

Marc Roby: We are resuming our study of systematic theology today by continuing to examine biblical anthropology. Last time we started going through the statement in Chapter IV, Paragraph 2 of the Westminster Confession of Faith, which says in part, “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; having the law of God written in their hearts, and power to fulfil it”.

Dr. Spencer, last time we discussed the fact that man was created male and female and with a reasonable and immortal soul. The next thing noted in this statement is that we were endued with knowledge. What do you want to say about that?

Dr. Spencer: I’m going to treat the next three things listed, which are knowledge, righteousness and holiness, all at the same time. In order to do this, I want to examine three verses from the Bible, which are, by the way, the verses cited by the Confession itself at this point.

Marc Roby: If I may begin, the first verse the Westminster divines cite is Genesis 1:26, where we read, “Then God said, ‘Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.’”<sup>1</sup>

Dr. Spencer: That is also the verse we began with in our previous session and which led to the discussion of what it means to be made in the image and likeness of God.

And the second verse they cite is from the New Testament, Colossians 3:10. But, in order to have a complete sentence, let me read Colossians 3:9-10. Paul wrote, “Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator.”

Marc Roby: And the final verse they cited was Ephesians 4:24. I’ll read Verses 22-24 in order to get a complete sentence. “You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.”

Dr. Spencer: And let me begin our examination of these New Testament passages by pointing out that both of them speak about an old self and a new self. The old self, of course, refers to an unregenerate person, in other words, a person who has not been born again. In other words, an unbeliever, someone who is still an enemy of God as Paul says in Colossians 1:21, where we read, “Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior.”

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And then, both passages also speak about a new self, which refers to a person who has been born again. The passages then tell us some things about the change that takes place when a person becomes a believer.

Marc Roby: There is also an interesting difference in the two passages that is worth pointing out before we go on. In Colossians 3:9-10 the past tense is used. We are said to have “taken off” our old self with its practices and to “have put on the new self”. Whereas, in Ephesians 4:22-24 we are commanded to “put off your old self” and “to put on the new self”, which describes something we are to do, not something that is a completed past event.

Dr. Spencer: Yes, that is an interesting and important difference. There is a very real change that takes place when a person is born again and confesses Jesus Christ as his Lord and Savior. In 2 Corinthians 5:17 the apostle Paul wrote that “if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!” And so, when the past tense is used, it is a clear indication of this change. It is evident in the life of a believer immediately.

Marc Roby: And yet, we are certainly not immediately made perfect.

Dr. Spencer: No, we’re not. And that is why the Bible also uses the present tense to talk about the continuing change that must take place in the life of a believer. Hence, we can be said in Colossians 3 to have taken off our old self, and then in Ephesians 4 be told to put off our old self. Both are true. And we will discuss this in more detail later, but for now I want to focus on the changes that are being made because they all tell us something about the image and likeness of God.

That image was radically defaced in the fall, but in Christ it is being restored. And so, as we already read, Colossians 3:10 says that we “have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator.”

Marc Roby: And so, clearly, knowledge is a part of the image with which man was originally made.

Dr. Spencer: That’s right. And we must note that for our knowledge to be in any way the image of God’s knowledge, it must be true and correct knowledge. The fall caused man to believe in lies. Paul tells us about unbelievers in Romans 1:21-23 and says, “For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles.”

Marc Roby: That is the exact opposite of the progression taught in our schools today. Pagan religions that worship images made to look like mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles didn’t come first and Christianity didn’t evolve from those religions. True worship came first and those pagan religions came when man rebelled against God. They are a perversion of true worship, not the first step in an evolution of religion.

Dr. Spencer: That is exactly right. Mans thinking *became* futile and our foolish hearts *were* darkened. We didn't start out that way in the Garden. We became fools as a result of sin.

**Marc Roby: And we read in Psalm 14:1 that "The fool says in his heart, 'There is no God.'"**

Dr. Spencer: Yes, the denial of God is the essence of foolishness and rebellion. And it is the source of our knowledge being corrupted by lies. This does not, of course, mean that an unbeliever is incapable to having any correct knowledge. Unbelievers can know many things that are factually correct and can use that knowledge to make useful objects and do useful work. But, at the core of the worldview of an unbeliever there is a lie. And that lie does corrupt many specific areas of knowledge as well, certainly including anything having to do with eternal realities, the nature of God or the nature of man.

**Marc Roby: Very well. We have established, I think, that to made in God's image includes the fact that man was made with true knowledge. Although that knowledge certainly was not exhaustive knowledge about our world.**

Dr. Spencer: Of course not. We aren't told exactly how much Adam and Eve knew before the fall and it isn't really important for us to know that. But what they knew, was true and correct. And, most importantly, their knowledge about God, however extensive it was, was true and correct.

Let me quote the theologian Charles Hodge about this knowledge. He wrote that "Adam knew God; whom to know is life eternal. Knowledge, of course, differs as to its objects. The cognition of mere speculative truths, as those of science and history, is a mere act of the understanding; the cognition of the beautiful involves the exercise of our aesthetic nature; of moral truths the exercise of our moral nature; and the knowledge of God the exercise of our spiritual and religious nature."<sup>2</sup>

**Marc Roby: And we could add that Adam not only knew moral truths, but he lived in accordance with them.**

Dr. Spencer: That's quite right. In fact, Hodge also wrote that "The knowledge here intended is not mere cognition. It is full, accurate, living, or practical knowledge; such knowledge as is eternal life, so that this word [knowledge] here [in Colossians 3:10] includes what in Eph. iv. 24 is expressed by righteousness and holiness."<sup>3</sup>

**Marc Roby: And that quote provides a perfect segue to our discussion of the next verse cited by the Westminster Confession, which is Ephesians 4:24. This verse says that we are "to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness."**

Dr. Spencer: And we can again conclude that since the new man is "created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness", that must also have been the case for Adam and Eve prior to the

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<sup>2</sup> Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, Eerdmans, 1997, Vol. II, pg. 101

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid*, pg. 100

fall. In redeeming his people from their bondage to sin, God is restoring the image that sin defaced, and that image included our being like God in righteousness and holiness.

**Marc Roby: I think most people have a fair idea of what it means to be righteous, it is to do that which is right. And to be holy means, in this context, to be morally pure or blameless.**

Dr. Spencer: And it is important to add that to be righteous is to do what is right *in the sight of God*, not what man thinks is right. Although the two terms righteousness and holiness can certainly be distinguished, Hodge points out that “These words when used in combination are intended to be exhaustive; *i.e.*, to include all moral excellence.”<sup>4</sup>

Therefore, we can conclude by saying that when the Westminster Confession says that God “endued [man] with knowledge, righteousness, and true holiness, after his own image”, it means that man was created with a true and proper understanding of who God is and who man is and that he was morally upright and faultless. He obeyed God’s precepts perfectly.

**Marc Roby: And the result of his perfect obedience was perfect happiness and perfect fellowship with God.**

Dr. Spencer: Absolutely.

**Marc Roby: Your statement that man was created with a proper understanding of who God is and who man is also reminds me of the first line to Calvin’s great work, the *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, which says that “Our wisdom, in so far as it ought to be deemed true and solid Wisdom, consists almost entirely of two parts: the knowledge of God and of ourselves.”<sup>5</sup>**

Dr. Spencer: And the similarity to his statement was quite deliberate. Properly understanding the Creator/creature distinction is crucial for us to be good image bearers. An ambassador always has to remember his place. He represents his government and country. He has no authority to do or say what he wants to do or say.

**Marc Roby: That’s a good analogy to keep in mind. As Christians, we are to always represent Christ.**

Dr. Spencer: Very true. But let’s get back to the statement from Chapter IV, Paragraph 2 of the Westminster Confession of Faith. It says that “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; having the law of God written in their hearts, and power to fulfil it”. We have now discussed all of this except the last phrase, which says that man was created having the law of God written in his heart and with the power to fulfil it.

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid, pg. 101

<sup>5</sup> John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Translated by Henry Beveridge, Hendrickson Publishers, 2008, pg. 4

Having the law written in the heart is again an aspect of being endowed with knowledge. That knowledge, as we have seen, includes moral knowledge.

**Marc Roby: So the thing that is added by this last phrase is that man was created with the power to keep the moral law.**

Dr. Spencer: Absolutely. Theologians, as is often the case, have a Latin phrase that they use for this. Prior to the fall, Adam and Eve were *posse non peccare*, which means that it was possible for them to not sin. Of course, they were also *posse peccare*, which means that they were able to sin. God did not prevent their sinning.

In any event, the Confession is right in telling us that man was created with the power to keep the moral law. If that were not so, Genesis 1:31 would not be true. We read there that “God saw all that he had made, and it was very good.”

**Marc Roby: How sad it is that it didn't remain very good.**

Dr. Spencer: That is very sad indeed. All of the troubles we experience are the result of human sin. God's purpose in creation is the manifestation of his own glory, not the immediate pleasure of man. We will get to the effects of sin as the last topic in our study of anthropology, but for now I want to continue looking at our being made in the image of God.

**Marc Roby: Very well, we've finished looking at the statement in the Westminster Confession of Faith, so what is next?**

Dr. Spencer: I'd like to read a fairly lengthy passage from Charles Hodge about what is called the essential image of God in man. But before I read it, I need to tell our listeners about Aristotle's distinction between the essential nature of something and the accidental nature.

The essential nature, or essence, of a thing is its fundamental nature.<sup>6</sup> If you take away the essence, you take away the thing itself. The accidental nature of a thing includes all of those aspects that are not essential to its being.<sup>7</sup> So, for example, the essential nature of a chair would include the fact that you can sit on it. Its accidents might include the fact that it is made out of wood, or metal, or that it has four legs as opposed to a single large pedestal.

**Marc Roby: Alright, that makes sense. So what is the quote from Hodge?**

Dr. Spencer: Hodge wrote, “While, therefore, the Scriptures make the original moral perfection of man the most prominent element of that likeness to God in which he was created, it is no less true that they recognize man as a child of God in virtue of his rational nature. He is the image of God, and bears and reflects the divine likeness among the inhabitants of the earth, because he is a spirit, an intelligent, voluntary agent; and as such he is rightfully invested with universal dominion. This is what the Reformed theologians were accustomed to call the essential image of God, as distinguished from the accidental. The one consisting in the very nature of the soul, the

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<sup>6</sup> John Frame, *The History of Western Philosophy and Theology*, P&R Publishing, 2015, pg. 751

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid*, pg. 739 (see page 150 and especially footnote 59 for further explanation of essence and accidents)

other in its accidental endowments, that is, such as might be lost without the loss of humanity itself.”

Marc Roby: If I might try to summarize and explain, Hodge is saying that both man’s original moral perfection and his being a rational, volitional being are essential to his being made in the image of God.

Dr. Spencer: I think that’s accurate. I’m not absolutely certain what would be considered accidental in this context, but I suppose the physical form of man; namely that we have a head, two arms, two legs and a torso might be the sort of thing that is meant. In any event, what is important, and the reason I read the quote, is that it tells us that reformed theologians have emphasized man’s original moral perfection and the fact that he is a rational, volitional being as being essential to our being made in the image of God.

Marc Roby: Is there anything you want to add before we conclude for today?

Dr. Spencer: Yes, one thing. The fact that we are moral, rational creatures is also essential to our performing the one function that clearly distinguishes us from the animals. The great Puritan theologian John Owen wrote that “The approaching unto God in his service is the chief exaltation of our nature above the beasts that perish.”<sup>8</sup> He also wrote, in the *Greater Catechism*, “Was man able to yield the service and worship that God required of him? Yea, to the uttermost, being created upright in the image of God, in purity, innocence, righteousness, and holiness.”<sup>9</sup>

Marc Roby: That’s wonderful. Our being made in the image of God is what distinguishes us from all other creatures and it is what enables us to worship and serve God, which is our greatest joy.

And now I’d like to remind our listeners that they can email questions and comments to [info@whatdoesthewordsay.org](mailto:info@whatdoesthewordsay.org). We’d appreciate hearing from you.

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<sup>8</sup> Quoted in: Beeke, Joel R. & Mark Jones, *A Puritan Theology: Doctrine for Life*, Reformation Heritage Books, 2012, pg. 670

<sup>9</sup> Ibid