**Conformed to Our Image**

*by Stephen F. Deaton*

The Bible teaches that man was made in the image of God (Gen. 1:26, 27). As such, we are inferior to Him. He is the Creator, we are the creatures, and therefore subject to His will. However, some do not see it that way.

People want God to conform to their image. They do not want a God of wrath, so they believe He is all love. They do not want a God who is strict and narrow-minded, so their God is one who is permissive and tolerant of a wide range of behavior – including small infractions of morality. They want a God who will accept their worship, no matter what, so they have a God who rejoices in man-made homage.

The Bible student will notice the attitude that conforms God to man’s image is idolatry.  Typical paganism has multiple gods. The people we are talking about (including friends and family), have one god that fits all. The Baptist, Methodist, Presbyterian, Pentecostal, Lutheran, and good Catholic are all acceptable to God – in their mind. He is a multi-cultural, pluralistic God.

Contrary to this erroneous thinking, the Word of God states that He is strict, narrow, and has one truth for all men (Matt. 7:13, 14). “Beloved, while I was very diligent to write to you concerning our common salvation, I found it necessary to write to you exhorting you to contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints” (Jude 3). There is only one faith, not many, just as surely as there is one Savior (Eph. 4:4-6).

Let us not try to conform God to our image, but let us be conformed to His.

**The Father of the Prodigal**

*edited from Heath Rogers*

The “Prodigal Son” is one of the better known parables of our Lord. It is only found in the gospel of Luke, alongside two other parables focusing upon finding lost things (the “Lost Sheep” and “Lost Coin” – Luke 15). In the Prodigal Son Parable, the younger son represents the sinners, the older son represents the unmerciful Pharisees, and the father represents God. Many important lessons can be learned from this parable, but it has been called the “gospel within the gospel” because of the beautiful way in which it presents God’s willingness to receive those who return to Him.

**1. God Respects Our Free Will.** The demand made by the younger son would have been utterly shameful in Jesus’ day. The son was wishing to no longer be under the authority of his father so he could enjoy his inheritance immediately. While it was a rebellious and shameful demand, it was one that the father surprisingly granted (v. 12). Not only did he grant the son’s demand, he allowed his son to leave and did not go searching for him to bring him back home against his will (v. 20).

Likewise, God respects our free will. He informs us of the blessings of obedience and the consequences of disobedience, but then leaves the choice up to us. *“I call heaven and earth as witnesses today against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore choose life, that both you and your descendants may live”* (Deut. 30:19). It is not that God does not care about us. It breaks God’s heart when we depart from His will (Hosea 11:5-8), but He allows us to make our own choice.

**2. God Has Compassion On Us.** Compassion is the ability to be touched by the plight of another. It is pity or empathy for those who are suffering, with a desire to help them. Another word closely related is “mercy,” which can be described as not desiring to give others the punishment or suffering they deserve, but rather to benefit them.

The son desired to return to his father, but he knew his father had the right to reject him. This is why he determined to ask to be a servant (vs. 17-19). However, when his father saw him returning, he was moved with compassion and showed mercy (v. 20).

This is a beautiful and accurate picture of God’s willingness to receive us when we choose to truly repent and return to Him. We all sin and fall short. We know such disappoints and angers God, but through this parable we can clearly see the love, compassion and mercy that God wants to show us if we return to Him (Psa. 103:8-14, 17).

**3. God Will Restore the Penitent.** The son came to himself and realized what he had left. In his mind, he had so offended his father that he had no hope of getting back what he once had. Instead, he planned to humbly request a position as a hired servant. To his surprise, he never got the chance to make the request. As soon as he confessed his sin, his father interrupted him and welcomed him back as a son (vs. 17-22).

Sin will be punished, but God desires to forgive us of our sins and restore us to fellowship with Him. However, the restoration of fellowship is dependent upon our willingness to repent, confess our sins, and seek God’s forgiveness (Ezek. 18:30-32; Micah 7:18-19; Acts 8:22; 1 John 1:9).

**4. God Provides For Those Who Are In His House.** It was the memory of his father’s goodness and kindness towards his hired servants that moved the son to repent (v. 17). *“Or do you despise the riches of His goodness, forbearance, and longsuffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leads you to repentance?”* (Rom. 2:4). God’s goodness and kindness are seen in the way He provides for His creation (Ps. 145:15-16; Acts 17:24-25). However, God has a special interest and care for those who are “within His house” - His covenant people (Ps. 37:25; Phil. 4:19).

The Prodigal learned there is no mercy or compassion found in this world. God has promised to lovingly and abundantly care for us, but we must remain in His house (in fellowship with Him).

**5. God Is Patient With Those Who Are In His House.** We know God is patient with sinners (1 Pet. 3:20; 2 Pet. 3:9). However, this parable shows that God is extremely patient with His children (vs. 25-32). The older brother is introduced into the story as refusing to join his father in accepting his brother back home. The father goes out to the older son to reason with him. We are not told how the older brother responded, but we do see his patience towards his son.

We do not always act in accordance with God’s will. He reasons with us through His word. He allows us the opportunity to grow, to overcome our challenges and to make the needed changes in our hearts and lives. God is extremely patient with us.

**Conclusion.** There are many other lessons that can be learned from this parable, but it does give us a clear and beautiful picture of God’s role as our Father when we are at our worst. We serve a great and merciful God.