

No.6. Man Made in God's Image

Man is the creature of God, but what distinguishes him from all other earthly creatures is his having been made in the image of God. WCF ch.4 section 2 – “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.**” Shorter Catechism Q.10 & Answer – “God created man male and female, **after His own image**, in knowledge, righteousness, and holiness, with dominion over the creatures.”

These statements contained in our Confession and Catechism are a presentation of the Biblical data as we have it in Gen 1: 26 where in the counsel of the Trinity, the Triune Godhead decreed “Let us make man in our image.” The verse goes on to say “after our likeness.” Through the ages some have put a distinction between *image* & *likeness* but the Reformed churches see no such distinction because the grammatical construction of Gen 1: 26 places no distinction between the terms. Both terms are used to emphasise that in a unique fashion man reflects God in that man as created by God was the *very image* and *perfect likeness* of God.

1. This does not mean that man partook of the divine essence – that is, man did not possess deity in any sense. In his original state man was purely man, possessing only the nature that essentially belongs to mankind; i.e. a finite human nature.
2. His being made in God's image did not consist in man's external form – since God is spirit He has no bodily parts, thus He could not be represented in any external or material fashion.
3. Rather, the image of God in Adam consisted at least in the spirituality of Adam's soul. As noted God is spirit – He is an immaterial, invisible and immortal being. The soul of man also is a spirit, though again it must be emphasised that it is finite. Man's spirit is utterly inferior to the “Father of spirits.” But, it is with respect to man's soul that he bears the image of God.
4. Some Reformed teachers also state that the image & likeness of God in man is also comprised in his dominion over the creatures. Man was made to be the representative of God on this earth. He possessed a delegated sovereignty over the inferior creatures – he had “*dominion over the creatures...*” as our Catechism states it. Man was constituted ruler of the world, and the creatures were imbued with an instinctive respect for him and submission to him.
5. However, the image & likeness of God in man also consisted in what is called the rectitude of his nature. It is this that is in view in our Confession & Catechism in the terms “*knowledge, righteousness and (true) holiness.*”

It is interesting to note that Luther & Calvin differed in this area of things. Luther limited the statement that man was made in God's image to his being created in righteousness. Luther denied that man's rational or moral powers were any part of the divine image in man. Therefore, in Luther's view man lost the image of God entirely when he disobeyed and fell into sin. However, Calvin taught – and this is the classic Reformed position – as is reflected in our doctrinal statements that the image of God in man included original righteousness and rational & moral powers – he had knowledge and holiness as well as righteousness. Robert Shaw states in his exposition of the Westminster Confession – “*Man had knowledge in his understanding, righteousness in his will and holiness in his affections.*”

Thus, Adam was made in God's image in the sense that he possessed knowledge, righteousness and true holiness. That means that he had the same kind though not the same degree of knowledge, righteousness, holiness as God. Adam was made in the image of God's morality. When God made Adam in His own image, in knowledge, righteousness and true holiness, He placed His law, the moral law in Adam's heart. It is in this sense that Adam was made in the image of God – he was made in the image of God's own morality by having the moral law placed within him.

(a) Let us note that in consistency with His own nature God would have placed the moral law in Adam.

God is a moral Being in that He is perfectly upright and holy. But it must be kept in mind that He is infinitely, eternally, and unchangeably so. God's infinity means that whatever is found in His nature is present to an infinite degree; and whatever is the opposite of any feature of His nature is not found in Him in even the least degree. 1 John 1:5, “*God is light and in Him is no darkness at all.*” Consequently, God is infinite, therefore eternal and unchangeable, in His moral nature. This means that in consistency with His own nature, the man He created in His own image did have the moral law in his heart. The creature made in His image would have had morality, a morality that springs from the very nature of God.

Remember that along with all else that God made, Adam was pronounced to be “very good” Gen 1: 31. Thus man was very good morally as well as physically. He possessed nothing in his nature that was not good. He was made upright, Eccles 7: 29. Hence he had unspotted knowledge of God, Col 3: 10. Adam's mental faculties worked perfectly. Saw and understood perfectly. All in creation he could read properly. Every word from God's mouth he understood. Adam also had righteousness, Eph 4: 24. Thus he had no experience of transgression and was possessed of full obedience to God's law. He was also created with true holiness, Eph 4: 24. So every faculty was in agreement with the moral nature of God. See Rom 2: 14, 15 -- specific reference is made to the Gentiles who never had the moral law revealed in written form, yet is affirmed that it is understood by and applicable to them, because it was “written in their hearts” the reference being to man's original creation. Thus, Adam's uprightness was the reflection of God's moral standard: he was created with knowledge of, conformity to, and an inclination toward, God's moral law.

(b) If the moral law had not been placed in Adam at his creation, the command to refrain from the forbidden fruit would have meant nothing to Adam.

We have seen that Adam was created with the moral law in his heart. But it must be remembered that since Adam was an unfallen man in the Garden, he had no knowledge or experience of sin. Because Adam was made in God's image, he would have viewed the law in his heart as natural, reasonable, desirable. Therefore the moral law in him only had a positive image to Adam's unfallen heart. It was natural for him to obey it for he loved God.

Therefore, in order to test Adam's obedience to God and love for God, a negative command was given, Gen 2: 17. There was nothing inherently sinful about the eating of the fruit itself. The real issue in focus was whether Adam would unreservedly obey God's will simply because it was God's will. Therefore this command to refrain from the fruit was a test of

Adam's love for God and the submission of his heart to God's moral standard. In essence, the test was the moral obligation of Adam to obey God's word and will.

But he who was made in the image of God disobeyed and thus the fall took place. His original righteousness was lost and man is now "desperately wicked" Jer 17: 9. Knowledge & holiness have been replaced by darkness and corruption of the nature. Thus, the image of God in man in these areas has been ruined due to sin.

However, Scripture continues to speak of the image of God in man – Gen 9: 6, 1 Cor 11: 7, & James 3: 9. Thus, while man has fallen the image of God has not been totally effaced as Luther taught in that man is still a spiritual being, with an immortal soul and possessing moral and rational faculties – though all are depraved.

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