

Image of God

At the time of creation, God was coming to the end of a rather full-on week.

He'd done a lot of difficult stuff – sunrises, for example, and gravity – and he'd had a lot of fun, particularly when he made penguins. And then he thought, "Now I'm going to create something like myself", and proceeded to make human beings.

This much we know, from the Book of Genesis – "*So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.*"

So people were made in the image of God, or 'imago Dei' as it's also called. But what, exactly, does that mean?

It doesn't make sense if you take it literally, that God made us look the same way he does, because, not being physical, God doesn't have a 'look', which is why he never posts selfies.

Therefore, it must mean that humans have some particular quality that's distinct from the rest of creation, a quality that we, and only we, share with the Almighty. But what is it?

There are plenty of things that humans do which animals don't – wearing hats, for instance. Most theologians, though, reason that whatever our divine quality might be, it probably isn't to do with hats.

Instead, they argue, it's our capacity to be spiritual, rational, and creative, that truly sets us apart, as well as our crucial ability to distinguish right from wrong.

Many Christians believe that humans only possess these higher abilities because each of us has a soul – a non-physical part which continues existing after death. And it's this that makes us reflections of God.

Some also believe that our unique quality is that we were created to rule the world – to "*fill the earth and subdue it*".

We're certainly managing to dominate the planet, but it's not obvious that we're doing a great job of looking after it.

It could be that it's our very capacity to make mistakes that makes us unique. After the story of creation comes the story of Adam and Eve. And it was Eve exercising her free will that led to the world's first major muck-up, resulting in mankind falling from grace with God, and leading to a lot of complicated questions...

Bitesize

Like, if God only wants us to live a good life, why did he give us the ability to do wrong?

Is it fair that we get blamed for our actions, and animals don't, just because we've got these great big brains?

And do we really have free will, or does it just feel like we do?

The Christian answer to all that is that it's our very capacity to sin, repent, and receive forgiveness, that makes us truly special in God's eyes.

That still leaves the question – why did God want to make humans in his own image?

Whatever the answer, we should certainly be grateful that he did. After all, he surely must have been tempted to make more penguins instead...