

Westminster Larger Catechism

Question 17

Halifax, 11 November 2007

Q. 17 How did God man?

- A. After God had made all other creatures, he created man, male and female; formed the body of the man of the dust of the ground, and the woman of the rib of the man; endued them with living, reasonable, and immortal souls; made them after his own image, in knowledge, righteousness, and holiness, having the law of God written in their hearts, and power to fulfil it, with dominion over the creatures; yet subject to fall.**

In the question, “How did God create man?”

- the main concern is not so much to know what the process was—though there is some value in that...
 - But to know what man is like—what are his characteristics.
 - What did God make us to be?

It is very important to know the answer to this question.

- Many people today have no idea why they are here.
 - Whether they realise it or not, their lives are empty and aimless.
 - They are simply going through the motions of biological existence...
 - and yet they were made to do much more than simply survive.
- Whether they admit it or not, they know that there is more to life...
 - And because they know that, they have various ways of dealing with the emptiness:
 1. Some give themselves to seeking satisfaction:
 - They continually divert themselves with a million empty pursuits.
 - They never stop to think about how empty it all is.
 - There was a guy in the paper a few years ago who had a huge collection of the foil liners of cigarette boxes that he was making into a ball.
 - He was trying to see how big he could make his ball.
 - But he never stopped to think about how empty this pursuit was.
 - *But the truth is, the pursuit of that big successful career or that romance or whatever it is if it is not with reference to our greater purpose in the Lord, it is all just as empty.*

TRANS> Many people never stop to think about this!

- They just go on—perhaps happily—in their aimless way...
 - That was the way I was for the first twenty years of my life
 - Then, I began to think about it and that was when God was beginning to draw me to Himself...
 - He showed me that all the things I was attaining were empty apart from Him...
 - There are many people like that who never stop to think about it.
 - But there are others who *do* think about it!
2. Rather than diverting themselves, they concentrate more on escaping the pain of life:
- They feel deeply the pain of their emptiness and try to suppress it with drink, drugs, debauchery, or even suicide.
 - Their goal is to escape the pain of their vain lives.
3. There is a third way that is far better!
- It is a way that accomplishes both goals at once—
 - finding satisfaction
 - avoiding pain
 - And that better way is the way that God has made for us to go.
 - It is to **be** what He made us to be!

Tonight we want to look at what God made us to be...

- but for a moment I want to jump several lessons ahead and simply point out that the only way you can be what God has made you to be is to come to Jesus Christ.
 - He is the One who takes all who come to Him, ruined by the fall as we are,
 - and restores us to be all that God has made us to be!
- In future lessons we will look at how Jesus does this—
 - But tonight I want us to focus on what it is that God made us to be,
 - which is what it is that Jesus restores us to when He saves us.
- Sometimes people come to Jesus to be saved, but they don't think about this very important matter!
 - They may even come to Jesus for the wrong reasons.

- For example, they come to Jesus to get their broken body fixed (to be healed), but they don't come to have their corrupt soul cleansed and renewed.
- This is like taking your car in to get the body fixed when it won't run—and you have no intention of making it run!
- It is very important to know what God **created** you to be so that you will be clear about what you **ought** to be and what Jesus came to restore you to be.
 - Anyone who understands this will never suppose that the salvation of Jesus is only a fire insurance policy—to keep us out of Hell.
 - He will understand that it is about restoring to us that life that God created us to live.
 - So now let's look at what that life is.

This we are told in Genesis 1:26-28

- READ> Gen. 1:26-28

I. First of all, notice here that we are told that God made us in His own image.

A. An image is something that looks like another thing.

1. You go down to Walmart to have a family portrait made.
 - a. That portrait is supposed to be an image of you—
 - It's supposed to look like you, and if it doesn't, you won't want to buy it.
 - If the agent produces a picture of another person, you will protest that you came for a portrait of yourself, not some stranger!
 - You want an image that looks like you.
 - When you see it, you say, "Yes, that is me!"
 - b. Now of course, everyone knows that that image is *not really you*—
 - It's only an image.
 - It is something less than you,
 - but in the way it was made to be you, it is a true reflection of you—
 - It can't do math or show love like you can, but it was not made to do math or show love—
 - It was made to look like you in a certain way, and if it looks like you in the way that it is supposed to look like you, then you will be pleased with it.

B. Now the question is, when God made us in His image, in what way did He make us to look like Him?

1. Clearly, He did not make us to look like Him in our physical appearance.

a. That is obvious because God is a spirit.

- A spirit is a being that has no material body such as we have.
- A soul is a being that has both body and spirit, but a spirit does not have a body at all...
- God and the angels are not souls but spirits.
- As to physical appearance, a spirit doesn't look like anything.
- Because a spirit has no physical aspect, it cannot be seen.

b. The idea that you are like God as to your spirit rather than your body is brought out in Genesis 2:7 where it speaks of the process God used to create us. (This is where it makes a difference to know the process).

- Look at Gen 2:7
 - **Gen 2:7: And the LORD God formed man *of* the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being.**
- Do you see how this relates?
 - God made our bodies out of the dust of the ground,
 - but our spirit was given to us by His breathing into our nostrils the breath of life.
 - It is our spirit, not our body that is directly related to our Creator.
 - Many times when God has need to humble us, He mentions that we are flesh...we were made out of the dirt—
 - fearfully and wonderfully made, but all the same out of the dirt.
 - Our bodies are not the image of God
 - It is interesting to see that even the animals are said to have a spirit—a *nephesh*—a soul, but when God made man,
 - there was this special breathing of life into him...
 - It is our spirit that is particularly related to Him.

TRANS> This leads us to another question...

2. What does it mean to look like God spiritually, to be His image in our spirits?

- The scripture gives us some indication of that...

- a. In Colossians 3:10...
- 1) It speaks about how God restores His image in believers after the fall...
 - This gives us an idea of in what we are God's image...
 - It says:
 - **Col 3:10: and have put on the new *man* who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him,**
 - 2) Being in God's image in knowledge means that we are able to see things the same way God sees them—
 - to think His thoughts after Him...to it the way it really is!
 - This is not to say that we can see things as exhaustively or as comprehensively as God—not nearly,
 - but it is to say that we can see things in a way that corresponds to reality—to what God sees.
 - You don't have to see something exhaustively to see it truly.
 - For example, you all know the difference between a spruce tree and a maple tree—
 - And as far as your knowledge goes, you are correct—the one is a spruce tree and the other is a maple tree...
 - But a scientist who devotes his life to the study of trees understands the differences much more comprehensively and exhaustively than you.
 - Your knowledge is more limited, but it is still true as far as it goes.
 - 3) When we were created, we were able to see everything truly—
 - What we knew about God was true...there was no distortion...
 - What we knew about God's will for us was true...His law was written on our heart—we knew what pleased Him and what did not please Him.
 - What we knew about ourselves and our place in the world was true...
 - We were living in the light, not in the darkness.
 - We were a people of truth, understanding, and discernment.
 - 4) This knowledge was unique from that of animals because as humans, God gave us the ability to know Him, our Creator!
 - Animals can know many things...

- But they don't have any sense of deity.
- But for us, the knowledge of God and His will was implanted in us—written on our heart—because God Himself breathed into us the breath of life...
 - As His image, we knew about Him from knowing ourselves, and we knew about ourselves from knowing Him...
 - That is the knowledge that God restores in us when we are converted in Christ.
 - We come to know in truth.

TRANS> So the first way we were like God was in knowledge.

- b. The second and third way we were created to look like God is brought out in a verse in Ephesians that is very similar to the one we just looked at in Colossians.
 - 1) It is also a verse that speaks about God's image being restored when we are converted.
 - It is Ephesians 4:24, and says:
 - **Eph 4:24: and that you put on the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness.**

TRANS> Let's look at each of these...

- 2) Righteousness is uprightness—we were made to be upright like God...
 - a) To do the right thing, you might say—
 - To love God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength, because that is what is right for us as creatures...
 - We weren't meant to be ungrateful, disobedient, cool toward Him, blasphemous, idolatrous, and all the rest...
 - And righteousness would mean that we would love our neighbour as ourselves, because that is what is right in our relations with each other...
 - We were not meant to be selfish and covetous and hateful and demanding—to lie and steal and take what is not ours...
 - to be abusive or indifferent to our spouses or our children...
 - to be disrespectful to our husbands or our parents...
 - b) None of that—when we came from God's hand, we were righteous...
 - His law was in our hearts and we had the ability to keep it.

- 3) The other thing mentioned in Ephesians 4:24 that we are restored in holiness...
- Holiness is the characteristic of that which is able to live before God.
 - It is that which is conformed to Him...
 - All through the Bible you see God's holiness destroying and rejecting what is not holy—what is polluted and unclean and does not harmonise with His glory.
 - It is to have a beautiful life that is shaped according to all that He is—
 - to live in the atmosphere of His glorious person...
 - in the reality of Him as the dominant reality—
 - not as if He is not, but as if He is everything.
 - Let me see if I can illustrate...
 - You would consider a person very foolish if there was a fire and he was watching his favourite TV show and chose to ignore the fire...
 - You would say that he was out of touch with reality because there is something there—something that radically affects him—that he is totally ignoring!
 - He is living as if the lesser thing (his show) is more important than the greater thing (the fire)!
 - He is set apart to his show instead of the fire!
 - But you see, that is the way fallen man is...when he is not holy...
 - God is the dominant reality who blesses and curses...
 - but man lives as if God has nothing to do with him...
 - He is not set apart to God—and he ought to be!
 - When we first came from God's hand as His image,
 - We were holy—we were before Him!
 - We acted based on what He is and what pleases Him...
 - We took notice of Him in all that we did.
 - But after the fall we became unclean...
 - So now those who are in Christ are being restored to image of God in true holiness.

C. Consider what we lost in the fall with respect to God's image!

1. First of all, understand that we are still, in fact, His image constitutionally...
 - a. This is shown clearly in Gen. 9 where the death penalty is pronounced.
 - **Gen. 9:6: Whoever sheds man's blood, by man his blood shall be shed; for in the image of God He made man.**
 - b. The reason it is such a great offense to kill another human being is because it is an attack on God's image!
 - It is the same kind of act that we saw when Iraq fell to the Americans, and some of the Iraqi citizens pulled down the image of Saddam Hussein!
 - They attacked him by attacking his image.
 - If he could have dealt with them, they would have been sorry!
2. It is, in fact, because we are God's image that we are so guilty (culpable) in the fall—
 - a. It is worse to be God's image corrupted than it would have been for us to never have been His image...
 - b. Because by the fall, we are now a distorted, twisted, corrupted image.
 - **Ec 7:29 Truly, this only I have found: that God made man upright, but they have sought out many schemes.**
 - **Ge 6:5-6: Then the LORD saw that the wickedness of man *was* great in the earth, and *that* every intent of the thoughts of his heart *was* only evil continually. And the LORD was sorry that He had made man on the earth, and He was grieved in His heart.**
 - **Ge 6:11-12: The earth also was corrupt before God, and the earth was filled with violence. So God looked upon the earth, and indeed it was corrupt; for all flesh had corrupted their way on the earth.**
 - c. Which is worse—
 - To be a picture of the glorious God that is twisted and distorted—
 - or to be no picture at all?
 - d. You really can't understand Hell until you understand this concept
 - If we were not made in God's image, our sin would not be such a big deal.
 - The wretchedness of sin is that we have taken the image of God and defiled it.
 - If we had not been made so gloriously, we would not be so guilty.
 - The fall is sacrilege because we have taken what belongs to God and have ruined it—even His very image!

TRANS> So you see that the first thing about our creation is that we were created to be His very own image in knowledge righteousness and holiness...

- That is what Jesus restores us to be...
- Now let's consider a second characteristic of what God made us to be...

II. God also created us with dominion over the creatures

A. This dominion was authority over all things

1. We can hardly understand what it was like before the fall because the fall changed that dominion significantly.

a. Animals used to submit to us, now they attack us...

1) From time to time you hear about children being attacked by a dog...

- I remember a few years ago, the newspaper reported how a two year old child had been nearly killed by a dog...
- a terrible thing—the child had to have 600 stitches in his head, and if the dog had hit his mark, the jugular vein would have been torn open!

2) But it is not just big animals...

- Bacteria is supposed to be our servant, but now it teams up to kill us with sickness.

3) But even so, there is still a kind of dominion that we have as we are able to bring many animals under our control and to prevent them from destroying us.

- Traces of the dominion we once enjoyed are still there...
- but most of it is lost...

b. And then there is the ground...

- When God created us, the ground submitted to us perfectly.

- It grew what we wanted it to grow—

- but now it produces thorns and weeds that choke out our crops...
- or it yields nothing at all.

- And even worse, in the end, we return to the dust...

- We were taken out of the ground to have dominion over it, but we are put back in it when we die so that it has dominion over us...

- our bodies are completely taken apart, decomposed into nothing.

- Yet, again, there are still traces of this dominion over the ground—

- For we all enjoy the fruits of the ground, and though it is by the sweat of the brow, it still brings forth fruit to us.

2. We were given this dominion in order that we might do great things as God's image bearers...
 - a. That we might produce beautiful and useful things to give to one another and to reflect God's glory—
 - We are able to grow and prepare food—tasty food, useful food...
 - We are able to take gold and silver and precious stones and make them into beautiful things...
 - We are able to make technological inventions that enable us to travel—in chariots or boats or even by air.
 - Just think what we could make for each other if we were not fallen!
 - We see the traces of our original creation...
 - and it is good for use these abilities to serve each other in love.
 - b. And then there is our ability to discover and classify and learn of God's glorious creation—
 - Thus Adam was able to name the animals, to understand the place that each one had in God's creation.
 - The whole world was full of things for us to discover that we might praise our God for His wonderful works.
 - c. And there is poetry and painting and music...all this is part of dominion taking—making gardens for each other in the earth—
 - for pleasure, for joy, for service.
3. Christ restores us to do this again—
 - We begin to do it now, though we are hindered by the curse—much of our energy is spent in accident prevention, in health care, and in solving social problems—these are all legitimate redemptive callings...
 - But all the while we have hope that in the resurrection we will be given perfect dominion again—
 - The curse will be completely removed and the creation that now groans will rejoice to serve man perfectly once again.

B. The dominion was also to multiply and fill the earth

1. God made us a race
 - a. A race is a family—
 - We are all related—we all come from one man, the man Adam—
 - We are not each separate creations, but we are all relatives.

- Remember how we saw that the woman is truly of the man when we looked at the Trinity a few weeks ago?
 - We saw in Gen. 5, that like the Catechism, the man by himself is called Adam, but that the man and the woman together are also called Adam—the woman takes the man’s name—
 - our tradition of the woman taking her husband’s name is scriptural.
 - We also saw that she is related to him in the way that she is made—
 - She was not a separate creation, but was created from his rib so that she truly is of him—
 - so that the human race is all of one man—we are all related.
- b. This means that there is a connectedness
- What one does affects all the others.
 - We cannot pretend that we are unrelated, independent beings.
 - We are social beings and connectional beings...God made us that way.
 - If a father makes a foolish decision, it affects his whole household.
 - If he is godly, it blesses his whole household.
- c. There is an authority structure in us that is reflective of the Trinity.
- Perfect harmony could be found in family and government if not for the fall—
 - If not for the fall subordinates would delight in the leadership of rulers and rulers would delight in subordinates.
 - As Christians, Jesus produces in us the fruit of love, and in our families and churches something of this harmony is known—
 - In heaven it will be restored perfectly and eternally.
2. He gave us the wonderful ability to procreate.
- a. He made us with the ability to fill the earth with His image-bearers!
- It is hard to think of a greater privilege than this!
 - To produce image bearers of God that will live forever!
- b. God desires a godly offspring. (Malachi 2:14-15)
- What shame is ours now that we produce children of corruption...
 - Adam and Eve were ashamed of their procreative organs after the fall, and so should we all be—for we can only bring forth corruption now.
 - But once again, Christ redeems us and restores us—

- He is the circumcision who cleanses our seed!
- Thus we baptise our children in His name.

How gloriously God has made us.

- Let us rejoice that in Jesus, God's glorious creation is restored again.
- Do not miss the goal of your redemption!
 - God created you to be His image in knowledge, righteousness, and holiness.
 - He created you to take dominion for His glory.