Love is mutually shared between two people or between a person and God, there is between both parties a shared concern for the heart that passes between them—even the *beginning* of an everlasting concern. That living and loving concern is fresh moment to moment, and shall only become more lively and genuine, indeed, even more endearing throughout heaven forevermore.

So to this point, we know that we have been raised with Christ and share with Christ a resurrection freedom. We have a wonderful ability in prayer. Indeed, all of these are part of what makes us unique in God's creation, because we have been created in God's Image. In that image, our *Imago Dei*, the best of life on this side of heaven is in Love, and we do have faith and hope that the best of Love is yet to come.

Love's labors endure into our everlasting lives. Let me explain.<sup>455</sup>

Love is a genuine heartfelt concern as well as an action, truly that and much more. God is Love, and our Love is from God. That ties Love to God's nature in a mysterious way which also somehow makes Love eternal. When we Love—and we do Love—we are experiencing something of the

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<sup>454</sup> In Fallows' *The Home Beyond or Views of Heaven and Its Relation to Earth by Over 400 Prominent Thinkers and Writers* (Chicago: M. A. Donohue, 1907, 1st 1883): 317.

<sup>455</sup> A portion of the following has been lifted from my ethics book, *Would You Lie to Save a Life?* (chapter 6:B), wherein we tried to discern God's will and our options in a horrendous dilemma; [www.preciousheart.net/ethics](http://www.preciousheart.net/ethics); in 1968, Commander Lloyd Bucher had to lie to save the lives of his men. Bucher did the best he could with the Love he had.

eternal nature of God. I certainly cannot explain all of that, not any better than I can fathom all of the awesome splendor of the Grand Canyon. This element of our Love transcends time itself, and this *can* be a bit understood.

We all believe that God is able to be with us in time, to some degree, and we also believe that God is above time as well. We talked a little about how we thought that time was actually irrelevant to God, not very important to God, as eternity shall surely crush all of time's relevance for us in heaven—shot dead by eternity's golden arrows.<sup>456</sup>

How does our Love allow us to transcend time like God? Love makes some serious ethical demands of us as well as being the source of our affection and the very treasury of our heart. Ethically speaking, this side of heaven, we must struggle to Love our way forward. That “struggle of Love” is the very essence of all of our Christian virtues and ideals, and Love is even the essence of what we cherish most in our own loving lives—family and friends. Russian poet Apollon Maikov said,

If you wish to live without struggle, without storm, without knowing the bitterness of life, to ripe old age, do not seek a friend and do not call yourself anyone's friend.<sup>457</sup>

With the struggle to Love here on earth, we have and maintain a faith and hope in heaven. In Love, we consider the past, look at the present, and press toward tomorrow, even toward heaven above. In Love and like God in many ways, our vision of our loved one spans all of time.<sup>458</sup>

Love is so much more than a mere ethically right action. Love is like a scarlet thread that runs through life itself and ends in the hands of God in perfect obedience.<sup>459</sup> Such a wonderful place as Heaven has only shadowy reflections here on earth. Thank God for our family and friends and church and what shadows of heaven we do know. Surely, those shadows are but small deposits of our great inheritance.

So let me say it like this: our *Imago Dei* is connected or linked in many ways to God's own eternal Love. “We share in God's Love” is more than a

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<sup>456</sup> Chapter 3.C.

<sup>457</sup> From a poem by Apollon Maikov (1821-1897), a Russian poet, quoted from the diary of the Pavel Florensky in his massive, *The Pillar and Ground of the Truth* (Princeton, 1997): 323.

<sup>458</sup> Paul Tillich, *The Eternal Now*: 130, “The mystery is that we *have* a present; and even more, that we have *our* future also because we anticipate it in the present; and that we have *our* past also, because we remember it in the present. In the present our future and our past is *ours*.... The riddle of the present is the deepest of all riddles of time. Again, there is no answer except from that which comprises all time and lies beyond it—the eternal.”

<sup>459</sup> See chapter 13.B of my book *Would You Lie to Save a Life?* where we bring together the Scarlet Thread and its weaving through the complexities, dead center among all of the ethical fine lines in perfect obedience.

trite phrase or another mere Christian cliché or platitude or colloquialism. Love is more than a mere conduit or fiber-optic cable between us and God, so much more than the mere pulsings of light between God and us, and more than divine radiation nudges between our experience of time and God's time. Very much like God's Love, our Love to God and others has a triune quality where all at once Love knows and sifts the past and has a warm concern in the very present and ongoing moment; best of all, our Love is focused into the near and distant future of the Loved one. Love takes from the past, applies in the present, and projects into the future. Love transcends our experience of time as we labor to Love God, Love others, and even to Love ourselves, just as God Loves us.

As God is Love and God is eternal, then once Love has birthed itself in our hearts—once true Love springs up in our hearts—that Love has an everlasting quality and shall spring forth in our hearts forevermore and even throughout our everlasting loving lives. Hey, I will never see many of my loved ones or friends again, and even those who have died and gone on to heaven—like Kathy Sue—but my Love for them continues. And I have a promise that I shall see them again, that my Love for them shall only be greater in heaven. So it is for God too, when we all finally go home.

You know this in your own family and among your friends. There is no completion to Love. We never come to the end of a loving deed. True Love is mixed with thoughts, feelings, and deeds; and the deeds are but individual actions on the concourse of Love always and forever moving towards more actions in the future. Each action in Love fosters more thought of how to give greater Love down the concourse. While looking the loved one in the eyes, our true Love is also looking down the concourse of time with a view to loving more and nurturing more. Love truly lasts forever.

And we Love God because He first loved us.

Though Love be ethically right in itself, Love is never solely right in itself. Love is never a mere *ethical* state of being. Instead, like God, Love has an eternal and everlasting quality to it. Our Christian Love pushes itself out from the inner reaches of our warm heart to do good deeds for others in the present: that is, at the *same time* we are loving our loved one we are *also* looking beyond the present moment to how to Love better.

Love is not merely an action, and Love for another is not complete with the completion of the deed. Biblical Love is so much more than a mere action. Biblical Love has an eternal quality to it, as Love is from God. Our Love is constantly pushing us forward. Our Love focuses us more on the future in view of how we can nurture in the present.

Biblical Love has a triune focus. Our Love looks to nurture the *whole* person. So our Love demands that we cull the relevant past in what the person needs or does not need, demands that we act in Love in the present

to meet needs, and then demands that we adjust our Love in view of the future effects of our current loving actions. In the present moment, we are transcending time in a way as Love impels us to view all of time in how we nurture our loved ones.

In Love, we *act* in view of our loved one's cumulative past, needs in the present, and how our actions will affect the future. That is, at the same time that we are doing loving actions for our loved one, we have in our mind's eye all of the past, the present, and the future. In our mind's eye, we look at our loved one and are adjusting our actions from the *entirety* of that loved one's life, the past we know, the present we are discerning, and whatever we can forecast of Love's work, respecting that loved one all along the way (even respecting the loved one's free-will rights to reject the Love we give).

Let's clarify further Love's connection between the present and the future. The loving person is impelled forward to more good deeds. In true Love, loving deeds are but small means to the larger end of nurturing the Loved one. Once again at the risk of tedium, Love is *never* the simple gift of a deed; a simple good deed devoid of roots in Love is unbiblical, cheap, and no Love at all. Love suffers long, nurtures affection, and fosters appropriation (and growth) of all the biblical virtues in the loved one. Love pursues the best in the loved one *only when* Love is transcending time, pulling from the past, applying in the present, all with a vision towards that loved one's nurture and even in view of heaven to come. A truly loving act cannot take place on the simple deontological plain. Love always has ends in sight, is always above time in many ways, and Love adjusts the good deeds in a constant series of refinements to meet the best interests of the loved one as perceived down the concourse of time.

We struggle with Love. Often, Love is hard work, even if we would have it no other way; and then at times Love is also easy and a light burden. Mother Teresa of Calcutta, India, once said,

I have found the paradox that if I Love until it hurts,  
there is no more hurt, but only Love.<sup>460</sup>

What we know of Love in our family and among our friends here on earth, as the Bible says in many places, indicates the kind of Love God has for us. No person can Love God—truly—if they do not Love others.<sup>461</sup> Love is of God, but is manifested first in us towards others, as if the very Love to others was in many ways Love to God; for when we Love the “least of these” we are also loving God. If our Love is like God's Love, the pain that comes from great Love only causes our Love to grow for the loved one: see

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<sup>460</sup> James P. Gill, *Love: Fulfilling the Ultimate Quest* (FL: Love Press, 1993): 22.

<sup>461</sup> 1 John.



the loving parent of a wayward child, and poets and song writers. From what we know here of Love, we are assured God has a greater capacity and very much more genuine stake in Love, since God is the source of Love.

In Love we press far beyond the present completion of a loving deed. In Love we look beyond the present moment—continually beyond—toward the ongoing enrichment of our loved ones and of others, indeed, we look for the enrichment of the entire world (even our enemies). What loving father and mother do any specific deed without thought of how that deed affects the future of their child? Every loving father and mother do everything with respect to the next moment, the next hour, or week or year. That is the heartbeat of Love's pulsing concern, the essence of the term "nurture" that is constantly measuring the present results with how to better apply the next hug, nudge, guideline, guidepost, and next push toward responsible self-reliance. And true Love here respects the free will of the child, engaging them, protecting them, even at times overruling them (for some who never enter the house, a time will come when the door shall be closed as well). Love and nurture are in a continual state of extrapolation, always balancing the perceived consequences that come with the good and better consequences that can be obtained.

Love has long and strong arms: one hand has hold on our present life and times, and the other reaches endless forward into the future. Hey! That is just the way we believe God is working out all things to our own good.

In other words, no one can do just one loving deed, for true Love can never be satisfied with just one deed. God is Love and Love is eternal, and once Love is initiated, the loving person is committed and pressed from the core of his or her being to look beyond the present deed's completion to how that deed actually affects the Loved one down the concourse of time.

Once born in our hearts, Love has an everlasting quality, cannot be fully quenched; the flame of true Love cannot be snuffed out, but burns by the oil of God Himself; Love is the evidence of the Spirit's work, the evidence of salvation, and the assurance of heaven to come. Love is not just the best of life for us here on earth, not merely the bread of life: Love is the evidence of God's very presence.

Based upon the totality of our knowledge of the loved person, upon the sum of our worldly and spiritual insight and wisdom, we scrutinize every eye wink and every flinch. In our scrutiny, we search beyond the loving deed to how we can further nurture the loved one in growth, comfort, and wellbeing. With the loved one in our sights, in our hearts, we scrutinize the loved one's demeanor and responses and adjust our affections and nurture accordingly. We try, try hard, that is. We scrutinize not simply to evaluate our effectiveness, not at all. But we scrutinize in order to improve our serve and look ahead for ways in which to nurture Bennett's ten virtues of self-

discipline, compassion, responsibility, friendship, work, courage, perseverance, honesty, loyalty, and faith.<sup>462</sup> We strive to improve our mutual trust, and we work hard to foster the ideals of justice and unselfishness.<sup>463</sup> The essence of true Love is that Love is never simply right in itself, never static, but always and forevermore has an eye and a hug pressing beyond the present moment, pressing towards the loved one's greater joy and more wholesome and secure life. In Love and because of Love, our heart is always outside of time and down the road of life.

Just as God does with us. And God will take us home.

For the Christian, Love is a living and selfless concern of the heart for others and for God, with one eye on the loved one and the other eye looking ahead toward the future and down the concourse of the life of the loved one. God Loves us. We Love God. Love is not static. Oh, the concern I have for those I Love flows from the farthest depths of my heart, and I bask in the Love they have for me. Each day the Love I have is new and fresh, and each day I enjoy and bask afresh in the Love others give to me.



#### **4. Our *Imago Dei*—Our Ability to Relate to God & Others**

Our *Imago Dei* consists of our natural likeness to God in some elements of our nature, most certainly in our personhood, in our personableness, in our inter-personal abilities, and in our abilities to have relationships that have depth on a moral plane and on the eternal plane of our lives. Augustus Strong said,

Man was created a personal being, and was by this personality distinguished from the brute. By personality we mean the twofold power to know self as related to the world and to God, and to determine self in view of moral ends.... This natural likeness to God is inalienable.<sup>464</sup>

We know each other and can know God solely because of our being made in the Image of God. God is the source of our genuine relationships, the source of our greatest treasures of Love in our family, among our friends, and with God Himself.

This ability to Love and to relate to God and others brings to each of us the greatest treasures and deepest sorrows of life. St. Bernard said,

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<sup>462</sup> William J. Bennett, *The Book of Virtues: A Treasury of Great Moral Stories* (Simon & Schuster, 1993). See Milton Rokeach's *Beliefs, Attitudes and Values* (Jossey-Bass, 1968) where he surveyed and ranked "values" by different groups in the country; herein is a treasure of cultural insights.

<sup>463</sup> Reinhold Niebuhr, *Moral Man and Immoral Society* (Charles Scribner's Sons, 1932): 257, "From the perspective of society the highest moral ideal is justice. From the perspective of the individual the highest ideal is unselfishness."

<sup>464</sup> Augustus Strong, *Systematic Theology*: 515-16.

In the being of every man are continents which no Columbus has ever yet discovered, depths of possible joy or sorrow which no plummet has ever yet sounded. A whole heaven, a whole hell, may lie within the compass of his single soul. If we could see the meanest real Christian as he will be in the great hereafter, we should bow before him as John bowed before the angel in the Apocalypse, for we should not be able to distinguish him from God.<sup>465</sup>

The depths of our soul can only be plumbed by God. In our relationships with each other and with God, we come to know ourselves and we come to know others as we relate and Love each other. That ability and desire and need to relate is the essence of our *Imago Dei*, and the actions of relating are the manifestation of our *Imago Dei*. Shakespeare said,

What a piece of work is man! How noble is reason! How infinite the faculty!  
In form and moving how express and admirable! In action how like an angel!  
In apprehension how like a god!<sup>466</sup>

Pascal said,

Man is greater than the universe; the universe may crush him, but it does not know that it crushes him.<sup>467</sup>

Whitton said,

God is not only the *Giver of* but the *Sharer of* my life. My natural powers are that part of God's power which is lodged with me in trust to keep and use.<sup>468</sup>

Indeed, our ability to Love God and others is the quintessence of our *Imago Dei* and that essence is manifested in life when we Love God and Love each other. Life is all about relationships. Nothing else matters much.

In addition to the Christ-Freedom and Shadow of Prayer dynamics, as two solid cables across this Grand Canyon, we can certainly affirm that our being made in the Image of God is a superstructure of sorts. Our *Imago Dei* will remain somewhat mysterious until we receive our full inheritance, but we are not without instruction. Our *Imago Dei* sets us apart from the animals, to be sure. Yet we come to see our noble calling and what we *should be* in the life of Jesus Christ: Jesus and the Father are one, Jesus did the Father's will perfectly, Jesus loved His Father and people, and Jesus always pointed us to the Father. In many ways the criteria of *Imago Dei* was set for us in the example of Jesus Christ.

I think this point of concurrence between the North and South Rims of the Grand Canyon is noteworthy and something to build upon in these struggles. We all recognize that only Jesus Christ is "the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of His being" (Heb. 1:3). We are to be

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<sup>465</sup> Strong, *Systematic Theology*: 515.

<sup>466</sup> Strong, *Systematic Theology*: 515, from Hamlet 2:2.

<sup>467</sup> Strong, *Systematic Theology*: 515.

<sup>468</sup> Strong, *Systematic Theology*: 515, from *Gloria Patri*: 94, italics mine.

like Christ, and one day we shall be made like Christ. Christ is our criteria for our earthly life, and the best is yet to come.

Look at the Grand Canyon *now*. I am sure we missed something. I do not know what. But the evening cool seems to rest me. Did you know that no two days are alike on the South Rim of the Grand Canyon?

Furthermore, we were not *merely* created. Let's reinforce this. Far from the rest of God's great and good creation, we were the climax of God's creation. And the best of life is not even in what the eye can see, but in what the heart can feel and what the soul can experience. Erickson said:

The image itself is that set of qualities that are required for these relationships and this function to take place. They are those qualities of God which, reflected in human beings, make worship, personal interaction, and work possible.<sup>469</sup>

What we know and experience in the very best of life springs from our soul and from the treasure of hearts, springs from the essence of who we are as human beings made in God's Image.

The image is something in the very nature of humans, in the way in which they were made. It refers to something a human *is* rather than something a human *has* or *does*. By virtue of being human, one is in the image of God....

[Our image enables] the fulfillment of destiny. The image is the powers of personality that make humans, like God, beings capable of interacting with others, of thinking and reflecting, and of willing freely.<sup>470</sup>

In the Image of God, we have a destiny and know we have a destiny.

The human was intended to know, Love, and obey God, and live in harmony with other humans... Humans are most fully human when they are active in these relationships and performing this function, fulfilling their telos,<sup>471</sup> God's purpose for them.<sup>472</sup>

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<sup>469</sup> Millard Erickson, *Christian Theology*: 518, "the image of God is what makes humans human." Erickson outlines the historical views under the Substantive, in that our bodily makeup (as with Mormon doctrine) or in some aspect of our psychology or spiritual makeup (as in our ability to reason abstractly as in Platonism or empirically investigate as in Thomistic-Aristotelianism), the Relational in that it is the act of relating (Brunner, *Man in Revolt*; in Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* Vol. 3:1, and seen in the vertical relation to God and horizontal relation with each other), the Functional in our charged dominion (Leonard Verduin, *Somewhat Less Than God*). Erickson indicates that our image is not merely substantive, relational or functional (530-531); concluding, the image of God in us is universal, not lost in sin, no degrees from one to another, and is indeed substantive "the very nature of humans," and entails human destiny in general (532).

<sup>470</sup> Millard Erickson, *Christian Theology*: 532.

<sup>471</sup> Telos is the end for which something is made.

<sup>472</sup> Millard Erickson, *Christian Theology*: 532-33.

The essence of our *Imago Dei* is in our ability to Love and serve God and to Love one another, and the manifestation of our *Imago Dei* is in the Love that we share and cherish and nurture. Indeed, the Love between us on earth, and the Love between us and God, become the most treasured parts of life itself. God is the source of our genuine relationships.

The highest manifestation of our *Imago Dei* is seen in Love for another person and Love for God in view of heaven to come. In such Love, in view of heaven, we connect our own eternal life with God's life, the God who is Love. In many and mysterious ways we share God's own eternal Love, and as such we are then exhibiting the best of our *Imago Dei*.

**We have been given the ability to share God's own Love.**

Let me say it like this. The ability to Love is the quintessence of our *Imago Dei*, and the Love that we experience and share is the manifestation and greatest treasure of our *Imago Dei* (as cloudy as that manifestation is this side of heaven). By virtue of our new freedom in Christ and in our ability to pray, we exhibit the highest manifestations of our *Imago Dei* this side of heaven—Loving God with all of our hearts and loving others as our selves.

And the best is yet to come.

Whether it is in digging deeper into Classical Theism's meanings or giving more credence to Open Theism or some other doctrinal development, we cannot deny the issue of genuineness in our living relationship with God—the First Doctrine in the theology of God. These issues of genuineness allow God Himself to have a degree of freshness today that He did not have with me 1,000 years ago, simply because I in my own fullness was not there 1,000 years ago.

Ethically speaking, the highest exhibition of our *Imago Dei* is in our stewardship of time this side of heaven. The treasures of our hearts cannot lie; what we truly Love dictates how we will spend our time. This stewardship of time is our ability to think ahead and responsibly make decisions that affect the future (and we will be accountable).<sup>473</sup> This side of heaven, our stewardship of time is just a mere exhibition of our being made in God's Image, just the evidence that we have a capacity similar to God's ability to look and plan ahead, similar to God's ability to make choices in real time. Our stewardship of time is another certain exhibition and evidence of our Image of God, our *Imago Dei*.

The glory of being made in God's Image, the highest manifestation of being bearers of God's Image is precisely in our ability to Love God and others and in our ability to receive Love from God and others.

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<sup>473</sup> Seen in my book *Would You Lie to Save a Life?* (1st books, 2003) on ethics: see chapter 13.B: Scarlet Thread Through "Time," Our *Imago Dei*, Christ the Criterion.

Our very ability to relate with less dysfunction is what will be made complete when this perishable puts on the imperishable. It will not be mere knowledge that will be made complete in heaven. Not at all. I will have no bad breath in heaven while speaking to Christ or Abraham or my loved ones who have gone on before me—no physical, psychological or spiritual bad breath at all. All of my own pesky dysfunctions (and yours too) will be transformed when we shall put on our imperishability and immortality. Because of Christ's work, we will be made like Him. Then, in heaven, we will be able to fully and more freely relate to God—just as Christ is doing right now.



### 5. Our *Imago Dei*—Our Love the Mere Image of God's Love

If that is true for you and me (mere images of God), how much more true is it for God? God's Love is no less and no less fresh day by day than our own.

Love is most important, the most crucial ingredient of our Christian life and of life itself, for we have been plainly, forcefully, even redundantly told that we *cannot* Love God or *know* the Love of God unless we know a true Love for our brothers and sisters.<sup>474</sup> The Love that we share in our families and among ourselves is like the Love of God, day-to-day dynamic and fresh and moving, ever welling up in our hearts and seeking new ways to nurture the loved one.<sup>475</sup> God could not have been clearer. Just as we experience something fresh each day, God experiences something fresh and even more profoundly fresh in His great Love for us each and every day.

The biblical nature of Love is that of an ongoing flow of concern from our heart to another. The flow of Love from one person's heart toward another person (friend or foe) is in a way unilateral—first—yet, longing in Love, we hope and will take great joy should the loved one respond in Love. Nevertheless, once the underground fountain of everlasting Love has commenced, there is no end, no turning off of the spigot, no quenching of the spirit of Love's flow. You see, Love will endure.<sup>476</sup>

That is the gospel, the good news. God first loved us.

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<sup>474</sup> 1 John 2:9-11 3:11-24, 4:7-21; yet all of 1 John is an exposition on Love as the most significant result of one's salvation, even the chief evidence of one's eternal security.

<sup>475</sup> The articulate and staunch Calvinist Boettner defends the doctrine of perseverance of the saints (*Reformed Doctrine of Predestination*: 182-201) as integral to election and limited atonement, and he notes how the Love of God is what draws us irresistibly to Himself (and this goes against some of the freedom we defend later—we are not Calvinist): yet even the mighty Boettner waxes near poetic and even quotes Charles Hodge in the subtle dynamism of Love's workings, for (Boettner, 186, quoting Hodge's *Systematic Theology*, 3:112).

<sup>476</sup> 1 Corinthians 13.

Our loving lives among ourselves and with God entail some give and take in mutual Love and concern, and our Love shall be consummated and made perfect in heaven. In heaven, we shall Love as God does in a perfected freedom and righteousness and peace, and that Love between all of us will be the best part of heaven inside of God's great light and life.

What we know down here of Love, on this side of heaven, is simply the cloudy side, for we have been made in the Image of God. Yet we have a heart-warming faith and hope that one day we shall be made like Him. When the clouds are cleared from this earthly pale, we shall then begin to Love as God does now and Love with a living and ongoing fresh concern from the depths of our heart towards every precious heart, day to day, millennia to millennia, and forevermore.



#### **6. Our *Imago Dei*—Ability to have Awe in Loving Relationships**

On the edge of the Grand Canyon, in view of all the splendor, the natural beauty of it all—what is it that makes me stand in awe in the first place? I am so small, so insignificant. What is the 100-mile-long Grand Canyon compared to the Milky Way galaxy that is about over 250,000 light years across?

Less than a century ago astronomers knew ... the Milky Way, which they believed held about 100 million stars. Then observers discovered that some of the fuzzy globs in the sky weren't in our galaxy, but were galaxies in their own right.... Today we know that the Milky Way contains 100 billion stars and that there are some 100 billion galaxies in the universe.<sup>477</sup>

When thought of, the Grand Canyon is hardly a scratch compared to our solar system and less than that compared to the Milky Way galaxy. Likewise, when thought of, the Milky Way galaxy is barely a grain of sand in the ocean of the universe full of greater galaxies—over 100 *billion!* we are told. I know someone must be called to count them, but I am sure glad I can just *enjoy* the night sky.<sup>478</sup>

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<sup>477</sup> Ron Cowen, "Discovering the First Galaxies," *National Geographic* (2-2003): 10.

<sup>478</sup> I have a question, too, but I want to preface the question with a statement of my unqualified allegiance to the Bible as truth. What does it mean that Abraham's descendents will be as the stars of the sky (Gen. 15:5, 22:17, 26:4—three times!; and to Moses in Ex. 32:13 God affirmed again that the starry promise was not only to Abraham, but to Isaac and Jacob too), when 100 billion actual observable galaxies with each galaxy containing from 1-100 billion stars each (like our Milky Way galaxy), rounded to 50 billion stars in each galaxy, would equal around 5,000 billion persons? What does that mean? Perhaps only what the naked eye can see, but then the observable number has been reached. If not, how can Christ's return be imminent when we have not even approached a tenth of the known minimum of heavenly stars in the combined number of persons since Adam? I kind of hope it does not mean that we will have to wait until there have been over 500 billion earthly souls [Footnote continued on the next page ... *do enjoy*]

Compared to the ever-expanding universe and billions of galaxies, our own Milky Way is not much, and the Grand Canyon much less. In perspective, then, and in perfect accord with Classical Theism, I am really nothing—when you think about it, when you cogitate upon it.

I cannot explain the grandeur of the Grand Canyon. I cannot fully explain the splendor. In fact, it is the very nature of the words themselves—grandeur and splendor—that are beyond full definition. I believe that my abilities to sense and to feel grandeur and splendor are part of my *Imago Dei*, the Image of God that God granted to me. When God made me in His own Image, God Himself granted to me the ability to have wonder and awe and granted to me the ability to sense grandeur and splendor at His very own good creation (that He Himself took pleasure in making: “good,” God said). The greatest of all, in making you and me in His Image, God granted to us the higher honor of sensing grandeur and splendor in a real relationship with another person—indeed, as well as with Him too.

The highest function of being made in the Image of God is our ability to Love. And if we do not Love one another, then we cannot Love God.

As we have noted, one of the highest expressions of our *Imago Dei* is in our own stewardship of time;<sup>479</sup> so too here. My ability to sense and feel grandeur and splendor on the South Rim of the Grand Canyon is part of my ability to sense and appreciate life in a spontaneous moment-to-moment sense of awe. But my sense of awe and splendor on the edge of the Grand Canyon does not compare to the grandeur of child’s hug.

The splendor of the Grand Canyon pales in comparison to the fellowship and loyalty and Love I share in family and friendship. My decades-old long-standing friendships are like refined gold, ever appreciating in value. Let me explain the higher parts of my being made in the Image of God, the best parts of my *Imago Dei*.

I Love this stuff. Don’t you?

Pick up another rock. Throw the rock far. You cannot hear the rock fall. On the edge, the Grand Canyon has no perceivable bottom or limit. Wow.

The Grand Canyon of God’s genuine real-time loving concern has no limit. Isn’t God good? ... He is *alive*! Let me relate ... share ... cuddle this further. There is no comparison to the grandeur and sense of awe-struck pride that a mother and father have in their hearts ... than when their own

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born and saved before God brings us all home. Even 50 billion would push the return of Christ ahead another decade or two. What do you think, and I would Love for anyone to send me the best biblical references that give the best biblical answer to this inside of the belief of the imminency of Christ’s return: [www.preciousheart.net](http://www.preciousheart.net).

<sup>479</sup> See my ethics book, *Would You Lie to Save a Life?* at [www.preciousheart.net/ethics](http://www.preciousheart.net/ethics).



teenager comes of age. When a person is sick and their pastor visits. When you are stranded and scared, and a strong and good person comes to help—most especially if it is a friend. The best of life, this side of heaven, is within the bonds of a good and long-standing relationship, which is God's gift to us in our *Imago Dei*—our ability to Love one another, parent to child, child to parent, friend to friend, heart to precious heart.

The ties that bind us together in Love and fellowship are invisible and more precious than the finest gems. Who in the history of the world does not know this? That is the difference between us and the animals. We have been created in the Image of God, and what we share in our *Imago Dei* among ourselves is the very quintessence of God Himself—Love.

How can God have been clearer? The best that we share with each other in Love—in all of our childish dysfunctions—is but the Image of God and the cloudy dark side. And God as creator God and *The Source* of our measly image is the greater and more genuine side of the relationship. The freshness I experience each day in the invisible bonds of Love is nothing compared to what God experiences in freshness, because He is God and the more genuine side—the Father, *Abba*.

What I share with my family and my best friends, I also have been divinely empowered to share with God by His own resurrection power. What I experience as genuine and heart-warming with family and friends, I can also experience in a greater measure with my heavenly Father. I have been made in the Image of God, and the genuineness of my relationships with others is just a very small token to the experience God Himself has with me.

Let me say this in yet another way for the backward-pushing mule herders. Polar opposite and so very contrary to Bruce Ware's soggy effigy, *precisely* what I experience in a genuine relationship with my family and friends here on earth is just a small measure of the genuine relationship *God feels* for me. Now read the Gospel of John, I John, and Psalms 23 and 139.<sup>480</sup> To help me along, God gave us a great revelation of Himself. God enjoys my coming to Him in my closet. As tough and dysfunctional as this life is, this life is just the dark side of what is to come. And the new shall replace the old as the old is consumed with fire.

Can it get *any* clearer?

I cannot fully explain the grandeur and splendor of the Grand Canyon, much less the splendor of friendship, and much, much less the splendor of my relationship with my heavenly Father. That is just my side, my own cloudy side. I sure cannot explain the splendor God Himself feels for me. What I do know is that God does feel some splendor and does have pleasure

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<sup>480</sup> *Please*, in this light, now read the Gospel of John, I John, and Psalms 23 & 139.

in me, even when I am contrite—heck—even when I am a prodigal. That is the New Testament message, blaring like a news broadcast. That is

***The Good News,***

the evangelical message of the church, that “God so loved the world.” I cannot fully explain all of God’s feelings in a full contrast with my feelings, because I am the child and He is the Father. And from the father-son picture in the story of the prodigal son, we can and should infer much, even volumes, for that was the high purpose of the story of the prodigal son.<sup>481</sup>

Indeed, I cannot explain all of God’s thoughts and feelings, as high and father-like as they are. Furthermore, my earthly and fatiguing cogitations of explaining actually distract from the splendor itself, distract from the Love itself. My cogitation moves me somewhat to the left of my focus upon my enjoyment of God’s Love in the moment. There is no great demand to explain God’s feelings in the first place, except when we are called to defend the gospel against the doubt fostered by the pagan perceptions of a sterile Eternal Now (so prevalent in Classical Theism).

Truly ... I fully believe, one cannot fully explain the grandeur and splendor of the Grand Canyon, the Milky Way Galaxy, or the greatest of all in that splendorous sense of belonging and gentle affection and warmth of Love in a family hug or in a best friend’s handshake.

Who can? The person who thinks they can, I dare say, has not truly known the inexpressible treasure and splendor of Love. Truly, the attempt to explain distracts from the grandeur and splendor itself. Remarkably, the more one turns to the exercise of explaining—there and then—the more one must turn from the enjoyment of the splendor.

This does not take away from psychology and work done in exploring and explaining the nature of relationships. This does not deny the value of learning from the consequences of failed relationships. This does not demean the value of helping each other to communicate and appreciate that friendship is good to the body and the soul and the community—not in the least. This is merely a statement of the obvious.

When we do attempt to explain, we must turn away from the splendor—just for a moment—in order to create words. After writing our words, we can then return to the genuine give-and-take enjoyment of the splendor of a loving relationship. We need to work on increasing and enhancing our ability to relate to others. Learning how to win friends and influence people

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<sup>481</sup> On top is the New Testament, though we could footnote volumes of Christian and secular views of the nature and nurture of family bonds, and at [www.preciousheart.net](http://www.preciousheart.net) there are several sets of bibliographies on pastoral skills, crisis, grief, listening, and divorce.

is hard work.<sup>482</sup> Perhaps I need a refresher course too.<sup>483</sup> Certainly the Classical Theists do.

This world would not need wars if everyone was willing to share Love. We could go far in world peace if everyone who knows of the splendor of friendship and the wonder of a child's hug could realize that such splendor was possible between their enemies and foreign neighbors as well as among their own kind. I read the biography of Jacques-Yves Cousteau many years ago, and I apologize that I cannot remember the precise book.<sup>484</sup> In that biography, Cousteau offered a means to world peace through a global child exchange program. Every child would be required to spend one full year in a foreign country. That is something to think about.

More so, if we all truly knew how to take active steps in bridge building, where *could* we go?



### **7. Our *Imago Dei*—Our Love Transcends Time like God's Love**

A selfless Love nurtures a growing product, and that nurturing has a dedicated focus beyond the present moment in time. One of the best parts of Love is how it presses us beyond the present moment. Love is really not much if it only dwells in the present, for the best of Love's essence always reaches from the present towards the future in nurture, in endurance, and in hope. Jimmy Carter wisely observed,

The future is sometimes fearsome, and I haven't even spoken of the inevitable, devastating changes when friends and family are parted by death. Only the certainty of God's Love can ultimately overcome the uncertainties of this earthly life.<sup>485</sup>

Love has a triune quality where all at once Love knows the past, has a warm concern in the very present and ongoing moment, and also our Love is focused into the near and distant future of the Loved one. Love transcends our experience of time as we Love others. Our Love for others impels us to transcend time itself, much like God does in His Love for us.

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<sup>482</sup> Dale Carnegie, *How to Win Friends and Influence People* (NY: Pocket, 1964).

<sup>483</sup> By the way, my doctoral dissertation is on Empathic Helping Skills, and you can see it online at my web site [www.preciousheart.net](http://www.preciousheart.net) with several good bibliographies on helping skills. I have really tried to learn how to listen. As a former Classical Theist, it was *very* hard to do. Sincerely.

<sup>484</sup> Perhaps it was: Jacques Cousteau and Alexis Sivirine, *Jacques Cousteau's Calypso* (NY: H. N. Abrams, 1983; 192p.); see also Roger Cans, *Cousteau, "Captain Planet": Biographie*. (Paris: Sang de la terre, 1997; 296p.); Richard Munson, *Cousteau, the Captain and His World*. (1st ed. NY: W. Morrow, 1989; 316p.); Bernard Violet, *Cousteau: Une Biographie* (Paris: Fayard, 1993; 318p.).

<sup>485</sup> Jimmy Carter, *Source of Strength: Meditations on Scripture for a Living Faith* (NY: Random House, 1997): 192.

We never do a loving deed that is outside of our considerations of the loved one's entire life—past, present, and future. Therein and in Love, we transcend time in many ways like God who knows our history, our present, and has a destiny for us. Our Love impels us to constantly look for the best in our loved ones as we are constantly looking at that loved one's entire life. Ever so delicately, our Love obsesses and presses these three dimensions all at once or individually, seeking God, nurturing family and friends, desiring to affect the world, and even seeking our own growth in Christian holiness, wholeness, social ability, and so much more.



### **8. Our *Imago Dei*—Treasuring the Moment of Love**

**Treasuring the Moment of Love** is the best part of a relationship. The best part is not the description or even the photograph or parable. The best part is the moment-to-moment enjoyment of the loved one's presence—the very ability to *treasure* the moment of Love as the present unfolds. Yes, that treasuring-of-the-moment includes at the same time a culling from the past and a focus upon the immediate and long-range future. But all of us who have known Love, know that Love is more than mere knowledge and more than mere fuzzy feeling in our chest. We all know that the most precious treasure of Love is how our whole person is consumed in the present moment with such a possession of soul that, though the past and future are there as concerns, it is the present moment itself (like me and you here today) that is the highest treasure of Love in life.

When Jesus said that wherever two or three are gathered in my name, there I am in the midst, that presence of Jesus is made a spiritual reality when His Spirit bears witness with our spirit that we are His children. We are His body. And we are members one of another.

Our sense of presence of each other and our sense of God's presence are truly but the downside of what God experiences of us. Indeed, I am supposed to Love God more than my family. My feeling of treasure in Love—as the image of God—reveals that God treasures us too, as He is a Father and as Jesus is my brother and friend. That is good news. God's present and real-time *enjoyment of me* is not any less than what I have for a friend or family, but God's enjoyment of me is greater than I have for any friend or family, more lively, real, genuine, and unique moment to moment (so very contrary to the static and settled God of Classical Theism). Whatever I understand about my own treasure of family Love and dear friendship is so much more shallow than what God has for me, *precisely* because I am the child and He is the Father and because I am the image and He is the Image-Maker and Christ the exact Image of the Father.

Let me say that again. God's Love and enjoyment of me is not any less than what I have for my family or my friend, not in the least, but God's enjoyment of me is greater than any affectionate enjoyment I have for my family or my friend. That is so because I am the mere Image of God (and I am not God), and that is so because I am but the child. My inability to understand the full nature of God's real-time enjoyment of me is simply the result of my being the child in my relationship to Him.

What is most important—remember these words—what is most important is that our measly attempts at explanation do not degrade the degree of splendor or the reality of the splendor. The splendor of our invisible Love for each other and the grandeur of our relational ties that bind us to each other are God's gift to us, our *Imago Dei*. And God wants me—made in His Image as I am—to relate to Him too, more so than even with my own family and friends. Those are the words of Christ, *for God's sake*, and we should pay heed to them. Of course, this is only possible through the divinely empowered resurrection freedom I have in Christ, a freedom that allows boldness in prayer inside of the very throne room of God the Father.

There is a Love among those outside of the Christian faith as well, as we have all share the essential elements of being made in God's Image; our *Imago Dei* is a human gift. Yet we also must understand that the highest experience of Love in our *Imago Dei* can only come within a relationship with God, only after being born again, only after becoming a true child of God. For there are spiritual elements and connections that can only be seen and felt *inside* of the fellowship of the saints. To truly know the best of Love this side of heaven, one *must* be birthed from heaven and maintain a somewhat healthy heavenly citizenship, that is *being* a good son or daughter of our heavenly Father. And the best is yet to come.

Let us not be confused. Whatever I experience of genuineness in my loving relationships this side of heaven *pales* in comparison to the genuineness that God Himself experiences with me, toward me, about me—as His thoughts do outnumber the sand on the seashore. Fresh each and every second. God enjoys me right now in a fashion He did not yesterday, and so much more today than 1,000 years ago.

Here is precisely where Bruce Ware actually degrades our own human relationships in his soggy effigy of us humans as information-exchange units, as the dynamism becomes confused with computer chips buzzing out binary code (some faster than others).<sup>486</sup>

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<sup>486</sup> Even so, even in the degradation, Bruce Ware, *God's Lesser Glory*, is above most Classical Theists, for at least he *tries* to deal with genuineness (unlike Frame and many others). This should make other Classical Theists burn the night oil, though I suspect not.

When the father comes home, the father knows the two-year-old child will be glad to see him. That is foreknowledge.<sup>487</sup> When the child is scared, the father knows the two-year-old will cry, “Daddy!” That is foreknowledge. There is nothing new that the child can inform the father about, nothing of intention or of knowledge. Whatever and however God may know of the next 1,000 years—so what? The extent of God’s exhaustive foreknowledge beyond the next five seconds is not the most important part of our relationship with God.

Whatever God foreknows—even in exhaustive-settled or in dynamic foreknowledge—let us not degrade God out of the freshness in His own experience. Let us not degrade God out of a freshness that comes today in a fashion that the freshness did not come to God 1,000 years ago. The greatest part of human life is Love—our *Imago Dei* in experience—is but the mere Image of God’s Love. I treasure my family and friends’ Love today, and that is the greatest treasure in life. *That* Love is no less with God.

What is the most substantial part of our genuine relationship in our *Imago Dei*? What is it to be made in the Image of God? Our very ability to Love itself and our ability to treasure genuinely loving relationships is the most significant part of our *Imago Dei*. And the very best of any relationship is not mere information exchange from one person to another as though the other person were ignorant. It’s blasphemy to say that God has any less ability than we do. The freshness of our Love day to day is no less for God.

Bruce Ware in his soggy effigy actually made over humanity in the likeness of an academic class. In so doing, humanity lost a lot of dignity. Even my dog Domino has a higher function than that. Compared to Einstein, my dog is pretty dumb, dumb intellectually. But my dog can relate ... probably better than Einstein. Sure, you could say there was some information exchange, but tell that to Domino. I know Domino, and he really and truly does not care about information; all he cares about in this world are hugs and attention. Just look at the guy. All he wants is to be in the in-crowd. Amazingly, Domino does not even care about food like normal dogs. I feed him once a day. At the end of the day, you can set his bowl out, and then call him and he will come for a hug and leave his bowl behind. Listen, all Domino



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<sup>487</sup> For the negatively inclined Classical Theist—grimace, boo-hoo—I am *not* saying this is just like God’s foreknowledge. Stay focused, Ok?

wants is to be in your face getting scratched behind the ear.

Domino's *presence* is great. I Love my dog, sure I do. But that Love is—I must admit (*sorry Domino*)—several layers removed from the Love I have for my family and friends. So too the *presence*.

Do you understand the difference between information exchange, on the one hand, and on the other hand, a true relationship between people where the splendid *treasure* of presence is more important than information exchange? Of course not. We try to explain it and have thousands of illustrations. Even the splendor of the Grand Canyon or even the splendor of my fellowship with Domino (the *can-relate-dog*) cannot be explained fully, and both of those pale to my Love for you and my family.

You understand the point of inserting Domino above, my good dog. Domino can relate. You know that. Let me pretend to insert a picture of me and my \_\_?\_\_, or you and your \_\_?\_\_. I would like to share many pictures here, but I believe words will do far better as they can allow your imagination to carry your own feelings of worth higher than any picture can portray (my vacation pictures are precious to me, but they may put you to sleep). Oh, the sweetness of a good *human* relationship in family or in a trusted-good-best friend has so little to do with information as much as that sweet, sweet treasure has to do with one eye wink of acknowledgement by the loved one—that, oh, that cherished preciousness of your presence.

It is the smile. The attitude of gratitude. The respite of respect. The calm of compassion. The held hand. The lingering hug-snug. The Love.

That is why a hug is better than a book to the soul—especially in pain.

A doctor can set a bone, but only a mother can calm a fear.

Let me explain. I know how hard this is, especially for the Classical Theist—so hard of head with a thousand years of cud and a persisting pagan inheritance of a stale Tenseless Sense (or whatever). I know, because I used to push mules backward too. It is very hard to push mules backwards.

So let me explain.

When a father (or mother) holds a child in his lap, looking into the child's eyes, the child makes a pretense of communication while the father looks past the communication to the heart of the child—as our heavenly Father does in His divine sovereignty.<sup>488</sup> God may even be looking in exhaustive dynamic foreknowledge, but that is not as biblically clear as God's genuine real-time temporal presence, where God Himself is getting a real kicker of joy in the present moment that God did not get yesterday. God's foreknowledge is not as important as God's genuine real-time loving

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<sup>488</sup> Rom 8:26: "In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express." (NIV).

relationship to each one of us, uniquely individual—the First Doctrine—because we ourselves *cannot* fully know the mind of God and because we *can* understand fatherhood and motherhood.

The vastly more important and definitive issue is the genuine loving relationship, in which God truly responds in some degree of spontaneity: the theological proof of which is that we are made in His Image and the empirical proof of which is that peace that passes understanding (the divine hug perhaps). Biblically, the more important issue is the genuineness of God's relationship to us—*God with us*<sup>489</sup>—the First Doctrine indeed in the theology of God. Our earthly relationships are but poor imitations, as rich and treasured as they are, but mere imitations of the true quality of relationship that God Himself experiences. God Himself initiated the relationship when He created the world, preserved through the fall of Adam in a great promise, bought back on the Cross, and promised to fulfill with everlasting life in the return of Christ. We are going home! And one day God will host a great heavenly feast. Can it get any cleaner or clearer.

Our experience in relationships, as genuine and nurturing and as precious as they are—these are but small things, the lesser parts of our being made in God's Image. The best of all is that our dynamic earthly relations reveal a portion of how God Himself is lovingly concerned and how He Himself dynamically relates in all fullness with us now in the present. Be careful here. That is general view of God to all humankind. With the household of faith, God's Love is able to be perceived by the children themselves in greater measure, as they have been born again and are spiritually connected. The best part of our own ability to relate to one another is how God sees us; the downside is that we cannot see from His own eyes just how genuinely loved and splendidous we are to Him day to day. All we have is the evidence of our value to Him. The evidence of our value to Him is called the Cross.

Life is all about relationships.

In the present, God Himself has a genuine relationship with you and me that has some give and take, a genuineness *not* based on mere information exchange. Truly, as Open Theism enlightens, there are a number of passages where God exchanges information and appears to grow in knowledge and even repents, but those passages are not the chief passages. Open Theists like Pinnock and Sanders have illuminated a large number of biblical passages, and those interpretations have sparked an interest (and persecution as seen in the appendices). But this dynamic relationship is seen on nearly every page of the Bible, as in the cherished John 3:16 where God

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<sup>489</sup> Immanuel, indeed = God is with us: name given to Christ in Matt 1:23, after Isa. 7:14 (7:10-16, 8:8); see footnote 189 for background on Immanuel.



is the Father and we are the children: “whosoever believeth” has a dynamic quality or means nothing at all. And if John 3:16 is dynamic, then nearly every page of the New Testament glows with a God who truly has *open* arms. We cannot underestimate the ramifications of this dynamism, this revelation in the Bible about God’s real-time Love that takes real joy in one sinner repenting and gets truly sad when one of His creatures curses Him.<sup>490</sup>

I’m a prison chaplain. One day in about 1999, I was walking toward one of the buildings to visit with a prisoner. On our general prison population side, each prisoner has a window by his bed. When going to any building, any person (employee or prisoner) has to walk within 30 feet of one of those 75 windows in each building. On my way to the building, a prisoner saw me coming (he knew I was the chaplain, and I did not know him), and I heard this man holler out from one of the windows, “F\_\_k Jesus.” That was as profane a remark as I ever heard. I have only heard it once in these last ten or so years, don’t care to hear it again, and I doubt that I shall ever forget its ugly profane and pagan tone. I do believe that God Himself felt sad that day at hearing those words. I just shook my head and did not say a thing. That prisoner truly did not know what he was saying.

Our God is alive. In creating you and me in His own Image, God gave up nothing in His ability to experience the best of life and even the worst of life. God does not lose anything by childish profanity, and He does not lose anything in His sadness for the lost sinner’s antics. But God is the richer when I pray, because God truly Loves to hear from me.

Now, let us take this to the next level. I am with you on the South Rim of the Grand Canyon. Truly, this has been a very good day. Breezy and lively. You are a good friend.

Honestly, though, instead of you, I wish I could be here with my deceased sweetheart, Kathy Sue. You know, Kathy Sue and I had talked about going to the Grand Canyon many times. I lost my Kathy Sue in August of 2003. I lost my father in 1982, and most of my grandparents followed him to heaven in the late 1980’s and early 1990’s. I wish we all could be together today. I wish my father and mother and grandparents could have met Kathy Sue and had gotten to know and Love her as I did. She made friends easier than anyone I have ever met, and I have met a lot of people, a lot of religious people too. I wish we all could be together one more time and enjoy the Grand Canyon.

You are a good friend. Oh, you too ... Hah? (Let me wipe my eye.)

You have some family and friends that have special places in your heart too, do you? You have lost some close family and friends in the last ten years too. I knew it. Even some family more close to you than me? That’s

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<sup>490</sup> See the introduction section D.1 and *whosoever will*.

sad, but great. In fact, now that you have shared that with me, that makes this *moment*, this precious moment even more special between you and me. Yes, that is information exchange—I suppose ... I think? But the preciousness of the moment is more, is ... is somehow above the mere info-exchange as well. And when I think about, that glint in your eye, that strength in your spirit and sensitivity in your soul, I *think* I saw that loss of yours in the pain in your face and in how you touched my hand *yesterday*! In a mysterious way, I *already knew* you have had some losses; I just knew—I just knew with a rock-solid certainty, I tell you—I just knew yesterday that you were not a virgin to grief, not a foreigner to the gravesite of a dearly loved family member. I knew *yesterday* that you have had experience in the valley of the shadow of death before you had ever told me so. I could see that *yesterday* in your eyes.

Hey ... wait a minute ... did I just experience something of déjà vu or some kind of post-trauma perception of elemental spiritual insight, even presaging yesterday something that would unfold today?—oh no ... yes, yes, maybe even a tad little bit yesterday of some kind of elemental foreknowledge of today, made in God's own image as I am.<sup>491</sup> Yesterday, could I have actually had known with a degree of confidence that today—in heart-to-precious-heart exchange—that we would become this close and that you would reveal to me what I intuitively, spiritually just knew about you yesterday. I knew yesterday that you had walked through the valley of death several times, and today you confirmed what I knew yesterday. Even though I was not thinking hard about you and me yesterday—wherever we were yesterday—somehow yesterday I just knew we would reach this stage of our friendship if we continued our journey together.

Oh, truly, that is probably too spiritual to apprehend further. I do sincerely mean that life is precious, and friends and family are treasures because of something far deeper than mere information. The precious treasure of life is called Love, running like river, fresh like Spring, and enduring for the rest of our everlasting loving lives—hey, hey, getting better all along the way the closer we get to the source of the spring and the closer we get to the greatest lover of souls—God, the Father, *Abba*.

Thanks ... here's a hug. What a wonderful day it has been.



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<sup>491</sup> No, I am not claiming divine foreknow, for some so negatively inclined to stretch things out context, like some of those in the appendices.

## B. God's Love Is Dynamic ... Alive

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1. What Changes for God? Not the Same 1,000 Years Ago as Today
2. Can God's Perfected Love Grow?
3. What's the Difference Between God's Foreknowledge & Experience
4. God's Love Steadfast, Dynamic, Crimson Shades to Infinity

### 1. What Changes for God? *Not* Same 1,000 Years Ago as Today

The God of the New Testament has a dynamism in a relationship that has flux. At a bare minimum, “God’s relationship” is like that of an earthly Father to a child. This is New Testament theological baby pabulum. Yet pabulum is still too tough for some to digest. Some are not out of the preemie ward yet. It is clear in their writings.<sup>492</sup> Pabulum is not so much an analogy as a clear biblical reference to spiritual milk, not so much derogatory as a New Testament description itself. Babies and small children are not ashamed of their youth or dependence (struggle with their emotions and freedom as they do). Only adolescents are ashamed of their youth.

The most important question to ask is not “*if* God changes.” The most important question to ask about the First Doctrine about our genuine relationship with God is “What changes for God in this dynamic loving relationship?” That is the question.

The question is *not* whether God’s character changes—it does not. Not whether God’s righteousness changes—it does not. Not whether God’s sovereignty changes—it does not. None of those change, not any more than those change for a good earthly father (for the most part). And I cannot see God limiting Himself either. True Love uses all its powers to Love—see the Cross (and somehow respect free will just enough to allow hell a real flame). Certainly, the most important question is not even the type of dynamic foreknowledge (or settled<sup>493</sup>). God knows everything, and the full nature of how God is related to us is truly beyond us when we move beyond the pictures He has given.

What God has given should be instructive. God is like the father of the prodigal son, and God sometimes caters to us as God did to Hezekiah.<sup>494</sup>

What is the nature of the dynamism then? If we are made in God’s Image, it is most biblical to infer a degree of genuineness from our human relations to our relationship with God, as we have been doing here. It certainly is biblical, for that is precisely what the Bible does.

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<sup>492</sup> Documented in several areas in the appendices, esp. Classical Theists.

<sup>493</sup> You already know what I think about settlement.

<sup>494</sup> And Tenseless Sense or Senseless Tense or Senseless Timelessness is not as clear as Immanuel (see footnote 189: God is with us: name given to Christ in Matt 1:23, after Isa. 7:14). With or without our knowledge or informing us, we hope and have confidence that God does cater to us like He did to Hezekiah; see appendix 3 on our Hezekiah Letter to Roger Nicole about his circumventions of the plain sense of the Bible.

Here is the answer to the question: when I sit across the table from my father, my mother or my son or daughter, I need no words or information exchange to enjoy the moment. In fact, my vast (?) understanding about life (greater for God) allows me to see the child's innocence and affections with greater appreciation. The part that grows and changes (or even deteriorates) with God is called relationship—like it is among us—where joy and sadness, a tear or a giggle or a sense of warmth passes between us in the living present (not merely the result of information exchange); that portion that changes is called Love and communion; true empathy in a heart-to-heart exchange in real time. “Draw near to God and He will draw near to you” is the way it is in all relationships.<sup>495</sup>

So sad that Bruce Ware missed that and John Frame so no need to even touch it in their massive tomes. Herein is the mystery of life that is at once simple and profound. I believe the very point of Open Theism and irrespective of my concerns for other areas of Open Theism.

The real grandeur is that God *can* relate to me—as the divine Father that He is—to me as a child in the present and in a fashion that God did not 1,000 years ago. God knew me a 1,000 years ago, certainly, but the degree of his foreknowledge 1,000 years ago of every rain drop and belly scratch of today is less important (not impossible and not provable). What is important is that 1,000 years ago God did *not* have a genuine relationship with me that he is having today. Let me repeat: 1,000 years ago God did *not* have a genuine relationship with me that he is having today.

Back then, 1,000 years ago, God was having a genuine relationship with Christians as He is today with you and me. Because God is alive, because we were made in His Image, because that is *precisely* what and how God communicated His relationship to us in the Bible.

Most importantly, precisely because God is greater than us, there are aspects of genuineness to this real-time loving relationship that are hard for us understand (cogitate though we will)—just exactly as it is with an earthly father to his two-year-old child. We cannot expect a two-year-old to fully appreciate the joy of his father or mother, much less articulate the full nature of the genuineness. That does not mean the genuineness is not there or any less responsive and spontaneous and ... well ... give and take. Let's remember, God is the author of the genuine relationship, and the relationship is more genuine to Him than we can perceive, *precisely* because

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<sup>495</sup> James 4:8, excepting many Classical Theists who would dumb that down with philosophy and a pagan inheritance that says, “since God is in all places at all times for all of time, then God never left”: therein, they missed the message of the verse in a heart-to-heart warmth. While God's Love remains steadfast, relationships are dynamic, and God wants our hearts.

we are the children and *precisely* because we carry only the mere Image of God. Let me put it in bold type for the Classical Theist:

**We Love God *Because He First Loved Us.***

We Love God, because God is Love, and because He Loved us first. We love because we were created in God's own Image. The Love and relations we share on earth are just the downside, just the image of what God has for us and shares with us. We share Love with God, because we are in a *covenant* relationship that in the New Testament became a *family* relationship. And the best is yet to come.

Again, just to press and clarify the point, what changes with God in our real-time loving relationship? The burning in our hearts and all the gushy stuff—but that is not academic. Hey! That is precisely it! The stuff that changes is—all of the most important stuff of life—the stuff that changes in a relationship is beyond most of the academic.

What changes?

It is the word “change” that has been co-opted out of context or misappropriated for confusing agendas. Let me change the word “change” to the phrase “real-time appreciation.” To the phrase “joy of fellowship.” To the phrase “communion in the light of the day's concerns.” To the phrase “God longing to be in your presence of mind and heart while you long to be in His presence.” It is the very affinity with a loved one in the moment, the good gushy feeling of “oh, yeah, *goood* to see you again” that is the essence and nurture of life. That precise moment is good for God in the *very moment* you looked up in contriteness and—the point of all this—good to God at that very moment toward God in a manner different than one hour ago when you were a bad boy or girl. That is what “changes” for God.

Hey, the First Doctrine in the theology of God is the genuine loving relationship that you and I have with God the Father, who also has a good track record and who—I'm rather proud to say—has also created the world. It's a family thing, and some people just struggle.

A failure to grapple with this Love is—to me—a failure to swallow one's spiritual milk. Such joy by God in your own devotion to God is the message of the New Testament. The Good News is that once you were lost, but now you can be found by God, grafted into a great inheritance and receive eternal life—eternal *life* that also grants you the ability to come before the very throne of God. Once you were bitten by the snake, but all you have to do is look up at the Cross and all can be forgiven. God Loves you and me and gets a real kick out of His children crawling up into His lap and loving Him.

And God gets a kick out your Love and my Love today that He did not 1,000 years ago, precisely because I myself was not there 1,000 years ago:

because He raised me in the 20th century, because I was made in His Image, because I am the child, and because He Himself experiences the more genuine side of the relationship.

That is profound and rich. God is Love and God Loves you and me, but best of all, because you and I are made in His Image, we can Love God. Love is part of God's nature, and in our *Imago Dei* we share with each other (and with God) God's very ability to Love in real time.

Likewise, and sadly, God gets upset when some just want to stay in the play pen and refuse their spiritual milk. It is not good for a baby to refuse milk. Babies need milk. Such refusals sometimes tax the patience of earthly parents.

The Grand Canyon is so large. You really feel your humanity, your *humanness* when you stand on the edge of the South Rim and look into the distance at the expansive valleys and the grand wall of the North Rim some 10-20 miles away and 1,000 feet higher. It is so good to share these moments with you. It is so good to be here today with you. Look at the sunset. Shall we skip along the path hand in hand. Like little children. What a good friend you are. Here ... give me a hug.

Even the word "spontaneous" is cheap here. A degree of spontaneity is the nature and nurture of life—made in the Image of God as we are. The very best of life is in the spontaneous nurture of a good loving relationship, and it is blasphemous to say such nurture is any *less* for God. And furthermore, the best of life will just get better in the eternal life to come.

Here are a few more examples of the good stuff of life. A longtime friend, whom you thought had died, meets you for dinner. The momentary infatuation of man for a woman that actually runs deeper than the libido. The child who comes of age and says, "Thanks Dad, thanks Mom ... for standing beside all these years." At those moments, far beyond all mere information exchange, there is a communion between father and son, mother and son, even father and mother, a real-time communion that comes in the spontaneity of the moment, but that also transcends that moment at the same time. That *living* and *loving* moment is the essence of our *Imago Dei*. Love in living that is also everlasting.

Broken down, it is the heart-to-precious-heart joy of presence.

Broken down, it is Love and the essence of 1 Corinthians 13.

Whatever God knew of me 1,000 years ago, God has today a real-time relationship with me that God did not have with me 1,000 years ago. Because I was not born then—though he knew me—it was not until I was born again by His own spirit and set free by His own divine resurrection power that I could (in the present) have a relationship with Him. That is, it

was not until now, after I was born again—not until now that I myself could have a relationship with Him that I myself could not have with Him 1,000 years ago.

Don't stand on the handrail! What were you thinking? Don't stand on the handrail on the edge of the Grand Canyon. Anything could knock you over. Be careful! This is important. Don't be mistaken about this or make light of it. And it is important to me, because I care for you!

Though God knew me before I was born, since I myself was not present 1,000 years ago, I myself could not have a full relationship with God back then.<sup>496</sup> I myself am certainly not an Eternal Now. Without me being there in fullness—back then—God could not have had any kind of real relationship with me 1,000 years ago. No matter—no matter what He knew back then, one thing is certain—"I" was not there, and "I" was not awake.

*Because* I am created in His Image, because I am His child, and best of all because of His own resurrection power and promise and revelation, I do have a relationship with Him *now* that even He did not have with me 1,000 years ago. Redundant, you might say, but that kicks Classical Theism.

Best of all. Because I am created in His Image and am His child and because of His own resurrection power and promise, the best is yet to come as I grow into God and even pass from this world into heaven.

Bruce Ware and others lambaste and deride the concept of *God growing* in our relationship with Him. That *God growing* could be reframed, as we have been trying to redundantly clarify. There is certainly a distinction in my relationship between God 1,000 years ago and today—because God Himself has given us many pictures in the New Testament, has given us a freedom in Christ, and has asked us to pray. The Bible is clear about our genuine ability to relate to God and God's ability to relate to us. Ware and others will lambaste *growth* in God, but will they clarify the genuineness they claim inside of the settlement in foreknowledge they defend?

Furthermore, if the best in our loving lives is in our Love for each other day to day, let us not diminish or degrade God below our own level, for we are but the mere Image of God, the mere Image of our Heavenly Father. The image does not have an *experience* more genuineness than the original Image-Maker. Contrary to Ware and Frame, we are the *children* of God, and our humanity has dignity and a reality that is greater than the puppet on the string of meticulous sovereignty or of a settled foreknowledge.

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<sup>496</sup> Heck, I cannot even have a full relationship with God in the present, because I am still so child-like in so many ways, waiting for my inheritance and hoping for heaven.

Are there better words than “change,” “spontaneity” and “grow” that describe the wonder of what happens between two earthly people made in the Image of God? Are there better words to describe *how* that wonderful treasure-gift of a loving relationship makes sense of our real-time relationship with God? Sure. How about Dynamic? How about Confidence? How about Trust? How about mother-and-father-like concern? How about Nurture? How about Love? How about faith, hope, *and* Love?

Ask all the Classical Theists to fit these into exhaustive-settled foreknowledge and into meticulous sovereignty and translate them into a genuine relationship in the present. It is time they *try*. I feel sorry for the Classical Theists that have missed that in life.<sup>497</sup>

In a two-year-old childlike understanding, some Classical Theists (like Ware above) might claim that there are no spontaneous or truly responsive aspects, but that is just like a child rebelling in the lap of the father. Be assured that our heavenly Father thinks that is OK, even normal for a two-year-old child, confident that one day he (or she) will grow up. Here, this is *the* meaning of Ephesians 4:1-24. Two-year-olds do that, you know, challenge all sorts of things they don’t understand and cannot grasp. That is just the *nature* of a two-year-old, especially with regard to the higher parts of life and living. They are just beginning to learn how to relate.

Whatever there be of foreknowledge, settled or dynamic, there is the First Doctrine in the theology of God about our genuine, loving, and real-time relationship between God and us, with all of the wonder and simplicity therein. That relationship with God is uniquely mine and yours in the present. And this relationship is genuine for me and you—real and alive between us and God—in a fashion that it was not for God 1,000 years ago. Even though God knew me then, God has some fresh experiences of me today, because He raised me *in* Christ just a few years ago and because He has the *more genuine side* of the relationship. God sacrificed nothing of His sovereignty when He made me in His Image and granted to me some of His own ability to Love and experience Love.

What I experience in fresh Love each day is but the *image* of His great Love for me. That Love that God has for me is truly a Grand Canyon of genuine real-time concern, each day fresh and rich. Magnificent. Beyond all that we can know this side of heaven.



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<sup>497</sup> Most have not really missed it, being loving parents and good Christians themselves, they just live this way while writing that it is not so in the ultimate scheme of things. That pagan heritage is so persistent, isn’t it? From all appearances, many Classical Theists live as though the future is indeed somewhat open in the genuineness with God they live for.



## 2. Can God's Perfected Love Grow?

One might ask, "Since God certainly does not experience hope or need nurture as we do, how is our relationship with Him truly a mutual relationship?" That's a good question that, after the above, only a child might persist in asking. Some children can be so stubborn. And we do want to cater to everyone, and it is a question of concern. Since God is Love and perfected in Love, can God grow in Love?

And therein is another valley in the Grand Canyon, deep and long.

Remember, we are *the* children. While God is Love and perfected in Love, and precisely because God is Love and we are made in His Image, therein is the highest element of our relationship with God. Because Love is dynamic between us here on earth, that is how we know Love is dynamic with God and from God to us. Love's dynamism that we know *here* is but the shadow side of *God's* experience, to us the cloudy side of heaven.

How then do we know that God is perfected in Love and can still grow? Because we are made in God's Image, and our ability is but the *small* reflection of God's greater ability to Love. Because God is the Father and we are the children. That is the picture given to us in the New Testament. We are *His* family. In many ways, God's Love is like pure gold is to us here on earth. Just as a father and mother can say *I Love you all the same*, so too with God. Love has the ability to hold on forever and never change or diminish, and yet Love has a richness that allows its *golden* value to appreciate forever. Because Love is dynamic and spreads like light in all of our loving families and loving friendships, made in His Image as we are, we know that God has the greater ability and more profound experience of dynamic Love. God is Love and is the Father, and we are the children. God has the more genuine side of our loving relationships.

Does God have hope? Like the father of the prodigal. Like the husband of the bridegroom. It cannot be clearer. God through Jesus made it *clear!*

Though I am inclined to believe in dynamic exhaustive foreknowledge, I certainly cannot *fully* explain it,<sup>498</sup> and I certainly cannot know all of what God knows (even exhaustive is too small). Not just me, but anyone goes against the New Testament and the nature of our relationship with God, as God Himself has revealed, when he says that such exhaustive-settled foreknowledge must also include that God *experienced* me 1,000 years ago just as He does today. That is not the New Testament. If it was not genuine for me, then there was no loving relationship 1,000 years ago worthy of the

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<sup>498</sup> I sure cannot explain it with the finesse that William Lane Craig gives to middle knowledge. And I would drill this in if I thought it would help: those having problems with middle knowledge and just continuing with their claims to exhaustive-settled foreknowledge and not contributing a scintilla to the solution ought to keep quiet. I can dream anyway.

word. To project or pretend one was there (back then in the mind of God in full experience of me) is to go radically against the New Testament pictures of a *dynamic* and *resurrected* relationship. That even caters again to the pagan idea of a Tenseless Sense or Timeless Presence or Eternal Now and makes about as much sense as, “See that bird flying still?” While God is certainly eternal, God went out of His way to reveal that He shares our temporal space. He is a Father indeed.

To say God had the same knowledge and experience *then*, 1,000 years ago, as He has today—because God is an Eternal Now—defeats the resurrection freedom of me now, a freedom God revealed that He Himself accomplished. Muddles the water. Though I cannot fully understand it, God has seen fit to say that my genuine feelings for my own children are the manner in which He Himself cares for me. That care and concern say something very distinctive about my relationship with God in the present that cannot have been true for me or God 1,000 years ago.

That is just what the New Testament reveals.

Using the rich Greek language, God could have just as well have revealed Himself as an Eternal Now to us in the New Testament. Plato’s and Aristotle’s writings were several hundred years old at the time of Christ, and my goodness were written in Greek too—the same language as the New Testament. The language and concepts were there 2,000 years ago to make clear the Tenseless Sense of the divine Unblinking Eyeball. Of all people, the Apostle Paul had the education and could have used the rich Greek language (as lead by God he was) to explain the eternal prowessness of the Tenseless Sense of timelessness and how the nowness of the Eternal Now knows no bounds in His own sense of the tenseless now. Hee, hee, haah.

Instead, God revealed that He is bigger and more personally connected, because He created a people in His own Image that had an ability to enjoy something of life like He Himself enjoys life, fresh each day in a dynamic relationship. Our dynamic loving relationships are our gift from God, given to us so that God Himself could feel good Love Himself.

The obsession that Classical Theists have for defending their Tenseless Sense that is a pagan inheritance is—me thinks—just another ruse of Satan’s deceit, perhaps something of Satan’s greatest deceptions to date since his duping of Adam and Eve. I mean, look how long and how profusely influential that pagan inheritance has persisted.

Look today at the work-around of some of our finest Christian scholars like Frame and Ware (so many others in the appendices). If Classical Theists should persist, let there best truly dissect Pinnock’s chapter on our pagan inheritance in his *Most Moved Mover* (65-111), for this chapter is a true service to Christendom and deserves recognition as such.

I have known many men who are pagans (on their faith of record and in their lifestyle), and I don't want anything to do with paganism. We truly need to clear the biblical record on this, and Pinnock has given us some of the strongest thinking to date. And the esteemed John Frame's two pages on "God and the Greeks" in his massive tome *No Other God* is a shameful rendition, even sympathetic to paganism in this light—unbelievable.

We goofed. Then God saved and raised us up, causing us to be born again into a living hope, empowering us by His own resurrection power. I stand before God clean in Jesus' name. And when I speak today and pray today—because I am made in His Image—God enjoys me today in a fresh and unique manner. That should be good enough. But God revealed more.

To help my childlike understanding grasp my genuine relationship with Him, God sent His Son, Jesus, who gives many fine words and parables. God is indeed my heavenly Father—my *Abba*. But that is not all.

To help me in my fatiguing cogitations, God revealed some of the dynamics involved in my loving relationship with Him. By the very resurrection power that God used to raise His own Son, He also raised me to a new freedom to serve in Christ. That is not all. Because of Christ's own work on the Cross and Christ's ascension to glory, I can right now come boldly to the very throne of God in prayer and have a living hope in heaven.

How much more clear do the Classical Theists want it? Even if it was written in the sky, they would not believe. Some children will kick stones.

Even though God knew me 1,000,000 years ago, even if God does possess exhaustive dynamic or settled foreknowledge, that foreknowledge 1,000,000 years ago did not include all of His fresh experience *with* me in this present moment. God experiences something with me today that is fresh, unique and lively for Him, because I was made in His Image.

Let me say it like this for the thick-of-skull. I have been raised a new creature in Christ; I enjoy a freedom in Christ; my own prayers are made possible because of the resurrection and ascension of Christ. That means—*by God*—that God Himself is enjoying me today as my heavenly Father much more than any earthly father can enjoy his own children. And likewise, God is enjoying you and me much *more* genuinely. And furthermore, God is enjoying this now in real time in a fashion He did not 1,000 years ago, because that is *precisely* what the New Testament says.

Oh, that is the basic meaning of "I shall never leave you" and Paul's meaning in that we should "pray without ceasing" and the very seal of the Holy Spirit who "bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God" and "intercedes" for us. That is the very meaning of Hebrews 4:20 in the declaration that we can "come boldly to the throne of God."

Close your eyes. Yes, close your eyes for a moment. Just listen to the wind and feel the breeze. Can you hear the far-off echo of the wind as it is forced through canyon strata below? Even turbo-charged as the wind forces its way up from the bottom of the Grand Canyon? It sure is good to be with you here today. It will be dark soon.

I wonder what the Grand Canyon looks like under the light of a full moon? I wonder if you can see the earth-tone colors under the moon rays.



### 3. Difference between God's Foreknowledge & Experience?

*Nothing* is more important than the certainty of our genuine real-time loving relationship with God. From the New Testament, God may foreknow everything, even the slightest detail in dynamic foreknowledge. Yet, who knows for sure? I do not know. But the type of God's foreknowledge is not nearly as settled as the genuineness of our relationship with God in the present; genuineness should be the benchmark against which all else is hammered—the First Doctrine indeed.

God is Love, and the nature of Love is a true and fresh joy in the presence of the loved one, hour by hour, day by day. My experience of my Love for my child is but the muddy and cloudy image of God's Love for me, made in His Image as I am.

God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son that whosoever would believe Him would not perish but have eternal life. And that Son was raised from the dead on the third day, appeared to many, then ascended to heaven. He shall come again and take us home. Between now and our homecoming, God takes great pleasure in each person who comes to Him in their own closet, who comes to Him as a child. For that is how we are to come to God.

That is what the New Testaments says. It cannot be more clear.

Does God *foreknow* the freshness He will experience of me tomorrow? Don't know. Don't *need* to know, yet I argue for a freshness to God too.<sup>499</sup>

What I do know is that there will be a huge difference between today and tomorrow, and I know that there will be a huge difference between what God knows of His own experience of tomorrow and what God will actually experience in freshness tomorrow—that is the precise difference between a

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<sup>499</sup> Who really cares? Other than academics, few worry about such things.

dead past-tense god of paganism's Eternal Now and our living and loving God. Whatever God knows of tomorrow will be somewhat different from what God will actually experience in freshness of tomorrow. Why? Precisely because the New Testament revealed that God is our Father and not a pagan Eternal Now. God did not give up any of His own life in the creation of the world or in the creating of us in His own Image. What God did do was give us some of His own *ability* to Love.

Best of all, whatever God knows of next month, beyond what God has ordained to happen, God can intervene tomorrow and answer my prayer. God's foreknowledge is not greater than God's power to intervene. Just like God did with so many throughout the Bible, God's ultimate plan from the foundation of the world does not change, and there is no place in the Bible that says that God did plan out every step or every cricketing of every grasshopper. Why should God need to plan and ordain each step? God could keep an eye on things just fine without being so needy. Truly, the future is not a stone too large for God to move. Our God is *alive*.

At the very least, there is some difference between

**what God knows and what God experiences**

based, again, upon the pictures of God's nature in the New Testament. We cannot discern all the differences, because we are the mere image and are the wee-little children. But we can discern some differences: Father, resurrection freedom, and daily prayer.

Now, hold on here. All of that could imply some kind of deficit in knowledge in God 1,000 years ago. It certainly could. And we can hear the Classical Theists hollering down from their high places on the North Rim of the Grand Canyon, "no deficit in knowledge, no deficit in knowledge."

What is greater? Knowledge or experience? What came first? The chicken or the egg? I read books and can come to know much through reading. But sometimes I learn from experience, by putting my hands on things and working with tools. Round and round the Classical Theist merry-go-round we go, but let us not get stuck as we go around. We have made some progress.

I know. Some Classical Theist will be saying that we cannot base our theology on experience and that we must derive our theology from the Word of God. *Da!* Don't you get tired of that? That is *precisely* what we have been doing. The New Testament witness is that we have a relationship with God and that our relationship with God is as that of a loving earthly father to a son. Raised to walk in newness of life. Today raised.

Could God have been clearer? Oh yes, God could have been. God certainly could have revealed Himself in the New Testament as the lordly

monarch.<sup>500</sup> He could have said that we were the slaves tending to His feudal palace. The Greek language was rich enough. Even the fisherman Peter would have known how to tell us about that. Paul would have given us the philosophy of that; you know Paul was not afraid of anything, certainly not the political fallout (he left his job as president of the Pharisees, as Pharisee of Pharisee he was). Instead of monarch, God sent His only Son, Jesus Christ, and Jesus Himself gave us many fine parables. Jesus is Lord of the universe, but to us He is closer than a brother and himself points us to the Father. And again, God revealed much more to Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Paul, Peter, and James.

If a Classical Theist brings this up, just remember what it was like when you had to taste the baby food in the attempt to cajole the child to eat. Some children are just that way, you know. They are just not going to eat.

And this genuineness, with all the fine words of Jesus, takes precedence over much and is instructive of the nature of God. The New Testament was given so that we might know God in a personal way, not just think about God in an abstract way. That is why God sent Jesus. Not only to help us, but to be our savior and make a way for us to be able to come boldly before the throne. He is with us always. And the very message of what God has provided is what instructs us—unilaterally—about the degree and nature of God’s foreknowledge.

Whatever the actual nature of God’s exhaustive dynamic (or settled [boo]) foreknowledge beyond the next five seconds of human actions or electrons—whatever—that “knowledge” does *not* include identical “experiences” from yesterday and today that would exclude or prevent God from getting and cherishing genuinely fresh joy in fellowship with you or me. Or prevent God’s answering a prayer to deliver or save from harm.

The New Testament gives ample evidence that knowledge and experience go hand in hand. And yet there is a distinction. We learn to grow in the knowledge of God, oh yes, we do. We do study the Bible. Why? To know God better, not just intellectually, but to learn how to obey and pray and walk with God in the cool of day—as well as in the mud and muck of life. But the most fundamental point of all—take a guess—has been made so very clear for us: Love God and pray. We study the Bible and doctrine in order to strengthen our living faith and living walk with God. The experience of loving each other and loving God take precedent over the study of God. Indeed, the study of God is vain and blasphemous as an end in itself.<sup>501</sup>

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<sup>500</sup> Or Tenseless Sense.

<sup>501</sup> In 1848, Søren Kierkegaard said, “From the Christian point of view, everything ... ought to serve for upbuilding. The kind of scholarliness and scienticity that ultimately does [Footnote continued on the next page ... *do enjoy*]

In the New Testament, the priority is upon our genuine loving relationship and upon our nurturing of that living relationship. In our fatiguing cogitations, whatever we shall believe or develop further about the extent of God's dynamic foreknowledge beyond the next five seconds—whatever—that extent of development will have to be hammered out against the supremacy of our genuine loving relationship with God—the First Doctrine in the theology of God.

We cannot make an exception to this genuineness, and it entails aspects far beyond us as well. In fact, because we are made in the Image of God, we will never know the full nature and ramifications and detail of this genuine real-time relationship. We're just the *children*.

Truly, the Potter in His own freedom has made us in His Image. That is the Potter's freedom, for that is what the Potter did. To truly understand ourselves and the grand mystery of our earthly father and son, mother and son relationship, we will have to plumb the depths of God's own triune communion, the very source of our *Imago Dei*, the image that we carry. What we share with each other—this side of heaven—is truly but a shadow of what God Himself is currently enjoying with us and just a shadow of what we will enjoy when we see God face to face.

I'll stick with the God of the New Testament, thank you, my heavenly *Father* who actually takes *real* joy in my prayers and supplications. But let us stay on track, and deal with a few more Classical Theist concerns.

For now, it is just good to be with you. Forget about the Granola Bar wrapper. I'm sorry for getting upset over it. Maybe I should not have brought that up.



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not build up is precisely thereby unchristian. Everything essentially Christian must have in its presentation a resemblance to the way a physician speaks at the sickbed; even if only medical experts understand it, it must never be forgotten that the situation is the bedside of the sick person. It is precisely Christianity's relation to life (in contrast to the scholarly distance from life) or the ethical aspect of Christianity that is upbuilding, and the mode of presentation, however rigorous it may be otherwise, is completely different, qualitatively different, from the kind of scientificity and scholarliness that is "indifferent," whose lofty heroism is so far, Christianly, from being heroism that, Christianly, it is a kind of inhuman curiosity. It is Christian heroism—a rarity, to be sure—to venture wholly to become oneself ... alone before God... All Christian knowing, however rigorous its form, ought to be concerned, but this concern is precisely the upbuilding." From *The Sickness Unto Death: A Christian Psychological Exposition for Upbuilding and Awakening* (ed. & trans. by Howard and Edna Hong; Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1980: 5).

#### 4. God's Love Steadfast, Dynamic, Crimson Shades to Infinity

Truly, the heart of our living God is Love; God is a person, and Love is the quintessential element in God's personhood.

And just think. The fellowship that you and I share is just a cloudy reflection of how God feels about us. His thoughts, I am told, outnumber the sand on the seashore. That is the way I feel about some family members of mine: I have thoughts of them that outnumber the sand on the seashore. How much greater is the number and how much more fresh today does God enjoy me today than 1,000 years before I was born? Heck, God is so great and so much larger than an Eternal Now, because God can Love you more at this moment than He loved you *one hour* ago. God is so great that He can experience something fresh in your Love for Him this very moment on top of what God experienced of you one hour ago. And God can do so on and on throughout our everlasting loving lives.

I shall not tweak or clip God into a pagan *settlement*, where He cannot grow in Love. I believe God will Love me more after 10,000 years in glory than He Loves me today; even while God's Love is steadfast and unchanging in magnitude and conviction, God's Love can also grow in dearness and affection. Why not? Is that not a greater God and greater Love than saying that Love has to be 100% settled? We truly do not know the limits of God or the limits of Love. Oh, you know, God *is* Love. How do I know this? Because that is an earthly father and mother's Love.

God could not have been *more* clear.

Hey, listen to this, God is so great that He can experience something fresh of you and me and every other person on the planet right at this very moment on top of what God experienced of all of us one hour ago. God has said that my relationship with my earthly father is how He Himself feels about you and me, and that gets better each hour of every day.

Oh, praise God for His great and steadfast and *dynamic* Love.

I wonder what it is going to be like when we go home and are able to share and relate and Love God on His level of genuine loving, on His level of heart-to-precious-heart concern.

Can you see the red hue of the sun as it goes down?

Watch, *watch* how the red hues of the sun cause the entire canyon to glow. Crimson shades to infinity.

Can you see? Can you see how the entire Grand Canyon of God's genuine *real-time* loving concern is colored and even empowered by the blood of the Son?

It is so very good to be with you here today.

Yeah, you're right ... I should shut up ... and just watch the sunset.

Hhhmmmmnnn ... aaaah ... (feel the wind?).



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Feeling the splendor ... is better than *thinking* about it.<sup>502</sup>



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### C. Going Home—Free at Last

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1. Where Time, Free will, Sovereignty, & Foreknowledge Will Be Swallowed Up in Glory, & the Classical Theist Burden
2. Going Home—Where Seeing God's Heart Dissipates Sovereignty

#### 1. Where Time, Free will, Sovereignty, and Foreknowledge will be Swallowed up in Glory, and the Classical Theist Burden

Another indication of the primacy of genuineness is seen in the Shadow of Prayer Dynamic where time itself will be swallowed up by eternity's weight and permanence. Free will, foreknowledge, and sovereignty will also be swallowed up by the glory of God that we will move into. When we move under the full light of our great God, we shall see Him as He is and be made like Him. That will be a very good day.

In eternity, do not expect to see much use of the words "time," "free will," "foreknowledge," or "sovereignty." A perfected Love has no fear, and a perfected Love has *no need* for those words.

In eternity, what will we carry over from this life? Nothing of this earth will carry over. There will be a new earth. I'll tell you what we will carry over from this earth to the next: only the gold and precious stones. The only thing of true significance in this life is our loving relationships with each other and with God. Best of all, our genuine and free relationship with God in Love will carry over and increase forever, or at least remain dynamically alive forever. That is the nature of Love, you know, to dynamically relate in caring and sharing from heart to precious heart. God moves toward your heart and is moved *by* your heart, and He desires us to be moved by His heart as well. The Most *Moved* Mover was so moved He sent His Son while we were still unmoved by a wondrous revelation of His own mighty deeds.

The genuineness of my relationship with God is permanently attached to the nature of my eternal life—the free gift of God. Is this the resurrection of my *Imago Dei*? Is this the clearing away of the clouds from my *Imago Dei*? Is my new birth a new restoration of the Image of God in me to have a

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<sup>502</sup> Splendor remains splendorous when splendor is not viewed as an abstract *it* or the mere idea of another kind or quality of information exchange. Ok, ok ... I'll shut up.

full relationship? I do not *fully* know, but this I do certainly know: this resurrection includes my ability to approach God in the present in a genuine prayer that touches God. It's pretty complicated.<sup>503</sup>

What I do know is that God is sovereign enough to enter fully into the present, if He so chooses (and He has given a long history of His so choosing—called the Bible). As such, then the great certainty of my genuine relationship with God becomes a great burden for all Classical Theists to explain how genuineness fits inside of a settled view of foreknowledge. For those Classical Theists believing in meticulous sovereignty, the great burden is twofold: (1) the above, and (2) explain how their genuine and everlasting relationship remains genuine under such sovereignty.

Dynamic foreknowledge does seem to fit well here. In that case, the burden is lifted, and it makes sense that God is alive enough to truly respond to you and me—no matter what the future holds.

Let's finish this. It is almost dinner time.

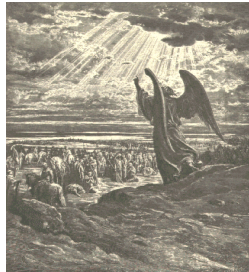
The air is getting cooler, and the moon is causing shadows of its own.



## 2. Going Home—Seeing God's Heart Dissipates Sovereignty

What a trip!

We shall be going home soon.<sup>504</sup>



Such beautiful scenery. You know that on both the North and South Rims of the Grand Canyon, we have identical stakes driven deep down to bedrock. We have a genuine loving relationship with God in real time—the First Doctrine in the theology of God—and this stake of concurrence is driven down on both sides. You remember how the very strata of the Grand Canyon is God's Omniscient-Omnipresent Attribute, the very foundation for both the North and South Rims. You felt the river of the Christ-Freedom Dynamic running freely, continually breaking up dirt, going deeper and

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<sup>503</sup> More complicated that the dynamics of creation *ex nihilo*.

<sup>504</sup> Illustration by Gustave Doré.

deeper, moving us, shaping us—and it will move us into a greater freedom in heaven.

You did—I know you did—we together enjoyed the grandeur and splendor of the radiating colors of the strata, earth-tones all of them, earthy to the uttermost. How beautiful the Christian life is made by the Shadow of Prayer Dynamic, unique to all and of the same essence for all—all at the same time. We pray and talk to God. We do pray much here on earth.

What God has given is great, but God has not given us all that is to come. No eye has seen or ear has heard yet what God has in store for us. Once we are finally home, we shall be able to talk to God much more genuinely and so much more clearly—personal to the uttermost in heaven. That is our Christian hope and the ultimate purpose of the Cross of Christ.

We emphasize again that God is not an idiot. If God had intended for us to understand Him as a grand Unblinking Eyeball, a fully satiated Eternal Now—God would have told us just that. Peter was direct enough, Paul erudite enough, and the Greek language was rich enough.

Just for me, I think it will be great to talk to God in heaven without any of my own distracting dysfunctions. Don't you? ... I know you do.

Best of all, we came to see how the splendor and grandeur of relationships are the essence of our *Imago Dei*. Being made in the very Image of God allows us to enjoy splendor and grandeur—moment to moment Love—at God's own creation, with each other and best of all with God Himself. God takes some real-time pleasure in your loving Him. If the splendor of relationships is so good here, we have not seen anything yet! Wow. What grandeur and splendor are to come? I cannot conceive.

What a fantastic trip! Thanks for being my friend.

When that time comes, the fatiguing cogitations of time and foreknowledge will be effectively annihilated by the weight of God's glory and the mass of our everlasting loving lives. In our everlasting home—heaven—I will not *need* the words “sovereignty” or “free will,” not anymore than a earthly child *needs* to know that his father is king of the house or lord of the manor. A loving father who is truly in charge so exercises his authority in a way that the child lives in security and Love.

How much more Love will we see and feel in heaven? If Love is good down here—in *His Image* as we are—then how much more grand will Love be when we do finally go to our everlasting home.

I have a promise. I shall one day enjoy a far more genuine relationship with God than anything that I could have ever dreamed of here on earth. God is very able “to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us,”<sup>505</sup> and certainly “No eye has

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<sup>505</sup> Eph. 3:20.

seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who Love Him.”<sup>506</sup>

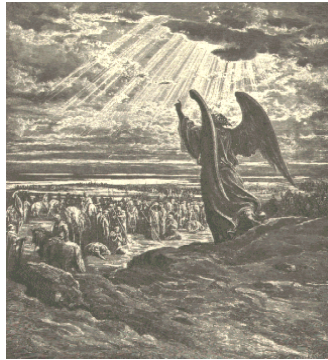
With a permanent, perfect Love and a permanently perfected freedom in Christ, my genuine and fearless and growing Love for God—I am convinced—will be so real and genuine and growing that I will be able to sit straight up front and right in the center of God’s face, face to face with His supreme glory. Sitting there, I shall not die or need to hide my face. Instead, I think I shall at last be able to say with utter sincerity and with warmth all around me—*Abba*.

Where then is the place for the word sovereignty in the very lap of God?

In heaven, at that time, God’s supreme glory will shine so effectively and my Love will reciprocate with God so purely and profusely that I will bathe in God’s glorious Love. When I sit in His lap and bathe in His Love—totally unobstructed—sovereignty itself will become passé as I view past God’s sovereignty and glory into the very **Precious Heart** of my loving Lord who is also my very own Loving *Abba*.

*See ya there.*

Now let me share with you the best part of all. What will heaven *feel* like when we do get there? What feelings and experiences will become more real and more genuine in heaven?



Truly, the best is yet to come.<sup>507</sup>



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<sup>506</sup> I Cor. 2:9, quoting Isaiah 64:4.

<sup>507</sup> Illustration by Gustave Doré.