THE IMAGO DEI

“Christ & The Image of God”

1 Cor. 15:21-26; 45-49

Sunday, November 20, 2016

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“For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. But each in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ. Then comes the end, when he delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death....Thus it is written, ‘The first man Adam became a living being’; the last Adam became a life-giving spirit. But it is not the spiritual that is first but the natural, and then the spiritual. The first man was from the earth, a man of dust; the second man is from heaven. 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. 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 15:21–26; 45-49, ESV).

Heavenly Father, you have made us, and in Jesus Christ your Son you are remaking us. May your Holy Spirit stir us up to live in the power of new life. May your kingdom come in and upon us, so that your reign may be displayed through us. We pray this in the name of Christ, our King. Amen.

I. Introduction

For most of this fall, we have been exploring the concept of the Imago Dei – the notion that that all people despite age, race, religion, or social class have been made in the image and likeness of God. This is an important idea, and a history-shaping idea. In fact it is this biblical idea that has given to the world the notion of human rights. We are to honor, value, and hold as sacred the basic dignity of every person not just because our best intentions sometime say so, not because governments sometime says so, but because God has placed his holy imprint on every man, woman, and child. It is because we have been endowed by our Creator with these unalienable rights that we are obligated to honor those rights one another.

The Imago Dei is something true about what we are, but it is also something true about why we are. It helps form within us a vision for life. We were created for the purpose of bearing the image of God, which implies that we were created to be in fellowship with God. And one of the ways that the truth of the Imago Dei is evidenced is by the fact that our hearts still yearn for something eternal, something beyond what creation itself can give us – we yearn for life in God.1

1 Dominic Robinson. Understanding the “Imago Dei”: The Thought of Barth, von Balthasar, and Moltmann. (Burlington: Ashgate, 2011), 10
But according to the Bible there is one massive problem to finding life in God. That problem is sin. In the beginning, humanity rebelled against God. And because of this rebellion, the image of God within us was not removed, but it was irreparably damaged and shattered.

How can that which was broken be restored? To answer that question we will conclude this sermon series by talking about “Christ & The Image of God”

II. The Text

Now 1 Corinthians 15 (today’s Scripture reading) is written to answer the question, “Why is the resurrection of Jesus so important?” To answer this question Paul goes all the way back to Genesis, and begins to unfold the elaborate relationship between Adam the first man and Jesus. And as we will see this passage has massive implications for how Imago Dei is redeemed in Christ.

I’ll admit, this is a theologically complex passage. But it is a passage that contains truly beautiful truth. I will try to unfold this text by asking for questions: 1.) Who is Adam? 2.) What does it mean to bear the image of Adam? 3.) Who is Christ, and 4.) What does it mean to bear the image of Christ?

1.) Who is Adam?

• Adam is mentioned or referenced six times in 1 Cor. 15. So who is he? He is the first man of the first chapters of Genesis; he made of dust and given life by God. He is where we look to see the original design of the Imago Dei, which we why we have primarily been in Genesis for most of this fall.
• It may be helpful to review some of what we have studied this fall.
• Part of the image of God is revealed in who we are.
• In our study we have talked through the design of humanity in Genesis 1 and 2 by talking about manhood and womanhood, marriage and family, and the sanctity of human life.
• We have seen that humans are created beings, rational beings, relational beings, with life that is a sacred gift from God – and that all of these features are part of bearing the image of God.
• But another part of the Imago of God is revealed in what we do.
• The Imago Dei is particularly displayed in mankind’s dominion over creation and Sabbath rest.
• “Then 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 birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth’” (Genesis 1:26, ESV).
• Humanity was created to be God’s vice-regent, his representative and ambassador.
• Man and woman were designed to promote and display the reign of God on earth, and then rest in the goodness of God’s reign.
• However, man and woman relinquished this role when we failed the test in the garden (Gen. 3). A serpent slithered into God’s good creation and poisoned Adam’s heart with a deadly lie.
• Rather than having dominion over creation and worshipping God, Adam attempted to have dominion over God and worship creation. And by this act, Adam forever altered
the fabric of creation. Now, as the poet William Butler Yeats wrote: “Things fall apart; the center does not hold; mere anarchy is loosed upon the world.”

2.) What does it mean to bear the image of Adam?

- “By a man [Adam] death came” (1 Cor. 15:21), and we now bear the image of his dust and death.
- We are now estranged from the created order. The world is fractured by the power of sin, evil, and death.
- In Adam all have fallen. In other words, Adam’s sin and its effects apply to all of us, for all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God (Rom. 3:23).
- We have lost of dominion even over ourselves.
- We call this “sin nature,” or “total depravity,” or “radical inability.” This doesn’t mean we are all as bad as we can possibly be; it means that we are radically unable to be righteous and to rightly bear the image of God. There is something broken in us.
- You may not believe this; but you have certainly lived it (Rom. 7).
- Think of sins and iniquities passed down through families. Think of habitual sins that you yearn to be free of.
- This is what it means to bear the image of Adam; which is the broken image of God.
- The Image of God within us was not destroyed, but like a broken mirror it is shattered. And like a broken mirror, this shattered image causes pain and wounds when it is touched.

3.) Who is Christ?

- Who is Christ in relation to Adam and the Image of God?
- Christ is the “man of heaven,” who put on flesh (1 Cor. 15:49). He was incarnated. This is a massively important doctrine.
- The illustration of Athanasius (A.D. 296/98-373): “For as, when a portrait painted on a panel has disappeared in consequence of external stains, there is need again for him to come whose the portrait is, that the likeness may be renewed on the same material; because for the sake of his picture the material itself on which it has been painted is not thrown away, but the likeness is retraced upon it: so, similarly, the All-holy Son of the Father, being the Image of the Father, came into our sphere to renew man made after Himself, and to find him as one lost, through the remission of sins; the which He Himself says in the Gospels: ‘I came to seek and to save that which was lost.’”
- The New Testament talks Christ as the image of God in many places:
  - “In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God” (2 Corinthians 4:4, ESV).
  - “He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation” (Colossians 1:15, ESV).
  - “Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he

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appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world. He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power” (Hebrews 1:1–3a, ESV).

- Adam shattered the image of God; Jesus came to restore it. This why Paul says, “He must reign until he has put all enemies under his feet” (1 Cor. 15:25). This is the language of dominion, which was Adam’s original task.
- Thus in the gospels we see Christ reclaiming the dominion Adam lost.4
- This is why Jesus began his ministry with the pronouncement that the “kingdom of God” has come (Mk. 1:15).
- Christ’s kingship is also displayed by his lordship over demons, disease, and nature.
- As Pastor Timothy Keller has written in his book The Reason for God, “Jesus’ miracles...were never magic tricks, designed only to impress and coerce...Instead, he used miraculous power to heal the sick, feed the hungry, and raise the dead. Why? We modern people think of miracles as the suspension of the natural order, but Jesus meant them to be the restoration of the natural order. The Bible tells us that God did not originally make the world to have disease, hunger, and death in it. Jesus has come to redeem where it is wrong and heal the world where it is broken. His miracles are not just proofs that he has power but also wonderful foretastes of what he is going to do with that power. Jesus’ miracles are not just a challenge to our minds, but a promise to our hearts, that the world we all want is coming.”5
- As Adam failed a test in a Garden and let sin into the world, Jesus passed the test in the garden so that light and life may shine into the world. Adam said my will be done, not yours, and believed the lie of the serpent. Jesus said, not my will but yours be done, and crushed the head of the serpent.
- This is why the words of Pilate in John 19 are so ironic and yet so powerful. As Christ is on trial, preparing to be crucified, he says, “Behold the man...behold you King” (Jn. 19:5, 14).
- But Jesus story does not end in death.
- Death “the final enemy” (1 Cor. 15:26) has been defeated and will soon be vanquished – this why the resurrection matters.
- “For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive... ‘The first man Adam became a living being’; the last Adam became a life-giving spirit” (1 Cor. 15:21-22;45).
- **Jesus has forever altered the fabric of creation. He is not just the second Adam – he is the last Adam.**

4.) **What does it mean to bear the image of Christ?**

- “Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of [Christ] the man of heaven” (1 Cor. 15:49).
- What Adam shattered Christ has restored, and now we are called to live in light of that victory. This is the good news of the New Testament!

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4 See Dan G. McCartney. “Ecce Homo: The Coming of the Kingdom as the Restoration of Human Vice-Regency.”

New Testament scholars Roy Ciampa and Brian Ronser write: "God’s plan of redemption entails, among other things, restoring the perfect reflection of his image in his people, now by conforming them to the image of his Son, Jesus Christ." 

What does this mean for us? It means in Christ we are remade. 1 Corinthians 15 is actually subtly filled with images of Genesis 1. There are references to animals, birds, fish and people and seed bearing plants along with the sun, moon, and stars (1 Cor. 15:37-41). This is all pointing us to the truth that by the power of the resurrection, God is remaking us. In Christ, there is new creation!

In Christ there is offered to us a new type of humanity.

Paul offers a distinction here between a natural, “soul-life” versus a supernatural, “spiritual life” (1 Cor. 15:45). We inherent the first from Adam who was given life. We inherent the second from Jesus who gives life by his Spirit.

This highlights the crucial role of the Holy Spirit, who is the life of the resurrected Christ in us.

The redeemed image of God is an objective reality granted to us by faith in Christ, but it is also something we are called to actively participate in.

Spiritual discipline are means of grace by which we clothe ourselves in Christ, as Paul points out elsewhere in the New Testament.

“Put on then, as God’s chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God. And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him” (Colossians 3:12–17, ESV).

When we walk in grace with one another, read Scripture with one another, and sing with one another, we are inscribing the new identity that Christ has purchased for us onto our hearts.

Moreover, the redemption of Christ restores to humanity the task of dominion; that is the mission of ambassadorship for the kingdom that is the call of the church and every Christian.

When we are participating in the mission of God, we are stepping into purpose for which we were created. What a profound honor.

III. Conclusion

Today, as it would happen, on the liturgical calendar Christ the King Sunday, the Sunday before the beginning of Advent wherein the Church has recognized Jesus’s reign and dominion. I pray we may now have just a little but more of an understanding of how profound a truth that really


7 Robinson, 16.
is. And in we response to Jesus’s redemptive accomplishment, by the grace of the Holy Spirit, may we seek to bear his image and display his kingdom! AMEN.

Questions for Community Groups:

1) How does Paul compare and contrast Adam and Jesus in 1 Corinthians 15:21-26, 45-49?

2) What is the difference between bearing the image of Adam “the man of dust” versus bearing the image Christ “the man of heaven” (1 Cor. 15:49)?

3) Now at the conclusion of our study of the “Imago Dei,” what are some of the big ideas in this series that have been the most helpful to you?

4) How should the doctrine of the Imago Dei affect the way you live and worship?