

## Image and Dominion

Colossians 1: 15 – 23 (various)<sup>i</sup>

### Adam, Eve, and the Image of God

Let's start here. In terms of His Deity—the reality that the Son of God “according to His nature is...the true eternal God, the Almighty, whom we invoke, worship, and serve”<sup>ii</sup>—Jesus is, was, and will always be Lord. When we read in Genesis chapter one that on the sixth day,

<sup>27</sup> ...God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. Genesis 1:27 (ESV)

We are reading about the work of the Triune God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—for, as the Apostle John wrote:

<sup>1</sup> In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. <sup>2</sup> He was in the beginning with God. <sup>3</sup> All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. John 1:1–3 (ESV)

Adam and Eve, then, being created in the image of God, bore the image not only of the Father, but also of the Lord Jesus Christ, “And,” having been created in the very image of God,

<sup>28</sup> ...God blessed them. And God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth.” Genesis 1:28 (ESV)

We sometimes hear the idea that when “the serpent” came to Adam and Eve and tempted them they must have been a little surprised to hear a voice speaking from one of the beasts of the field as he is designated in Genesis 3, verse 1, and without doubt they were. What should they have done? Well, at the very least, as those who were given dominion over the beasts of the field, I think they should have taken

<sup>9</sup> ...that ancient serpent, who is called the devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world... Revelation 12:9 (ESV)

by the throat, lifted him up before the living God, and brought the charge, “Lord God, this creature has been calling you a liar, and suggesting that we should be disobedient to your holy will.” In short, they should have exercised the dominion that had been given to them as the image-bearers of God.

### The Effects of the Fall

Instead, man who had been formed in the image and likeness of God,

...subjected himself willingly to sin and consequently to death and the curse, lending his ear to the word of the devil. For he transgressed the commandment of life, which he had received, and by his sin he separated himself from God, who was his true life, having corrupted his entire nature.<sup>iii</sup>

Article 14 in the Belgic Confession goes on to tell us what effect that had on the image of God in man.

So he made himself guilty and subject to physical and spiritual death, having become wicked, perverse, and corrupt in all his ways. He lost all his excellent gifts which he had received from God, and he retained none of them **except for small traces which are enough to make him inexcusable.**<sup>iv</sup>

That's what remains of the image of God in fallen humanity. We are not animals—unlike everything else in creation, our first parents were made in the image of God, but

<sup>22</sup> Claiming to be wise, they became fools, <sup>23</sup> and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things. Romans 1:22–23 (ESV)

and since,

<sup>20</sup> For [God's] invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made... they **[we]** are without excuse. Romans 1:20 (ESV)

I point this out because in our day, there seems to be this tendency to speak of all people being created in the image of God as if that makes all people divine, and indeed, that argument has been made from time to time. The thing is, it would not have been true even if man had not fallen into sin—the Creator/creation distinction would have remained regardless—and it is especially not true given that we did. So, the image of God is not lost in fallen humanity, it remains, but only in those small traces of God's excellent gifts that serve to leave us inexcusable.

As we have seen, the fall changed everything. It changed man's relationship to God. We looked at that last week, noting that since the fall, we are born spiritually dead in trespasses and sin and can only be made alive by grace through faith in Jesus Christ.

<sup>7</sup> In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace... Ephesians 1:7 (ESV)

But also, the entrance of sin into the world changed man's relationship to the entire created order. It was already true when Adam refused to exercise his God-given dominion over the serpent and chose instead to lend his ear to the word of the devil. It's more obviously true in God's word to Adam after the sin had been exposed; Genesis 3, verses 17 – 19:

<sup>17</sup> And to Adam he said, "Because you have listened to the voice of your wife and have eaten of the tree of which I commanded you, 'You shall not eat of it,' cursed is the ground because of you; in pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life; <sup>18</sup> thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you; and you shall eat the plants of the field. <sup>19</sup> By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread, till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for you are dust, and to dust you shall return." Genesis 3:17–19 (ESV)

What a far cry from the original dominion mandate:

<sup>28</sup> ...“Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth.” <sup>29</sup> And God said, “Behold, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is on the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit. You shall have them for food. Genesis 1:28–29 (ESV)

The creation which had been specifically made to sustain the life of man, having been “subjected to futility” and “bondage to corruption”<sup>v</sup>, will now wear him down until injury, disease, and old age have taken their toll and he returns to the dust from which he was made.

### Jesus Christ Is, Was, and Always Will Be Lord

But understand this, when God created man in His image and entered into covenant with him, making him chief steward over everything else that He had made, this did not elevate Adam and Eve to divine status, making them somehow equal to God. 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 15, verse 27 is speaking of Jesus Christ, but it quotes Psalm 8, which has a more general focus:

<sup>27</sup> For “God has put all things in subjection under His feet.” But when it says, “all things are put in subjection,” it is plain that He is excepted who put all things in subjection under him. 1 Corinthians 15:27 (ESV)

So, in the fall, when Adam sinned, there was no sense at all in which some legal dominion was given to Satan that could thwart God’s ultimate purpose in and for the creation. The fall happened before the face of God and in plain sight “to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account” (Hebrews 4:13), but it was still “the Lord God”, Yahweh Elohim, who came to find them after they had fallen. The very fact that God is the one who justly fulfilled the terms of His covenant with them indicates that God, and therefore the Word, was still God and still Lord even after the fall. The fall did not dethrone God as sovereign over the universe. In terms of His divine nature, Jesus Christ was, is, and always will be Lord.

I believe that our text this morning was speaking to that fact when it said,

<sup>15</sup> He [**Jesus Christ**] is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. Colossians 1:15 (ESV)

(He is Lord!)

<sup>16</sup> For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—

(so, not merely the physical creation, but also the spiritual, and even the structures, or spheres, of authority that operate within it)

all things were created through him and for him. <sup>17</sup> And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. Colossians 1:16–17 (ESV)

All things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities (just all things), and this in terms of His deity. All this because He is God over all, and

<sup>3</sup> All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. John 1:3 (ESV)

### The Firstborn from the Dead

But the apostle goes on:

<sup>18</sup> And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, **the firstborn from the dead...** Colossians 1:18 (ESV)

This is parallel to 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 15, where Paul wrote

<sup>21</sup> For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. <sup>22</sup> For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. <sup>23</sup> But each in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ. <sup>24</sup> Then comes the end, when he delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power. 1 Corinthians 15:21–24 (ESV)

<sup>18</sup> ...he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, **the firstborn from the dead...** Colossians 1:18 (ESV)

So, this in His humanity. Christ, who according to His divine nature was, is, and always will be Lord,

<sup>7</sup> ...emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. <sup>8</sup> And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Philippians 2:7–8 (ESV)

Then, having been raised from the dead, “the firstfruits” of the resurrection,

<sup>9</sup> ...God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, <sup>10</sup> so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, <sup>11</sup> and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. Philippians 2:9–11 (ESV)

As we saw in Colossians:

<sup>18</sup> ...He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, **that in everything he might be preeminent.** Colossians 1:18 (ESV)

### Image and Dominion

So, the image that was so badly marred, and the dominion over creation that was conceded by the first man, Adam, is restored by the second man and last Adam, Jesus Christ our Lord.

<sup>47</sup> The first man was from the earth, a man of dust...

(especially after the fall, when God said to him, “for you are dust, and to dust you shall return”<sup>vi</sup>)

the second man is from heaven. 1 Corinthians 15:47 (ESV)

And the Lord Jesus Christ came from heaven to this world, not to sanctify this world **in its fallenness**—not to set things as they are in stone—but to redeem, to reconcile, and to restore that which was lost, fallen, and broken. He who was Lord of heaven and earth, the eternal, almighty, sovereign Son of God who was “the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of His nature” (Hebrews 1: 3) “did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped” (Philippians 2: 6), but He came into this world, and He lived, and He died, that in being raised not only from the dead but also to the right hand of the Father, “in everything He might be preeminent” (Colossians 1: 18).

What does this mean? It means that if you want to know what humankind was meant to be, don't look back into the garden and, with your fallen imagination, try to project forward from there, and above all, don't look in the mirror and say to yourself, “I'm good enough; I'm smart enough; and doggone it, people like me.” God forbid we get sucked into the cult of self acceptance and exaltation. In fact, Colossians 2, verse 8:

<sup>8</sup> See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the world, and not according to Christ.

Colossians 2:8 (ESV)

You were made for more, and not simply the best version of yourself. You were made to bear the unbroken and unmarred image of God. Colossians 2, 9 and 10:

<sup>9</sup> For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily, <sup>10</sup> and **you have been filled in him, who is the head of all rule and authority.** Colossians 2:9–10 (ESV)

1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 15, 47 – 49:

<sup>47</sup> The first man was from the earth, a man of dust; the second man is from heaven. <sup>48</sup> As was the man of dust, so also are those who are of the dust, and as is the man of heaven, so also are those who are of heaven. <sup>49</sup> Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the man of heaven. 1 Corinthians 15:47–49 (ESV)

and if you want to know what that looks like, open your Bible and look to Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith.

<sup>15</sup> He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. <sup>16</sup> For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. <sup>17</sup> And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. <sup>18</sup> And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent.

Colossians 1:15–18 (ESV)

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- ii Christian Reformed Church, "The Belgic Confession", *Ecumenical Creeds and Reformed Confessions* (Grand Rapids, MI: Faith Alive Christian Resources, 1988), 87.
  - iii Ibid., 91.
  - iv Ibid., emphasis mine.
  - v Cf. Romans 8: 20 – 21.
  - vi Cf. Genesis 3: 19.