

Sermon Series: Imago Dei



#8 How, then, shall we live? – Romans 12:9-21

INTRO

What's your opinion about Harry and Meghan cutting ties with British royalty?

You say you don't care, but **I don't believe you** 😊. After all, they're **Oprah-worthy** – so don't tell me you don't have an opinion!



The “Harry” **formerly known as “Prince”**, and his apparently controversial bride, voluntarily rejected **any official rights or roles relating to royalty**.

What's this got to do with our sermon series, “Imago Dei”, looking at the image of God said by the Bible to be present in human beings?

Well, imagine for a moment **the implications for Harry's and Megan's daily living after their change of status?**¹

It seems they were fully aware of the implications, saying to Oprah...

“The feeling is that this was our decision therefore the consequence is on us” *Harry and Meghan*

It's these ideas of a **consequences for daily living** and the concept of **“royalty”** that I'd like to bring together in our learning from the bible today.

So far in this series...

- We've considered our **ORIGINS** - how that **original image of God** said to be in humanity is now **marred and diminished**
- We've looked at our **IDENTITY** - how God, through Christ, rescued us and is offers to shape us anew in the **image of Christ**, the perfect “Imago Dei”

¹ I fully appreciate that neither of them is destitute or struggling financially as a result, but much has changed, which is the relevant point to Paul's writing about Christians and their change of status and life in Romans 12.

- We then considered the Bible’s view of our DESTINY. Christians are to live by **the way of the cross**, the pattern of Jesus’ life, but in the end, we **will be like Christ** in the new creation to come.

Today, we’ll briefly consider the ETHOS of our lives in the light of the Gospel. We will look at the potential for change and transformation in our **daily living in the here and now**.

REFLECT

Pause with me for a moment and ask yourself, “**what difference** in ethos or character or practice of living do you hope to find in Christians when you visit a church?”

A great place to address this question to is **Romans chapter 12**. The Apostle begins, saying,

“I appeal to you therefore, in view of the mercies of God...” (Rom. 12:1)

Paul goes on in chapter 12 to describe the **implications** of knowing Christ for **daily living**. He has already unpacked what God has done for us in Christ. Now he urges Christians to **give their whole lives** thankfully into God’s service and to **live in a new, godly, manner**.²

Three characteristics of the **life of Jesus**, the perfect “Imago Dei”, can be seen here in Paul’s aspirational vision of the **new life** he urges Christians to live...

HUMILITY, LOVE, AND MERCY³

- ✓ adopt a **humble** heart and attitude (3-8)
- ✓ **love others** sincerely and sacrificially (9,10)
- ✓ **pardon** those who wrong you, leaving justice to God (17-21)

A common thread in these verses in response to God’s mercies to us is “**sacrifice**” or **giving up something**. Because God has **given us everything** we need in Christ, we are called:

- **to give up** our need for first place over others,
- **to give up** relying on our own competencies alone,

² “...present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect.” (Rom. 12:1-2)

³ Verses 3-16 address Christians loving other Christians, and verses 17 to 21 are about Christians loving other people outside the Christian community

- **to give up** attitudes of exclusivity that marginalizes others, and
- **give up** the need for revenge when someone wrongs us.

The Apostle Paul wrote elsewhere about what he gave up to follow Christ:

In Philippians 3 he testified personally, saying:

“...whatever gains I had [in my previous life of pride and power], these I have come to regard as loss because of Christ. More than that, I regard everything as loss because of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord.”⁴ (Phil. 3:7-8)

I imagine that Harry and Meghan **counted the cost** of **giving up** the status of royalty. I also realize that they are still far more wealthy and comfortable than most of the world’s citizens, so my analogy goes so far, and no further. Yet, in a strange, upside down way, **there is a link** to the image of God in us.

For me, the “**royal**” view of the image of God in us is the most helpful definition I can draw from the bible about how we **bear the likeness** of Christ.

The Bible **doesn’t define** the **image and likeness** of God in us in a systematic passage of writing – that’s been the domain of theologians over time.



- ❖ **The SUBSTANTIVE VIEW - Many** have claimed that the Imago Dei in us is **substantive**, that is something physical, psychological or spiritual in likeness to God. But, for me, this view has too much of an **ableist edge**. Those with higher reasoning powers are too easily regarded as more representative of God, leading to hierarchy and exclusion.



- ❖ **The RELATIONAL VIEW - Others** hold to our **capacity for relationships** as the key to the Imago Dei in us. Karl Barth a master of this trope. This view dominates the lyrics of our worship songs, our prayers, and our church vision statements. Yet, though wholesome relationships are encouraged, we don’t wish to suggest people who cannot engage with others as less like God.

⁴ In Romans chapter 8 he testifies on behalf of all creation: “I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory about to be revealed to us.” (Rom. 8:18)



▸ **The FUNCTIONAL VIEW - Others still** point to the image of God as **functional** – that is, as something intrinsic to human actions and tasks. It's what we can do in taking “dominion” over creation that is our godly likeness, this view suggests. Yet, we see time and time again that God consistently **chooses the heart**, in favour of abilities when choosing His servants. In my view, **doing stuff** is not the essence of the image-bearing the Bible points to as our likeness to God.



❖ **The ROYAL VIEW - There is another** unlikely and unpopular contender known as the “**royal**” view. In Genesis chapter 1, where the image of God in humanity is first mentioned in the Bible, God gives to the human beings above all other creatures a sense of **majesty**, granting them the role of **stewardship** over the cosmos (the best description of “dominion”). God made them representatives of God's own **sovereignty**.

Conclusion

Harry and Meghan, in my opinion, made a **wise choice** to leave earthly machinations of **royalty** behind them.

Monarchies of history have rarely resembled, if ever, the sovereignty, love and justice of God.



But there is a **royalty** in the one who perfected the image of God, into who's **likeness** we Christians are being transformed by grace. Paul writes elsewhere with the royal view of the Imago Dei in us in mind, saying: “...If we have died with him, we will also live with him; if we endure, we will also **reign with him**” (2 Tim. 2:11,12).

This **Gospel-shaped royalty** is quite unlike the kings and queens and international leaders of history. NT Wright says,

“If you want to see what it looks like for God's renewed people in Christ to be “royal”... don't look at the fourth and fifth centuries when Roman emperors first became Christians.”⁵

⁵ *Virtue Reborn* p.194

The “royalty” that the **Bible** depicts as ours in Christ is, for example:

- Present in Him, **gentle and riding on a donkey** upon His entry into Jerusalem, rather than on a fine stallion as warrior king,
- It’s marked by the **crown of thorns** upon Jesus’ head as He was led to the cross to die for our sins, rather than fine jewels symbolising earthly riches and power like monarchs of old.



Lorde was right to sing “**we’ll never be royals**”, not in the worldly sense.

The image of Christ **we** are being conformed to, like the originally intended Imago Dei described in Genesis, **confers on us** a gracious, **unmerited status**. This **Gospel-shaped royalty** exemplified in Jesus is granted to us **irrespective of** gender, or competency, or ethnicity, or power of reason, or abilities, or skills.

Because of God’s grace, we can be **representatives** of Christ’s **humility, love and mercy** here on earth, in the manner expressed in Romans chapter 12; we can represent **God’s sovereignty** on earth by living the **way of the cross**.