

Are We Masking the Image of God in the Face of Man

Covid-19: An Un-Anticipated Problem

I confess, the last 6 months have perplexed me. Health organizations declared COVID-19 a pandemic in March and the world was not ready. Government officials gave recommendations and eventually mandated tactics to *prevent* the fire-blazing spread of the pestilence.

As a church leader, I felt responsible for our members' safety. Many depend upon the elders to give guidance, especially in floundering times. The startling news reports gave us short notice. We had little time to figure out our responsibility as to *guardians* of the flock. We were concerned for our people's safety. We also wanted to demonstrate love for our neighbors. And as these things progressed, there grew in us a concern that the civil government would overstep its boundaries (tyranny).

We were told that delayed action would likely kill millions. We were told that our elderly would easily get the virus, spread it, and quickly pass away. We were told we must keep the hospitals from overcrowding (flatten the curve) if there were any hope of treating the victims. The government recommended we keep people away from people. They told us to stop shaking hands. Keep six feet apart. Stay in our homes. Cover our faces – mouth, nose and even eyes – so that the virus would not spread.¹ To be sure, epidemiologists and government officials were aiming at a moving target. And when the virus killed handfuls at a time, as it burned through a couple of nursing homes, the concerns became grave.

Mitigation became the \$3 buzz word.² The Wisconsin State government ordered people to stay at home, and categorized people's livelihoods as essential and non-essential. The essential ones got to keep working. Those who did unessential things were supposed to stay home. There were a lot of companies with empty parking lots and notes taped to the front door.³

No one liked the upheaval the "virus" was creating. But, most thought, "if we sacrifice in these little ways for a short time, then we will save lives and beat it." We were told we could "win the war."⁴

A Visceral Response Against Mitigation

Everyone did not feel the same way. Some opposed the mitigation recommendations. They did not want to confine themselves to their homes. They had no intention of wearing a mask.⁵ They were appalled that a health official would declare the hand-shake an unhealthy relic to be replaced by an unmanly elbow-bump.

1 The face is often the gate that gives sickness access to our body. Although, the masking approach was considered unnecessary by experts at first, including Dr. Fauci, wearing a mask has now gained popular support and is regularly commended as the patriotic and loving thing to do.

2 Mitigation is simply the action taken to lessen the severity or seriousness or pain of a thing.

3 United State Attorney General, Bill Barr, likened such requirements to putting people under house arrest and contrary to liberty. At one point he used the word "slavery." His comments were distorted by his political enemies.

4 Our church council decided to take steps to help "mitigate," and we began to livestream services and also assigned the deacons to check in weekly with our congregants in regard to their spiritual and material needs.

5 One man told me he quit shopping at Menards because they required him to wear a mask. He would go to Fleet Farm instead.

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The reaction of mitigation opponents felt visceral to me (from the gut). They would hear a government recommendation and become instantly repulsed by it. It was as if by instinct. The calls to change their lifestyle were unacceptable.

Of course, that is painting with a broad brush. People's motives varied. Some were simply careless. Others thought the virus was a hoax. A few followed what they deemed *better* health science. And still more complied initially but then balked once the government mandates started.

As the government and church leaders continued to wrestle with safety concerns, time passed. A couple of days became a week. A week or two, turned into a month. And all-of-a-sudden, we are a half-year into it and wondering what's next.

Meanwhile, my thinking shifted like a restless body under the covers. For months, it had nagged at me. I couldn't help feeling, there was an underlying or primal cause being forgotten. Could the base, instinctive reaction of the resisters really be a God-given response? Was there something seminal, fundamental to our humanity, feeding the tension? Now, I have come to believe, the Garden of Eden is at the root.

God's Edenic Order

For me,⁶ things have been boiled down. The layers have been removed, and I can see a little more clearly what is at stake. At stake is God's purpose for humanity as mentioned originally, in the Garden of Eden. Two things in particular have surfaced. 1. God gave us six days to labor and the seventh for rest and worship. 2. God made us in His image. It is our identity, and we must not deface or obscure it.

Both have been threatened (or put aside) in efforts to mitigate the virus. The first, God's Week, was jeopardized by stay-at-home orders. People were told not to leave their houses for work, and not to gather for worship on the Lord's Day. The second, God's Image, was jeopardized by mandatory mask-wearing laws, once we were required to cover our faces.

The stay-at-home orders kept people away from others, but the collateral damage was severe. It crippled the economy, and distanced people emotionally and spiritually. However, with this paper, I wish to focus on the second threat. I intend to make a case that the image of God is seen in the face of man. And, if we commit to covering up our faces, even temporarily, without an obvious life-saving benefit, we will dishonor God and dehumanize people. I am not as concerned for the medical advantages or disadvantages of mask wearing as a means to prevent the spread of the virus.⁷

6 My mind works slower than some. Maybe, instead, we should call it different. I compare my brain to a dog gnawing on a stick vs. a beaver chewing one. Beavers figure out the task and get right to the point. Dog's just gnaw around on it for a long while. They leave it lay and come back to it again and again.

7 There are two views (and more) of science that speak to the health effects of mask wearing. I do not take a side. It is not my purpose in the paper to speak scientifically, but rather theologically. This does not mean the question of science and health and mitigation is unimportant to the topic. I will address some of that later. Getting the virus must not be equated with dying, although it can lead to death.

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I contend that facial masks cover God's image. His likeness. Whereas, God made the face to shine.⁸ A mask covers over that part of man that should be unimpeded. Masks embarrass us, as there is a sense in which they emasculate⁹ the wearer. One British commentator referred to the face mask as a muzzle (like a dog might wear, or a bear in the circus). That word is a bit inflammatory, but to picture a man in a mask is to picture God's image-bearer inhibited, less than human.

Not everyone who puts on a mask feels they are inhibiting God's image. Some might argue that face masks *protect* the image-bearer, and thus *respects* God's image.¹⁰ But who decides? And for how long? Is it acceptable for someone with governmental power to impose masks on others? And does God's image in the face of man ever enter the conversation?¹¹

This is what we find back in the Garden of Eden:

Genesis 1:26-27 Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth." So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.

Genesis 2:7 then the Lord God formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living creature.

No animal was made like man. Though made from the dust like the animals, God breathed into Adam's nostrils the breath of life and he became God's image-bearer. This was unique.

God's Image in the Human Body

Adam's physical body does not complete the image of God, but his physical body is integral to it. Adam, like you and I, will forever be more than just a body. He is body and soul. It is what makes¹² him Adam. Adam is a physical image-bearing creature to this day. And though Adam's body is currently one place while his soul is another, this does not prevent him from still being a physical image-bearer. The Bible regularly identifies people as "buried" and "buried with the fathers"¹³ as if their physical body is still identified as the person even after death.

8 This statement may sound reductionistic, but please continue reading. I do not contend that man's face is God's image, but that it is an important part of the image. One might say, a prominent identifier stamped upon the human body. Nor is the image confined to physical body alone. Although our hands, feet, and other physical attributes contribute to how He has constructed us in His image, the body by itself does not capture the image completely. See later sections: *God's Image in the Human Body*, and *Only Worship the One in Whose Image We Were Made*.

9 My use of the word emasculate is according to its secondary definition: to deprive of strength or vigor; weaken.

10 In the same way that a doctor wears a mask while doing surgery, or a carpenter sanding wood, or a scuba-diver, or arctic explorer, all wear a face covering to protect the life of a person.

11 Doubtless, others have discussed this. In my research I even came across a public official who stood against mask wearing based upon an image of God argument.

12 I've intentionally used *present indicative form* here.

13 See Genesis 25:8-10, 1 Kings 2:10, 1 Kings 11:43, etc.

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Joseph wanted his bones to be brought out of Egypt and buried in the Promised Land.¹⁴ In death, God's people respected the physical remains. Yet we also understand that their souls are somewhere else.¹⁵

Then, at the Resurrection, the Bible assures us, a person's soul and body get re-unified. So Adam and Eve and Noah and Jacob and Joseph and David and the rest will stand again to see the LORD, in physically-spiritually restored bodies. Jesus Christ is the first-fruits of this wonderful resurrection.¹⁶

I teach and preach as a pastor from the reformed tradition. One or two of my colleagues have bristled at the thought that man's physical body is somehow included as part of God's image in man. They cited language from the Westminster Confession.¹⁷

In that Confession Chapter IV, article 2, it describes three qualities found in man that describe God's image. This is what it says, "After God had made all other creatures, He created man, male and female, with reasonable and immortal souls, endued with knowledge, righteousness, and true holiness, after His own image...".

So, they feel that since the physical body is found nowhere in this list, that it must not be possible. However, I do not believe the Confession intended to boil down God's image and limit it to these three aspects.

The reformed theologian Sinclair Ferguson asserts that the three were not meant to exclude other aspects: The image has been defined in ethical and cognitive terms. God is holy and righteous. Man made in his image is so as well. Calvin, in particular, argued for this position...The image of God, therefore, consisting of holiness, righteousness and knowledge of the truth is dynamic rather than static in nature. Reformed theology recognized that more than this was required in order to express fully the Biblical teaching (cf. Calvin's belief that not even the body is excluded from the idea of the divine image). [Sinclair B. Ferguson, "Image of God," in *New Dictionary of Theology*, eds. Sinclair B. Ferguson et al (Leicester: IVP, 1988), p. 328]

So what about God's image being represented also in the physical body of man? I think we find the best support, for man's physical body being fashioned to reflect the image God, from the words the LORD spoke to Noah and his sons in Genesis 9:5-6.

"And for your lifeblood I will require a reckoning: from every beast I will require it and from man. From his fellow man I will require a reckoning for the life of man. Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed, for God made man in his own image."

14 See Genesis 50:25-26

15 John Frame, *Systematic Theology, An Introduction to Christian Belief* (New Jersey: P&R Publishing, 2013). p. 799-801.

16 See 1 Corinthians 15:23; John 20:27, "A week later his disciples were in the house again, and Thomas was with them. Though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, 'Peace be with you!' Then he said to Thomas, 'Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe.'"

17 The Westminster Confession is one of the formal statements of doctrinal belief for the English speaking Presbyterian branch of the reformed tradition.

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We find here it is the physical killing of the man that is the thing for which God requires a reckoning. The shedding of blood is physical, not spiritual. The murderer has killed, physically. He did not kill the man's soul. He did not take from the man those other three aspects mentioned. He did, however, participate in the division of the image bearer. The body was separated from the rest of the person.

Further, this separation is not acceptable to God. Our bodies still matter, even as they lie in the ground or are cast as ashes over the ocean. And God intends to take those bodies, transform them, and restore man complete again. A deceased man is not complete until the resurrection.

I tried to think of an analogy that might capture my thoughts on God's image in the physical body (and therefore in the face) and thought of a cup of milk. The definition of a cup of milk requires, not only the milk but the cup that carries it. If you smash the cup, you no longer have a cup of milk. It, by definition, must be milk in a cup.

The cup is not sufficient to the definition. It may seem to contain the more important milk. However, the cup is necessary. You have no cup of milk without it.

So your body is an essential part of your identity as an image-bearer. We recognize a human by his or her body. As the children's exercise song goes: *Head, shoulders, knees and toes, knees and toes. Eyes and ears and mouth and nose...*

Even a physically deformed person is easily distinguished from an animal. The human head and face are the most telling identifier. God has made it the prominent, physical, emblem of the person and the location of the command center for the body.¹⁸

In the human head we find the brain working behind the eyes, ears, nose and mouth. The face is out in front.

Reed Armstrong, a sculptor and Professor of Fine Arts with the International Catholic University, Notre Dame, IN, writes, "The perfect face mirrors the perfect soul, the soul in complete conformity with God. This perfection is not physical beauty, but a spiritual perfection that shines through the human face. When we speak of a person's 'inner beauty,' we are acknowledging that the spiritual soul is revealed through the human face."¹⁹

Again, it was into Adam's nostrils that God breathed into him the breath of life. We continue to breath air into our lungs by our noses. Noses detect scents. They screen out particles and the like. A nose also serves our ability to communicate facially and by sound.

18 The importance of the head to the body is typified by Christ being the head of his body, the church. (Colossians 1:18)

19 Armstrong's thought provoking article, written in 2011, speaks to the issue of the image of God in the face of man. He writes as a Roman Catholic observer. You can read the article here. <https://www.crisismagazine.com/2011/the-human-face-image-of-god>

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God gave us eyes to see. We read. We watch. We measure. But our eyes do more than that. We direct our eyes toward the things we pursue. We determine a direction we want to go in our *hearts*²⁰ and then our eyes look to it. Jesus said, “The eye is the lamp of the body. So, if your eye is healthy, your whole body will be full of light, but if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness.” Matthew 6:22-23a

You might say your eyes are a tool used by your heart. If you wish to pursue some evil, your eyes will be on the lookout for it. If you want to run after righteousness, then your eyes will watch for the signposts that will take you there.

There is also a sense in which your eyes keep you honest. They assist or expose us when we communicate. Only a skilled liar can get away by looking you in the eye while they deceive you. It is the reason for the common phrase, “He lied right to my face!” I make a habit of taking off my sunglasses when speaking about important things to people. I don’t want to hide my eyes. I want people to know I’m sincere. Unless, of course, I desire to disguise my intentions. Some certainly do try to hide: fear, doubt, anger, deception, etc. behind a pair of sunglasses.

Of course, the prophets routinely accused the disobedient of having eyes but not “seeing.” They were blind to the things of God. Jesus quotes the prophets while accusing the Pharisees of having eyes that do not see and ears that do not hear.

God gave us ears to hear. We are made to listen. God speaks to us. We are persons that are not alone. We communicate with Him and with other image-bearers. Communication requires listening. “He who has ears to hear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches...”

With our ears we also detect sounds from the world around us. With them we appreciate the beauty of music, story, the preaching of God’s Word. A deaf girl longs to hear and must maximize the use of her other senses to appreciate what someone with hearing takes for granted.

God gave us the mouth to speak, breath, and eat. The mouth is the secondary opening for the respiratory tract. (It can step in for the nose if necessary.) And eating is the mouth’s contribution to keeping the rest of the body alive. Of course, man shall not live on bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.²¹

God put a tongue inside your mouth. By it you articulate sounds to communicate a language. Most people grow up speaking their native language, but some use their minds and learn how to manipulate their tongues to also mimic and replicate the sounds of *foreign* languages.²²

20 The Bible often uses the word “heart” to refer to the center of the person. It is understood as the seat of the person’s intellect, will and desire.

21 Matthew 4:4

22 Foreign languages did not always exist. God cursed mankind and divided our original, shared tongue, into many tongues at the Tower of Babel. By establishing languages foreign to each other, He scattered people and broke up their evil efforts. When Jesus Christ sent His Spirit on Pentecost, He gave people the capability to speak in languages they previously hadn’t learned. It demonstrated a reversal of the curse God brought at Babel.

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God's Image in the Face of Man

I said all of this to briefly introduce aspects of the human head and face, and infer a connection between it and being made in God's image. If indeed, the human face is *identifiable* (in part) with the image of God, then we should not demean it. We shouldn't casually regulate its effacement or vandalize it. Rather, the face should be esteemed, for in the human face God is honored.

Now people have suffered facial deformities. It is sad. Some are born with a cleft lip, a birthmark, or a craniofacial condition, while others are damaged by disease, war or some accident. The psychological effect can be devastating. People with facial disfigurement often withdraw from society, get frustrated and depressed. For those who previously appeared one way and then became disfigured, *identity issues* become an additional problem. Many victims are eventually diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

But, in every case, the image of God was not lost by the disfigurement. The person remained 100% an image-bearer. And this is beautiful knowledge which can assist their recovery from injury.²³

The PTSD suffered should at least cause us to ask, "If God has so endowed man's face to identify him as bearing the image, what psychological problems are we unknowingly introducing when we mask faces?" Can life even be lived appropriately with faces covered? Is safety a greater duty than image bearing? Does the LORD permit a civil magistrate to force people to cover up the human face for some "greater" good? Am I relinquishing my responsibility to represent God by submitting to a government edict? Also, there is a curious dynamic that takes place in the mind as we begin to consider what others think of us when we do or don't wear a mask.

The other day, as my wife and I walked through a Walmart store with our faces covered, I saw a woman shopping with her young son. Neither wore a mask.²⁴ She smiled. They went up and down the rows with a shopping cart like the rest of us. I looked around at all the other mask wearers in the thirty to forty minutes we shopped. She, and her son, were the only ones I saw in the store with faces uncovered. As we checked out, she past by on her way out of the store, again smiling. I felt ashamed and convicted. I felt like I had compromised God's image. I took off my mask.

Perhaps others judged the woman to be selfish, or careless, or did not pass any judgments at all. I know full well that many people wear a mask to protect others. Family and friends, near and dear to me, consider it an act of love. They do it for others. Truly, they are convinced God would want them to. My point here is that things take place in our minds. We perform mental gymnastics. We adjust. We wonder

23 Those who served as priests before God in the Tabernacle/Temple could not offer the bread of God if they had a mutilated face, among many other defects: hunchback, dwarfism, itching disease, etc. This is what the LORD told Moses to instruct Aaron. However, this did not make the man less than human. He was not excluded from the community of Israel. It simply kept him from serving in this priestly fashion. (See Lev. 21:16-24)

24 I will admit. I don't know why they were not wearing masks. It may have been due to physical health conditions. I drew some conclusions, perhaps, based upon my growing conviction that the image of God should be uncovered. I may have been projecting motives that were not present in her. My motives for taking my mask off were to honor God. Others may judge me differently.

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what others are thinking. We wonder if we are guilty or innocent. Proud or defiant. We wonder what God is thinking. We are concerned that we are living upright.

Tattoos, Burqas, Make-up and Beards

Vandalism of the face, in the name of personal artistic expression or some sort of societal nomenclature is a desire to change your face (and identity) from the one you grew up wearing. There were ancients who “tagged” themselves with facial markings according to their tribal affiliations. More modern day gang membership uses face tattoos for the same purpose. Others simply want to mark themselves as rebels, or as trend-setters. Face-tattoos are troubling, and the permanency of the act suggests an underlying dissatisfaction with one’s original identity.

Martin Noth, in his commentary on Leviticus, believes that God’s command, “You shall not make any cuts on your body for the dead or tattoo yourselves: I am the LORD,” was likely a command against a practice found in pagan nations where tattooing was “an attempt to make oneself unrecognizable in face of the dangers emanating from the ‘soul’ of a dead person.” So the command was against tattooing in an effort to change your appearance for fear of what the dead might do to you.^{25, 26}

As agreeable or disagreeable as face tattoos may seem, most Christians completely reject the Muslim custom of women wearing the burqa. We consider it dehumanizing. The burqa is the garment worn by women head-to-toe, covering the woman’s face but leaving only a small space for her eyes to see out in front of her. Whether forced upon the woman or voluntarily worn, the burqa strikes at the heart of God’s image being seen in the face of a human being.²⁷

Some may wonder whether a man’s beard covers the face. The quick and simple answer to the question is: God gave men facial hair. It does not cover the upper face – meaning eyes, nose and ears. Also, hair does not grow from the lips or out of the mouth, which sounds like it supports rather than denies the legitimacy of keeping the face uncovered.

Another question may be raised about the legitimacy of women wearing make-up. I think it can be argued that make-up should enhance rather than obscure or show disdain for the face. Make-up can be used to cause a face to shine more brilliantly. To be sure, some use “face paint” like the tattooist who is dissatisfied with his place in life, and wants to transform into something else.

So far I’ve scratched at some important questions: What is it that defines the Image of God in man? What makes us different from the other creatures? What makes us God’s vicegerents?²⁸ And is the image of God represented in the human face?

25 Noth, Martin, *The Old Testament Library Leviticus*, p. 143, Westminster Press, Philadelphia, 1963.

26 In another exposition, John Gill quotes from a rabbi who taught that tattooing, “was the custom of the Gentiles in ancient times, to imprint upon themselves the mark of an idol, to show that they were his servants.” This would be in contrast to remaining, in appearance, the person the LORD God made you to be and serving Him alone.

27 Whereas the Muslim hijab is a head scarf, which typically covers the hair, neck and chest. It does not cover the face and is more agreeable to the woman’s personal identity. In the Muslim world, the hijab is more commonly worn than the burqa.

28 Vicegerent: A person exercising delegated power on behalf of a sovereign ruler. The position was given to mankind in the Garden of Eden where God established the man and the woman as His representatives to rule over the earth.

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Only Worship the One in Whose Image We Were Made

The Apostle Paul writes about Jesus Christ, “He is the image of the invisible God...”²⁹ This reference is to the Son of God (who took on the form of a man). God is invisible, yet now perfectly found “imaged” in the Lord Jesus Christ. Of course, Christians recognize that Jesus Christ is God the Son, and fully God. Yet Paul writes that Jesus is the image of the invisible God. So the unseen God is seen when you look at the man: Jesus Christ. Jesus is God’s perfect human image of Himself. Jesus fully honors God in His whole person: body and soul.

All men should be like Jesus. The LORD refuses to be represented by other creatures. They were not made in His image. And so he tells His people, “You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth.”³⁰

And though man is made in God’s image, the image of man is not to be worshiped either. Paul writes, “Claiming to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things.”³¹

Certainly, God’s image in man is more than his head, heart, brain, face, hands, feet and other physical features. The image includes his soul and spirit too. But more, the image is found in the intellect, will, the ability to ponder and plan, and communicate, and all else that God determined to make and breath into him.

John Frame writes, “So the image of God consists of those qualities that equip man to be lord of the world, under God. What can these qualities be, but analogies of God’s own lordship attributes?”³² By saying this, Frame does not exclude the importance of man’s physical component.

He continues, “But it should already be evident that the image of God does pertain to the body. Man’s physical strength is a major *aspect* of his power to subdue the earth and take dominion of it. Some have objected that the human body cannot be God’s image because God is incorporeal. But God’s incorporeality does not mean that he can never take physical form, only that he is sovereign in his choice of whether or not to take physical form; and if he chooses to take one, he is sovereign in choosing the form he takes...He is superphysical – more than physical, not less. Further, whether or not he chooses to take a physical form, he is able to do everything that we can do with our bodies, and far more: Psalm 94:9 asks, ‘He who planted the ear, does he not hear? He who formed the eye, does he not see?’ Human beings hear with their physical ears and see with their physical eyes. God, however, is master of the processes of hearing and seeing. He does without physical organs what we do with them, and far more.”³³

29 Colossians 1:15

30 Sinful man has historically created idols to replace God in worship. Sinful man has historically resented God’s purpose for him and has tried to exchange it. Sinful man runs away from God and as he runs he casts off reminders of God for they get in the way of his destination: to be free of God! (See Exodus 20:4)

31 Romans 1:22-23

32 Systematic Theology, p. 786

33 Ibid, p. 788.

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So God made us to be like Him. And He formed Adam and Eve physically to comport with His image. Our body and soul is one whole. And we've been made to think and want and plan and communicate like God and with Him.

False “gods” are Unworthy of Man’s Worship

In contrast, consider false gods. They cannot do the things God does.

There is record of a time when the Philistines defeated the Israelites and took away the ark of God. They placed the ark in the presence of their god, Dagon. It is found in 1 Samuel 4 & 5. The curious thing is how God treats the false god with contempt.

In 1 Samuel 5:1-4 we read:

When the Philistines captured the ark of God, they brought it from Ebenezer to Ashdod. Then the Philistines took the ark of God and brought it into the house of Dagon and set it up beside Dagon. And when the people of Ashdod rose early the next day, behold, Dagon had fallen face downward on the ground before the ark of the LORD. So they took Dagon and put him back in his place. But when they rose early on the next morning, behold, Dagon had fallen face downward on the ground before the ark of the LORD, and the head of Dagon and both his hands were lying cut off on the threshold. Only the trunk of Dagon was left to him.

So God knocks over onto its face the deaf, mute, and dumb god. And the Philistines find him and stand him up again. God knocks him over on his face again the next night, and this time cuts off his head and hands. Dagon was no god. God makes man to bow down to Him. And any idol formed by man, face or no face, will only prove itself blind, deaf and dumb.

It is striking the way the Psalmist puts it. In Psalm 115:4-8 we read, “Their idols are silver and gold, the work of human hands. They have mouths, but do not speak; eyes, but do not see. They have ears, but do not hear; noses, but do not smell. They have hands, but do not feel; feet, but do not walk; and they do not make a sound in their throat. Those who make them become like them; so do all who trust in them.”³⁴

Whereas God does all of these things, that make believe gods (idols) can't, even though, as Frame noted above, *He does them without physical organs*. This is why false gods are unworthy of our worship. We've been made for someone great!

Our Faces in Life and Worship

Back to a previous question: Is the image of God represented in the face of man? Certainly, it is. The human head and face captures the glory of God and reflect Him in a special way. The human face is to shine forth in the earth. It represents God to other creatures. Animals quickly detect when a man is

34 See also Psalm 135:15-18

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present.³⁵ To see a man's face is to see the man. And by his face, he sees you. The face is man's primary source for communicating with other creatures by his speech, his facial countenance,³⁶ and his hearing. Also, a man knows to bow his face to the ground when encountering God and angels sent by Him. Moses hid his face when God spoke to Him from the bush, "Do not come near; take your sandals off your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground." And he said, "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God."³⁷

Other examples include:

Genesis 17:1-3, When Abram was ninety-nine years old the Lord appeared to Abram and said to him, "I am God Almighty; walk before me, and be blameless, that I may make my covenant between me and you, and may multiply you greatly." Then Abram fell on his face."

1 Chronicles 21:15b-16, "And the angel of the Lord was standing by the threshing floor of Ornan the Jebusite. And David lifted his eyes and saw the angel of the Lord standing between earth and heaven, and in his hand a drawn sword stretched out over Jerusalem. Then David and the elders, clothed in sackcloth, fell upon their faces."

Also, Daniel 10:15-16, "When he had spoken to me according to these words, I turned my face toward the ground and was mute. And behold, one in the likeness of the children of man touched my lips. Then I opened my mouth and spoke. I said to him who stood before me, "O my lord, by reason of the vision pains have come upon me, and I retain no strength."

Finally, Luke 5:8, "But when Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, 'Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord.'"

At times, a man will bow his face to the ground to show submission to another person, recognizing that man's rightful authority in the relationship, or an authority God gave to the person.³⁸ To bow the face is to show homage, defer to someone greater. Otherwise a man's face represents his own authority as vicegerent of God.

35 See Genesis 9:2, "The fear of you and the dread of you shall be upon every beast of the earth and upon every bird of the heavens, upon everything that creeps on the ground and all the fish of the sea. Into your hand they are delivered."

36 See Genesis 4:5b-6 says, "So Cain was very angry, and his face fell. The Lord said to Cain, 'Why are you angry, and why has your face fallen?'"

Also Isaiah 13:8, "They will look aghast at one another; their faces will be aflame."

Also Job 29:24-25 reads, "I smiled on them when they had no confidence, and the light of my face they did not cast down. I chose their way and sat as chief, and I lived like a king among his troops, like one who comforts mourners."

Also Ecclesiastes 8:1, "A man's wisdom makes his face shine, and the hardness of his face is changed."

Also Daniel 3:19, "Then Nebuchadnezzar was filled with fury, and the expression of his face was changed against Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. He ordered the furnace heated seven times more than it was usually heated."

Also Nahum 2:10, "Desolate! Desolation and ruin! Hearts melt and knees tremble; anguish is in all loins; all faces grow pale!"

37 See Exodus 3:5-6

38 In Genesis 33:10 Jacob bowed his face to the ground before his brother Esau and Joseph also bows before his father in Genesis 48:12.

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God's Image Bearing Enemies

It is because man bears God's image that we are biblically satisfied when we see God's enemies defaced and devalued because of their wickedness.

It is just and final that Goliath should have his face forced to the ground and his head removed. The prophet Samuel records, "And David put his hand in his bag and took out a stone and slung it and struck the Philistine on his forehead. The stone sank into his forehead, and he fell on his face to the ground."³⁹ Samuel continues, "Then David ran and stood over the Philistine and took his sword and drew it out of its sheath and killed him and cut off his head with it. When the Philistines saw that their champion was dead, they fled."⁴⁰

It is the same sense of satisfaction when the woman Jael is able to deliver the enemy of God's people, Sisera, by pounding a tent peg through his head.⁴¹ And we wait eagerly to see what happens next once soldiers cover Haman's head. We are glad that he is hung on the gallows he himself built to hang God's servant, Mordecai.⁴²

I don't think it is because we desire for these men to be destroyed *as men*, but we know God did not make us to represent Him so wickedly. They forsake the image. We see throughout Scripture how God hates "haughty eyes, a lying tongue, hands that shed innocent blood, a heart that devises wicked schemes, feet that run swiftly to evil..."⁴³ and so we wish for the wicked to be disallowed and disabled from bearing His glorious image. We want for them to stop.

Man's Face is Suited for Glory!

Nevertheless, God's image is to be *especially* found in the physical face of man, more than compared to other bodily appendages.

We see the face's prominence when Peter, James and John witnessed the brilliance of Jesus face on the mount of Transfiguration. We read, "And he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became white as light."⁴⁴ Jesus met with Elijah and Moses who appeared with him in glory on that mount and we are told a bright cloud covered them. We are not told that Moses and

39 See 1 Samuel 17:49

40 See 1 Samuel 17:51

41 See Judges 4:22, "And behold, as Barak was pursuing Sisera, Jael went out to meet him and said to him, "Come, and I will show you the man whom you are seeking." So he went in to her tent, and there lay Sisera dead, with the tent peg in his temple."

42 See Esther 7:8b-10a, As the word left the mouth of the king, they covered Haman's face. Then Harbona, one of the eunuchs in attendance on the king, said, "Moreover, the gallows that Haman has prepared for Mordecai, whose word saved the king, is standing at Haman's house, fifty cubits high." And the king said, "Hang him on that." So they hanged Haman on the gallows that he had prepared for Mordecai."

43 See Proverbs 6:17-18

44 See Matthew 17:2

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Elijah's faces were like the sun, but we can't help being reminded of the skin of Moses's face shining after having been in God's presence in the Old Testament.⁴⁵

It appears God has made the face especially suited to reflect His image and glory.

We are told in Revelation 22 of a time and place when, "No longer will there be anything accursed, but the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and his servants will worship him. They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads."⁴⁶ Perhaps when Jesus Christ returns and we are forever in His presence, then our faces will shine as bright as the day.

The most compelling passage, illustrating that God has made the human face significant to the image of God, is the LORD's appearance to Moses.⁴⁷

As the story goes, Moses asks God, "Please show me your glory." The LORD tells him, "I will make all my goodness pass before you and will proclaim before you my name 'The LORD.' And I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy. But," he said, "you cannot see my face, for man shall not see me and live." And the LORD said, "Behold, there is a place by me where you shall stand on the rock, and while my glory passes by I will put you in a cleft of the rock, and I will cover you with my hand until I have passed by. Then I will take away my hand, and you shall see my back, but my face shall not be seen."

Without spending time debating the various components that contribute to God's image, without dividing soul from body, without delineating between communicable and incommunicable attributes,⁴⁸ without discussing the invisible God becoming visible, without quibbling about analogical language,⁴⁹ or some backward personification,⁵⁰ it seems pretty plain that God considers the face (His face) very significant to His image and glory. To see God's face meant that Moses was somehow *seeing* God. And no one shall see Him and live.

45 Exodus 34:29-35 speaks of how Moses face shone and that he veiled it afterward. He did this so that the people did not have to witness his complexion returning to normal after being so glorious. Moses had told the people what God said to him with his face bright, but covered it afterward. The Apostle Paul speaks to this in 2 Corinthians 3:12-13 when he writes, "Since we have such a hope, we are very bold, not like Moses, who would put a veil over his face so that the Israelites might not gaze at the outcome of what was being brought to an end."

46 See the broader context of Revelation 22:1-5. No matter your eschatological viewpoint, Christ has a face that can be seen and his name will somehow be on the foreheads of those who serve Him.

47 See Exodus 33:18-23

48 God shares communicable attributes with man. He made us with the ability to love, learn, show mercy, etc. God does not share His incommunicable attributes. He has not made man to be all-knowing, everywhere present, etc.

49 Analogical language is an important way in which God communicates with man about Himself. He refers to Himself as their King or Father. He calls Himself the rock, or a mighty fortress. These are things humans understand from their creaturely experience, and God builds off of these to explain Himself. Of course, all that man experiences is because God made it so. And God makes it so because of Who He is. So our concept of father must be rooted in God from the start.

50 Personification is to give human characteristics to nonhuman things. Eg. The tree worked dutifully to provide shade for the deer and a home for the birds. (Trees don't think like men.) Some argue that to say God has a face, or hands, or a brain is to impose our human qualities upon God.

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And so, by inference I suggest that to see man's face and recognize God's image in it, is more significant than seeing God's image in *other parts* of the human body. If God's face was especially impressive in the exchange with Moses, then man's face is especially impressive too.

Face Masks for Everyone?

So then, how does God's image in the face of man contribute to the argument against mask wearing? Is it a sin to wear a mask? The short answer is: God did not make mankind to cover faces by default. In other words, people aren't born with masks.

Wearing a Mask to Protect God's Image

However, there are circumstances in which some form of mask is necessary to protect the image-bearing person. He or she would become gravely ill, or die, if some sort of mask were not used. This is the argument for surgeons using masks during operations, or astronauts wearing a protective helmet and suit in space, or covering a face in extreme heat or cold (the legitimate concern of a race car driver or arctic explorer). You and I would put a hat and scarf on a child before they go play in the snow. The list goes on and on. In such cases, there is a common motive to protect. We mask to honor the life and health of God's image-bearer. And typically the wearer understands the risk to their own health or that of their patient, and willingly embraces the covering.⁵¹

Yet, does this mean that someone who bears the sword is allowed to demand you wear a mask?⁵² Has God given responsibility to people in civil authority to require you to cover His image in your face? Do we really think it likely that God created us to be a certain way, but then allows magistrates to tell us we cannot?

The Government Recommends vs. The Government Requires The Threat of Punishment.

A parent would be blamed if their child suffered frostbite, just as they're blamed for leaving a child in a hot car. And for good reason. Children don't know better. Parents should. It is not as obvious that the World Health Organization knows what is best for people across the globe. Or the CDC⁵³ for Americans. Or the Wisconsin Department of Health Services for Wisconsinites. However, our civil rulers depend upon these scientifically-based health organizations as advisors. And it's the combined efforts of scientists and governors that have led to both recommendations and requirements.

Anyone can feel free to take or leave a recommendation. And often, a compliant citizenry will go along with reasonable recommendations when it comes to health safety. However, when a civil authority determines that for the public safety there will be new laws implemented, then citizens are liable to ask more pointed questions. New laws are especially concerning and questionable when governors take partisan sides when implementing health *recommendations and/or regulations*.

51 This includes the little boy who is sledding in the snow but is glad when his mother pulls the scarf up over his cheeks.

52 The use of the word *sword* is from Romans 13. God gives the civil authorities the sword for punishing wrong doers.

53 CDC stands for the Center for Disease Control and Prevention. It is our nation's health protection agency.

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Perhaps Christians would consider health and government officials more trustworthy if the topic of *God's image in man's face* was the vital concern. As of now, it is not even a proposition in the debate. Any wonder, since many scientists and governing officials are not, themselves, god-fearing people. And yet these are the ones to decide for the rest of us how and when to cover the human face? I argue, here, God's image is seminal, but it is not yet obvious to even churchmen. We must see the importance and then teach it to others.

I've often said, tension in a society is a good thing when a civil magistrate is trying to pass new law. And though COVID-19's governmental *recommendations* did not begin as new "law," executive orders⁵⁴ have quickly transformed them into legal questions.⁵⁵ And with every new mandate the reason given is: *serious concern for public safety*.

Man's Decrees

There are times when a government will declare a "state of emergency" and claim the right to do things it would not normally be able to do. These "state of emergency" orders are supposed to be for the safety and protection of its citizens. They are typically declared in regard to natural disasters, when a whole city or region has been decimated by hurricane, earthquake, fire, flood, etc. The state of emergency regulates behavior for a set period of time and the goal is (usually) to keep unauthorized people from an area until order and safety return.

An example is Hurricane Katrina. Both the state of Louisiana and the U.S. Federal government declared a state of emergency the day before the hurricane hit. The focus was primarily on New Orleans, where 1.5 million people were evacuated. However, anywhere from 150,000 to 200,000 remained.

Under the conditions of a flood, or pandemic, or war, or city-wide fire, or other impending doom, when a governor⁵⁶ instructs us to act differently in the name of safety – to temporarily halt our day-to-day Edenic rhythm of life (six days labor, one day rest with worship) and warns citizens to alter behavior for fear of fire or flood or pestilence – then we must weigh the recommendation. After all, God's order has been challenged. Compliance is the question. Thankfully, a state of emergency does not always restrict the citizens' activities. It is often a warning of conditions with recommended safety precautions.

In the summer of 2018, a tornado spun through my small town of Alto, WI. Trees were toppled, roads were covered with branches and electrical lines. Homes were damaged and left without electricity. My wife was trapped home alone. She spent the night without me. There was no good way into town. County law enforcement closed the three main streets. Only emergency workers, including the power company, and police and fire personnel could come and go. Everyone else got stopped and needed permission to gain entrance. Many were sent away. The following day, in order to get to my wife and

54 State of Emergency and Martial Law are labels for legal constructs by which a civil magistrate imposes its will upon the citizenry for their own good, by taking freedom away in some form. These two constructs are applied in cases of natural disaster, hostile uprisings, and the like.

55 If not at the Federal government level, this has certainly been the case at the local and state levels.

56 By governor I mean a ruler or chief magistrate in general, not particularly an executive head of one of the states in the United States of America. Although they qualify.

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house, I parked the car in the lot of a company on the edge of town, and walked through yards to reach her. It was an emergency, and whether or not the county government called it such, they were still acting on behalf of the citizens of Alto. It was for our good. Yet, before God, my responsibility is to care for my wife and household. There is no one God has authorized to get in my way.⁵⁷

Some Alto residents remained in town. They started up their chainsaws and went to work. Others came to help from nearby towns, climbing fences, trudging through backyards, etc. Sawing, chopping, dragging, raking, and so forth. Yet everyone knew, they were in Alto under “swim at your own risk” conditions. The county sheriff was keeping people out who had no real need to be in. Further, all who found their way into town, knew they had better stay clear of the emergency workers. This makes sense. People could see the work that needed to be done. They understood the safety concerns. And they mostly complied.

In regard to our current masking requirements, the President has refrained from ordering people to wear masks, but he has recommended their use. This is reasonable.⁵⁸ It puts people in charge of their own health decisions. It does not require them to take a position for or against covering over God’s image found in their face. The President also took the approach of a “voluntary national shut down,” allowing choices to be made by citizens and local governing officials.

In the State of Wisconsin, as well as some others, the Governor attempted to impose stay-at-home requirements under Emergency Order #28, and he has since issued an “emergency order” requiring face coverings “indoors and in enclosed spaces, with some exceptions.”⁵⁹ Although, most local officials and county governments have had no intention of enforcing either of the Governor’s attempts, the Orders were still required. In essence, the Wisconsin Governor has decided that it is within his authority to disallow people from from keeping God’s week, and to force them to cover His image in people’s faces. He did not merely recommend these things and leave the responsibility to the citizens. He required it of us.

Though an urgent and temporary threat to the health of the population should concern all good people, with due respect for the position and authority of governing magistrates, it remains our obligation as image-bearers to take the following steps: 1) Examine the legitimacy of the life-threat and take action to protect life as individuals. 2) Look to protect life in a way that God’s order and commands can still

57 I speak to God’s ethical will here. Certainly, God can and does interfere with my ability to care for my wife and household by His sovereign will. If he sends a tornado, or I’m put into jail, or die, these can all get in the way of me carrying out my responsibilities as a man. However, none of those alter my obligation as a husband and householder.

58 The alternative to recommendation is requirement. If something is required it is law. And if it is law that means there are penalties attached to breaking the law. Fines, confiscation, physical restraint, arrest, are all sanctions used by governments when a recommendation becomes a law. We have already seen cases of arrest for non-mask wearing. CNN and Fox both reported on a woman being tasered and handcuffed at a middle school football game because she refused to wear a mask or leave the event. Another example of arrest took place when three Christians were arrested for participating in an outdoor song event. They were not wearing masks. Does arresting these citizens seem reasonable?

59 Private residences are exempt from the order, as are people with medical conditions.

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be followed. 3) If God has imposed circumstances, by natural disaster,⁶⁰ war⁶¹ or governmental edict,⁶² which temporarily prevents us from walking within the bounds of His created order, then we pray⁶³ and take action in order to quickly overcome both and return proper order to society.⁶⁴

God's Order as the Christian's First Obligation

God's Edenic design must be upheld as our mutually agreed upon purpose. By "mutual" I refer to all governments and its citizens. No people or nation is exempt from this requirement. God has created us and governs us. He is the One to whom all must answer.

It is not the civil magistrate that defines truth and reality. It is not the civil magistrate that decides good law and order. In other words, "Just because you said it, doesn't make it so."

God gives us the limits and boundaries of Law and Order in His Word. But it is the Church, first, who must know that God has ordered all things. Then it is the Church that must teach the civil magistrate God's Word and remind him that His order and Law is supreme. This means that no man or magistrate can change it. God made things as they are and instructed us to obey Him.

My daughter has asked me the question, "Is it proper for people to individually decide when to obey or disobey a governor's order?" I believe the quick answer to the question is, "The individual *always* decides. And he or she always decides in the presence of God."

As Christians we must weigh on the "scale" the civil authority's logic, motive, and plans for implementation of any law, or every emergency order. And if a requirement comes up lacking sufficient respect for God and His Word, then we must decide what to do about it.⁶⁵

60 See Genesis 41:56-42:3 "So when the famine had spread over all the land, Joseph opened all the storehouses and sold to the Egyptians, for the famine was severe in the land of Egypt. Moreover, all the earth came to Egypt to Joseph to buy grain, because the famine was severe over all the earth. When Jacob learned that there was grain for sale in Egypt, he said to his sons, "Why do you look at one another?" And he said, "Behold, I have heard that there is grain for sale in Egypt. Go down and buy grain for us there, that we may live and not die." So ten of Joseph's brothers went down to buy grain in Egypt."

61 See 2 Kings 25:1-25 where it describes Nebuchadnezzar's siege against Jerusalem and the severe famine that resulted.

62 See Exodus 1 and 2. The Hebrew people groaned as they were unable to live and work and worship according to God's order because of the tyranny of their Egyptian masters. They were sorely oppressed under harsh labor. They were required to kill their newborn children. They were slaves and not free men.

63 See 2 Chronicles 6. This is King Solomon's recipe. The people should pray and repent so that the LORD will restore things to their proper order.

64 Even in the disputed face covering Emergency Order #1, of Wisconsin's Governor Evers, there is a time limit. The order went into effect on August 1st, 2020 and is set to expire on September 28th, 2020. In other states, emergency orders have been prolonged after reaching the first expiration date. Perhaps that is the reason for the #1 in the above "Emergency Order." It should also be noted that Governor Evers previously issued a stay-at-home order for the state's citizens. However, the Wisconsin Supreme Court struck that one down.

65 How far one is willing to obey or disobey may be determined by how much money you will be willing to pay in the form of citations and fines, confiscation of property, jail terms, imprisonments and the like. When Milwaukee pro-lifer's blocked abortion clinic doors back in 1992, those arrested came to be charged as defying state and federal court orders. For some it meant being ticketed for trespassing in the amount of \$200 per ticket. Others, those who were pro-life leaders, spent many months in jail.

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Sometimes authorities create bad law, such as America's nationwide constitutional ban on alcohol in the 1920's known as Prohibition. It was ungodly law hoisted upon the citizenry in the name of public health and safety. It led to a ruinous promotion of underground (and above ground) criminal activity. It was later repealed.⁶⁶

Christians are obligated to promote God's Law and Order in every nation the Church resides. And the church should go to every nation. Jesus sent us into the whole world to teach the nations all that He commanded. He is King of kings. Even if our best alternative is for disobedience as a *conscientious objector*, we must seek God's order first.

Whatever level of prayer and action you take, people in positions of authority need to be taught that God's order is of first importance. They are not allowed to encroach upon our duty to God. He alone is permitted to impose *disorder* by fire, flood, pestilence, etc.⁶⁷ Good people may recognize His handiwork in such cases and recommend a course of action.⁶⁸ And we should listen to their recommendations and determine ourselves to protect life.

However, being unable to keep God's order due to interruptions like calamity, or danger, must not be embraced, but held at a distance, like a child with a dirty diaper that you're not sure where to put it, but you intend to figure it out immediately.

After all, God's order is beautiful and His commands promote and protect liberty. These things cannot be put on a shelf, nor are we allowed to let them slip easily from our fingers because of the efforts of tyrants.⁶⁹ Governors and scientists need to know that they are not God. And Christ has given the responsibility to His Church to teach them. We should do so lovingly. However, to do so, we must know the reasons and the beauty for which God created us.

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10-21-2020

66 Prohibition was the 18th Amendment to the Constitution established in 1919. It was repealed by the 21st Amendment in 1933.

67 There is the aspect of God's presence and purpose in all calamity. Oftentimes it represents punishment or discipline or medicine to cure us of our sins and trespasses. Too often we act as children who will run to the other end of the house and hide to keep from taking our medicine. If we don't take our medicine we won't get better. God wants to teach us how to be good. (Saying this, I am not suggesting we quit trying to fix those things that have been destroyed. I am not suggesting we allow calamitous things to occur without trying to prevent or avoid them.)

68 Joseph, as second to Pharaoh, implemented a plan for the wellbeing of the Egyptian citizenry. It required drastic behavior change. The government took one-fifth of the land's produce for seven years. This was to prepare for seven years of famine that God showed Joseph were to come. (Genesis 41) God certainly gave Joseph "inside information." There is not a government of men which possesses such "inside information" today. We must learn from the Scripture God's principles and proper design for government: family, church, and state. Doubtless, it can be difficult caring for people who are supposed to submit to your authority. For this reason, it is helpful for governors to think of themselves as representatives of God and not owners of people. God will have His way with all of us.

69 I do not think every tyrannical decision is coming from evil intent. I think often these decisions are ill-informed. Because so many have no regard for God, or know little about the Bible, they try to make sense of rule and authority from alien perspectives.