

The Image of God in Man

Lord's Day 3

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Bible Text: Titus 3:3
Preached on: Sunday, August 26, 2012

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Before we turn to the Catechism, we read from Scripture Colossians 3:10, one of the passages upon which the Catechism bases its teaching on Lord's Day 3. Colossians 3:10,

10 And have put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him:

In connection with that passage, we treat the truth of Scripture as it is summarized in Lord's Day 3. Lord's Day 3, Questions and Answers 6, 7 and 8, which read as follows.

Q. 6. Did God then create man so wicked and perverse?

By no means; but God created man good, and after His own image, in true righteousness and holiness, that he might rightly know God his Creator, heartily love Him and live with Him in eternal happiness to glorify and praise Him.

Q. 7. Whence then proceeds this depravity of human nature?

From the fall and disobedience of our first parents, Adam and Eve, in Paradise; hence our nature is become so corrupt, that we are all conceived and born in sin.

Q. 8. Are we then so corrupt that we are wholly incapable of doing any good, and inclined to all wickedness?

Indeed we are; except we are regenerated by the Spirit of God.

Beloved congregation in our Lord Jesus Christ, mankind is prone by nature to hate God and our neighbor. We learned last week that it is the perfect law of God that reveals that to us. We simply do not measure up to God's perfect law. That was Lord's Day 2, now Lord's Day 3 deals with the issue of our natural corruption. More specifically, Lord's Day

3 deals with the truth of Scripture as regards the source of that corruption and how bad that corruption is.

Question and Answer 6 teaches that this corruption that is in mankind is not God's fault, God didn't create Adam and Eve that way, he's not the source of that corruption. Question and Answer 7 then tells us who is the source of that corruption: mankind himself, Adam and Eve and the whole of the human race. We are at fault for that corruption. And finally, Question and Answer 8 tells us how bad it is, essentially by nature we have none of the image of God left in us. God created us with his image, mankind threw it away, and now we are left by nature, we are left with none of the image of God.

It's important that we understand that we are at fault. When we want to understand our misery, we have to know that it was not God that created us that way. It's not his fault. But to know the extent of our misery, we have to know that the fall and the loss of God's image is the fault of mankind. It's our own fault and when we see that it's our own fault, that makes our misery all the greater. It makes us recognize our misery all the more. God is fair to have brought the curse upon mankind.

The passage that we read in Colossians is important because it deals with the image of God. It gives us insight into the image with which we were created, and it gives us insight into the restoration of that image in God's people, but it also emphasizes that we still have corruption clinging to us. We do. That's why the apostle says in verse 5, speaking to believers, "Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth: fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence and covetousness which is idolatry." In other words, put to death your old man. We still have that corruption clinging to us, but at the same time, this passage brings out that we have been raised with Christ. We have the new life of Jesus Christ. We have been given the new man, and as a consequence, God is renewing us in his image. When we arrive in heaven, then that image will be fully restored. Now we have it in its beginning.

So let's talk about the image of God and let's note in the first place that God created man with that image; secondly, that mankind lost that image; and lastly, by God's grace that image is restored in God's people. The image of God in man, created in the image, losing the image, and restored in the image.

We have to understand as regards our misery that God didn't create man the way he is. Our misery is not God's fault. We may not even suggest that our misery is God's fault. Although Adam and Eve tried to blame God when they fell into sin, "The woman whom thou gavest me," but we may not suggest as Adam and Eve did that our misery is God's fault. God is holy and God is righteous. Those are attributes of God. God is light, 1 John 1:5. 1 John 1:5, "God is light, and in him is no darkness at all." God is not the source of corruption. He cannot be, even as light cannot be the source of darkness. We installed more lights in the sanctuary and the children even can understand that installing more lights is not going to bring more darkness. That's impossible. That's even silly to think of that, and so it is God cannot be the source of corruption.

Just the opposite. Scripture tells us God created man good. God created man good. Genesis 1:31, "And God saw every thing that he had made, and, behold, it was very good." And that includes mankind. When he looked at the whole of creation, it was very good. Mankind was very good.

How good was man? Well, Genesis 1 tells us that as well. Genesis 1:26, "And 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 fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth. So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them." That was very good. As far as the creatures go, you can't get better than that. Created in the image of God.

Now to have God's image means that mankind, Adam and Eve, resembled, they had the likeness of God. That's what Scripture says, "Let us make man in our image after our likeness." Now you understand that mankind resembled God doesn't mean that they had the essence of God. It wasn't as if God created mankind with his infinite power. God didn't make mankind omnipotent, so mankind does not in God's essence, mankind does not have the same essence as God. Mankind is not everywhere present like God is omnipresent. But when we bear God's image, the idea is that we reflect God's perfections.

We reflect God's perfections. Maybe the picture, and there is always a danger in pictures, but maybe the picture of the sun and the moon will help us understand that. The sun gives light, the moon gives light, you could say they resemble one another, but they are different. They are essentially different. The sun in its essence makes its own light, but the moon only reflects the light that is shined upon it by the sun. They are different essentially, even though they resemble one another. In the sky, they look the same size. That's a striking feature of creation that the sun and the moon, though they are vastly different in size, yet in the sky they are the same size. They resemble one another but they are different essentially.

That's the difference also between the image of God in man and God himself. Now we're not talking about a finite difference but there's an infinite distance between God's essence and our essence, and yet we resemble God. We are made in his image and likeness. What is included in that? God's image and likeness? Some people have thought that means God must have hands and God must have ears and eyes. That's not the idea of Scripture, however. God's image and likeness includes those attributes that make it possible for him to, or make it possible for us to fellowship with him.

To fellowship with him. Notice the language of the Catechism in Question and Answer 6. "Did God then create man so wicked and perverse?" Now notice when it talks about God's image, it talks about them as those things that make it possible to fellowship. "Did God create man so wicked and perverse? By no means; but God created man good, and after His own image." And what is included in that? The Catechism says, "in true righteousness and holiness, that he might rightly know God his Creator," and there is the fellowship. God created us with righteousness and holiness that we might rightly know

God his Creator, "heartily love Him and live with Him in eternal happiness to glorify and praise Him." The fact that God gave us his image is what allows us to fellowship with him.

Well, the first aspect of God's image and man that allows us to fellowship with him is true righteousness and holiness. True righteousness and holiness. Those have to do, righteousness has to do with upright actions that are according to God's law, and holiness is related to that, holiness is being devoted to God in complete service. Well, as such, following God's commandments and being completely devoted to them, those are aspects of love to God. Love to God. Well, of course, without love how can there be fellowship? How can there be fellowship without love? These things, true righteousness and holiness, if there is going to be fellowship with a God who is righteous and holy, these things are necessary for there to be fellowship with God.

Well, we could ask the question: how do we know for sure that righteousness and holiness are aspects of God's image? How do we know what the image actually consists of? Well, Scripture gives us insight into that. One passage that's a very important passage that regards the image of God is Ephesians 4:24. Ephesians 4:24 reads as follows, "And that ye put on the new man, which after God," that's not talking about after in the sense of time, but after the image, according to the image, "put on the new man which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness." After his image. This passage defines what is included in the image of God, it is righteousness and holiness.

Now, if these things and this is talking about the new man which is given that image, but if this is part of the image in the new man, this is also the image of God, God didn't change his image, God always has the same image or God always has the same essence, so the image that he gives is going to resemble in the same way. God gives that righteousness and holiness to man originally. We call that original righteousness, the righteousness that Adam had when he was created very good. He had God's image.

Now, when Adam and Eve had that righteousness, they were able to know God. They were able to know God, not just know about God, not just facts about God, but they were able to know him personally, and there's the knowledge that's included in the aspect of God's image. Knowledge is another aspect and that comes out in the passage we read in Colossians. Colossians 3:10, again, speaks of the new man, "And have put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge," and here it's even more explicit because it says, "in knowledge after the image of him that created him." That knowledge is after the image. The knowledge is a reflection of the image of God, a reflection of God's attributes, that is to say. They were created to know God, to know God as their friend sovereign. Knowing him, they were able to love him and serve him and live with him. They required that image in order to fellowship with God.

God created them that way. God created Adam and Eve very good and, therefore, God is not the source of the depravity of mankind. God did not create man wicked and perverse. He didn't. Well, if God is not to blame, who is to blame? We know the answer to that. Question and Answer 7 asks that question. "Whence then," that is, from where, "Whence

then proceeds this depravity of human nature? From the fall and disobedience of our first parents, Adam and Eve, in Paradise; hence our nature," from there our nature, "is become so corrupt, that we are all conceived and born in sin." That's where we get our depravity, from our first parents. They passed it down to their children, their children passed it down to the next generation, on through all the generations until finally our parents passed that corruption down to us.

That's the origin of our corruption. Adam and Eve started the process. They started it by deliberately disobeying God in the garden. That was a horrible rebellion against God. It wasn't just a mistake that they made unknowing. No, it was rebellion and that's the origin of our sin and misery. Romans 5:12 makes that explicitly clear. Romans 5:12, "Wherefore, as by one man," that is Adam, "Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned." In Adam, we were all in the loins of Adam. When he sinned, we all sinned. The whole human race is guilty of that sin of Adam.

As a result of Adam's rebellion, we are dead by nature, mankind is dead spiritually. That's what God threatened in the garden, did he not? He said to Adam, "In the day that thou eatest thereof, thou shalt surely die." Thou shalt surely die and maybe the children ask, "Well, why didn't he die?" Well, he did die. Physically he began the process of death but spiritually he died. He died spiritually in the garden and that is to say, he lost the image of God. He lost the image. That's what spiritual death is all about. He lost the ability now to fellowship with God.

What happened in the garden? Death came by sin. Spiritual death, now that spiritual death is passed down from one generation to the next. Everyone who is born in the human race, Jesus Christ excepted, everyone who is born in the human race is born in the line of Adam, is born or conceived spiritually dead. I leave the possibility and that does happen that God does regenerate in the womb but conceived spiritually dead. That's what is passed down through the lines of generations, spiritual death. That's why David could say, "In sin did my mother conceive me." Not that his mother sinned in his conception but he himself was sinful already at conception.

Well, how bad is that corruption? Many would say, "Well, it's not that bad." That's the world speaking, "It's not that bad. People are still pretty good by nature. You know, if you give them a chance, they'll do the right thing." That's the lie of the devil. Many churches even teach that, "It's not that bad." They teach the doctrine of common grace, that God by his gracious restraint, by his working in all people, makes it so that nobody is as bad as they could be. The way they talk, they might even say somebody like Hitler really wasn't as bad as he could be. He was, after all, a great example of a powerful speaker. We could learn much from him, they would say.

The point is they say it's not as bad as it could be, but what does the Catechism say and what does Scripture say? Look at Question and Answer 8. "Are we then so corrupt that we are wholly incapable of doing any good, and inclined to all wickedness?" And it answers, "Indeed we are." Indeed we are. The Catechism and Scripture would have us

know our misery. Are we really that miserable? Yes, we are. We are. By nature, the way we were born in Adam, we are so corrupt; that we are wholly incapable of doing any good and inclined unto all wickedness. Notice those superlative expressions. It goes to the extreme. It's not just we are mostly incapable of doing any good, we are partly incapable. No, it doesn't say that, it says we are wholly incapable. Look at Romans 7:18, "For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,)" that's what he got from Adam, "in my flesh dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not." The flesh. That's talking about the old man which we have inherited from Adam. There is no good in the old man.

Not only are we completely incapable of doing good, we are also inclined even in the other direction. Some people would like to say, "Well, we're kind of just neutral and depending on our circumstances, we might go one way or the other." No, that's not what Scripture teaches. Look at Romans 3. Romans 3 is a powerful passage. I'm going to read a few verses, Romans 3:10-18, because it brings this out so strongly. In the first section, it teaches us that we cannot do any good. We cannot do any good by nature. Romans 3:10, "As it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one: There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God. They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no, not one." That's the absence of good. That's one aspect.

But then the inspired writer goes further. He says that's not the only thing, it's worse because they are also inclined unto all wickedness. Look at the description now. It as if he's descending the ladder. Absence of good and even worse, the presence of active evil. Verse 13, "Their throat is an open sepulchre," an open grave. When you open a grave, just as you open it after a rotting corpse has been in there, what happens? The stench spreads itself all around. An open sepulchre, that's the idea, not just an empty grave lying there but a grave that had had a rotting body in it, now it's opened up, what happens? It's not neutral.

"Their throat is an open sepulchre; with their tongues they have used deceit; the poison of asps," the poison of poisonous snakes, "is under their lips: Whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness: Their feet are swift to shed blood: Destruction and misery are in their ways: And the way of peace have they not known: There is no fear of God before their eyes." Did you ever think of that? By nature we are poisonous snakes. Does anybody expect a poisonous snake to do any good? Or children, could you imagine, sometimes children like to have cuddly pets, can you imagine having a poisonous snake as your pet?

That's the way we were born in Adam, without God's image, because when mankind lost the image of God, he didn't just, like we said, he didn't just go neutral, he didn't only lose the image of God, he also took on the image of the serpent, the image of the devil. Why is the devil called a serpent? Look at 1 John 3:8, "He that committeth sin is of the devil; for the devil sinneth from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil." That's why Jesus said to the Pharisees, "Ye are of your father, the devil," because they had the image of the devil, the image of the serpent, you could say. That's why by nature we have the poison of asps under our lips.

God didn't create Adam and Eve that way, with that poison under their lips, they went over. Adam and Eve went over to the devil's camp and, therefore, the fault is their own. The fault is ours because we're all part of the human race. Our misery is our fault. We need to know that if we are going to live and die happily because we have to see that we cannot look for salvation in ourselves. We cannot say, "Well, if I just try hard enough, then I can save myself." We can't because we are miserable creatures. So I say we have to know our misery so that we look outside of ourselves for salvation.

There is only one hope of salvation. When we see our misery, when we see that we put ourselves in that misery and Adam and Eve were created good and they still fell into that miserable position, there is only one hope of salvation and if this section meant to stress our misery, it doesn't just leave us in that misery. It doesn't only talk about our misery. There is a way out and that is the message of the Gospel. If God would restore to us the image that Adam and Eve lost, that's the Gospel, God does restore us in that image.

That restoration involves two things. In the first place, it involves putting off the old man, the corruption, the image of the devil, and putting on the new man. That's what Colossians talks about. Colossians, we read chapter 3 but chapter 2 has a significant portion on that. Chapter 2 of Colossians, verse 11, we read, "In whom," that is, Christ, "In whom also ye are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands," that's a spiritual circumcision, "in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ: Buried with him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with him through the faith of the operation of God." Notice we didn't do it ourselves, God did this, "who hath raised him." God raised Christ from the dead, God raised us from the dead. Verse 13, "And you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh," that's where you were, notice what the apostle then says, you being dead, "hath he quickened," has he made alive, "hath he quickened together with him, having forgiven you all trespasses." The body of sins of the flesh has been put off. The old man has been put off. In principle the beginning of the process has taken place. It's not done completely but there has been a radical break made with the old man. That's what Colossians is talking about.

Oh, we still sin, we still have the old man clinging to us, fighting against the new man. I say he has been put off in principle, only the beginning yet but he has been put off. There has been a radical change. The old man is not in the driver's seat anymore. Well, how is that old man put off? According to the verses we just read, by the circumcision of Christ. By the circumcision that he has performed. Well, what is circumcision? It's a cutting away of the filth of the flesh.

That's the work of the Holy Spirit. Jesus Christ by his Spirit circumcises our hearts. We were uncircumcised. We were spiritually dead. We had lost the image of God through the fall, but thankfully God doesn't leave us that way. God didn't leave us that way. He sent his only begotten Son into the world to die for our sins, to pay the full ransom for all of our sins, and Jesus didn't stay in the grave either. He rose again and from heaven now he sends forth his Spirit to quicken us. That's what Colossians is talking about. He makes us alive. We have new life in him.

Look at Question and Answer 8 now. We read the first portion of the answer but we read now the second portion. "Are we then so corrupt that we are wholly incapable of doing any good, and inclined to all wickedness? Indeed we are; except we are regenerated by the Spirit of God." We could put the question this way: are we then so corrupt, are we then absolutely dead in trespasses and sins? The answer is: yes, unless we are regenerated by the Spirit of God. Or we could put it this way: are we so corrupt that the image of God in us has been totally defaced? Yes. Indeed it has been totally defaced unless God restores that image to us. Unless he graciously gives us that image again, we still only would have the image of the devil.

That's the message of the Gospel, that Jesus Christ having forgiven us, having paid the price for our sins, he also renews us in the image of God. Look at Colossians 3:10 again, "And have put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him." This is talking about the new creation, the creation of God's children when we are given life again. And when God gives us that life, he renews us, that's what the inspired apostle says, he renews us in knowledge. That's an element of the image of God. God gives us covenant knowledge of himself. Not all at once, not so that we are renewed perfectly in the image of God and now we don't have anywhere to go, we've already been taken to heaven. No, God doesn't take us immediately to heaven but he renews us.

That's a process. Look at the verse again, verse 10 of chapter 3 of Colossians, "And have put on the new man, which is renewed." That's in the present tense, not was renewed, not will be renewed but is being renewed in the knowledge of Jesus Christ, "in knowledge after the image." There's an ongoing process. There is a radical break when we are first regenerated, gives us life, but that life is something that is given to us more and more.

Ephesians talks about that renewal as well. Ephesians 4:24, "And that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness." It's true that Ephesians doesn't stress the process as Colossians does. That points to the radical change, however. It does. "Put on the new man, which after God," which after the image of God, "is created in righteousness and true holiness."

Whether you look at the process as the beginning of the process or the adding more and more of that life, the truth remains, the wonderful truth that God restores to us the image that Adam and Eve gave up. The image that they lost, God restores it. Oh, we still sin against God, we show everyday that we don't love God the way we ought to love God, we don't love God with all our heart and all our soul and mind and strength. We don't. Day after day we see our sins and sinfulness and then somebody might ask, "Well, where is that image you were talking about?" Scripture says we have it, by the way. "Where is that image?" We have that image. We do. Although we sin day by day, we have the image of God and we use the word "in principle," that is, we have the beginning of the restoration process. Maybe you could say God has begun to paint that master work again.

We have the image. There is a part of us that now delights to do God's will; that delights to fellowship; that wants to worship God. There is a part of us that wants that otherwise why would we be here today? Maybe there are hypocrites. There are hypocrites in the church but why would we in our hearts truly desire to worship God if not for the image being restored? Why would we want fellowship?

There is a part of us. That's the regeneration the Catechism is talking about. Indeed we are that corrupt unless we are regenerated by the Spirit of God, and that's the idea of Scripture. If we are to live and die happily, we have to know our misery. We have to know that we are miserable by nature. We have to know it's our own fault but we must not stay there. We must have a complete knowledge. If we are going to live and die happily, we must also know that God restores us. Now in its beginning, but when we are taken to glory, and we ought to believe this, we will be restored completely in the image of God. We will have the image. We won't have the old man. We won't have the image of the devil anymore. We won't have the old man clinging to us. We will be restored perfectly in the image of God.

That's the message that we can rejoice in. May God grant that to us, that we would rejoice in our salvation in spite of the old man that yet clings to us. May we rejoice in the new man and the prospect of eternal glory. Amen.

Our Father which art in heaven, we thank thee that thou art a God who saves. Thou dost save us completely. We look forward to that day when all of our corruption is removed and thou dost take us to be with thee in glory where we shall fellowship with thee perfectly in righteousness and true holiness, knowing thee as thou dost know us. May we ever look forward to that day and may we, even in the midst of our misery, rejoice in our salvation always, rejoice in Jesus Christ our Savior. We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.