

Recovering the Image of God

Introduction:

1. How can I ever be what God wants me to be? Or as the great apostle put it after reflecting on his sinfulness, “Wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from the body of this death?” (Rom. 7:24).
2. Perhaps you too have reflected on your personal predicament like Charlotte Elliott in her song JUST AS I AM. “Without one plea,” she said. “My soul darkly blotted with sinful spots. Tossed about, with many conflicts, many doubts; fightings and fears, within, without,” and all of it is because we have marred and distorted the image in which we were created.
3. How can I ever be what God wants me to be?
4. God created us in His own image and gave us dominion over the creation. But we did not exercise that dominion properly. Sin, shame, a curse and death ensued.
5. We were damaged, but not destroyed and Scripture reveals a process involving a progressive recovering of God’s image.
6. And it is about that recovery process that I want to talk to you this morning.

Discussion:

- I. Jesus Christ is the means by which the image of God may be restored (Rom. 5:6-11).
 - A. There are two senses in which we can speak of Jesus as the means of restoring the image of God.
 - B. First, He is the avenue by which forgiveness is available.
 1. By His blood we can be saved from the wrath of God against sin.
 2. He paid the penalty of death for us (Rom. 5:12, 15-21).
 3. Observe that this is described as “justification” in this text.
 - C. Second, Jesus is the model of “image of God creation” that we are to follow.
 1. In the example of His life Jesus perfectly reflected the image of God.
 2. He committed no sin (2 Pet. 2:21-23).
 3. As we constantly put to death sin and conform ourselves to the example of Christ we restore the image in which we were created (Rom. 8:12-13).
 4. This may be spoken of as sanctification—the process by which Christians progress toward conformity to the example of Christ. It is simply the process of Christian growth. It is to this process that Paul refers in Rom. 12:2 when he tells Christians, “Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.”
- II. The process begins with our coming to faith in Christ and being raised up with Him in baptism.
 - A. Christians are raised up with Christ (Col. 3:1).

1. When does this occur? Col. 2:12-13.
2. Now I know some discredit baptism saying that it is a “work” and we are not saved by works.
3. But before you shut me out consider that this text is saying that we are “raised up with Christ through faith in the working of God.”
4. Perhaps the most famous passage of all stressing salvation by grace through faith says the same thing. “It is not as a result of works, for we are His workmanship.” God works on us raising us from spiritual death to life through Jesus Christ.
- B. This transformation involves a mind set, a death to sin, and a new life in Christ (Col. 3:1-4).
- C. Herein lies the progressive recovering of the image of God (Col. 3:5-10).
- D. After talking about the mechanism that God has given for Christian maturity Paul talks about recovering of the image of God in Eph. 4:17ff.
 1. First, observe the process of Christian growth (Eph. 4:11-16).
 2. Second, observe his elaboration on the process in 4:17-24ff.
- E. It involves a mind set. It involves more and more knowledge of Christ. It is a progressive recovering of the image of God. Illustration of purchase of wrecked truck. Most of you would not have it. It is severely damaged, but it will be restored. Actually I bought three trucks. The motor and transmission will come from one truck. The frame will come from another and the body from yet another.

III. The transformation process is phenomenal. Sin caused severe damage from the very beginning. It began with the individuals, Adam and Eve, and resulted in shame, blame-pining, tension and alienation between them. Sin spread. Cain killed Abel. Lamech killed a man and a boy (Gen. 4:23). By Gen. 6 God observed “that the wickedness of man is great on the earth, and every intent of the thoughts of his heart is only evil continually” (5). Sin had spread from individual to society. It had now resulted in social and cultural distortion. Adam and Eve were even ashamed to be in the presence of God. They were separated from Him in a way they could never have imagined before they sin. They were a wreck. And we joined them. But the transformation process changes everything.

- A. The transformation process takes social and cultural distortion and transforms it into peace (Col. 3:11; Eph. 2:16ff).
- B. It takes murder and blame-pining, tension and alienation and transforms it into friendship (Matt. 5:21-25).
- C. It takes shame and transforms it into confidence to enter into the presence of God (Heb. 4:16; 10:19).

Conclusion:

1. Christ is the means God has given to renew within us the image of God so tainted by sin.
2. As we learn Christ we are transformed from a wreck to a restoration.
3. The old self is put off and the new self is put on.
4. Charlotte Elliott was right when she said,

Just as I am, without one plea,
But that Thy blood was shed for me,
And that Thou bids't me come to Thee,
O Lamb of God, I come

. . .

To rid my soul of one dark blot,
To Thee whose blood can cleanse each spot

. . .

. . .

Tho tossed about, with many a conflict, many a doubt,
Fightings and fears within, without

. . .

Just as I am Thou wilt receive,
Wilt welcome pardon, cleanse, relieve;
Because Thy promise I believe,
O Lamb of God, I come!