

Shorter Catechism 12  
Genesis 2  
Psalm 8  
Colossians 1

“The Covenant of Life”

November 25, 2012

In Genesis 1:26-28 we hear that God created man in his own image,  
in the image of God he created him;  
male and female he created them.

What does it mean to be created in the image of God?

Well, in Genesis 5, we are told,

“When God created man, he made him in the likeness of God.

Male and female he created them,

and he blessed them and named them Man when they were created.

When Adam had lived 130 years,

he fathered a son in his own likeness, after his image,

and named him Seth.”

In other words, if you want to know what it means to be created in the image of God,  
look at your parents.

There is a family resemblance between parents and children.

And it’s not just a matter of outward looks.

Not only do you look like your parents –

but you also act like your parents.

Of course, you don’t look *exactly* like your parents –

neither do you act *exactly* alike.

After all, you are only “in the image and likeness” of your parents!

In the same way, the fact that we are created in the image of God means that we are *like* him,  
but we are not identical.

In the ancient world, the king was often said to be an “image” of the deity.

The OT is full of the language of “images” –

usually with a negative tone:

because “images” are generally associated with idolatry.

God says that we should not worship him by means of images,

because God himself has established his image – Man.

Last time, we looked at Genesis 1 and Psalm 104,

and we saw that God created the world to be a temple –

a house where God could dwell together with his people.

Now we need to see that there *is* an image in God’s temple.

*Adam* – created as male and female –

is the image in the temple of God.  
The reason why images are forbidden in worship  
is not because the idea of images is wrong –  
but because no man-made image can compete  
with the *God-made image* that God himself placed in his holy temple.

That's what is behind the catechism's question (from last week):  
How did God create man?  
God created man, male and female, after his own image,  
in knowledge, righteousness and holiness,  
with dominion over the creatures.

There are three parts to that answer –  
and all three are essential to what it means to be in the image of God.

First, "male and female" are essential to what it means to be in the image of God.  
Even as God himself is an image-maker,  
so also are we.  
And the way that we are to make images of God is through procreation.

God is the holy trinity.  
Some creatures may be simple and undifferentiated.  
But it would not be possible for an undifferentiated creature  
to reflect the image of God.  
(Some might ask, then why are there not three genders?  
The answer is simple:  
humanity is incomplete without God.  
"You made us for yourself – and our hearts are restless  
until they find their rest in you!"

Second, "knowledge, holiness, and righteousness" are essential to the image of God:  
God knows all things –  
so he created us to know things too (though our knowledge is finite).  
God is holy – set apart –  
and so he created us to be holy – to be set apart for him.  
God is righteous – not only does he do what is right, but he establishes a just world –  
and so he created us to be righteous – and to govern the world aright.

Obviously, these three attributes are only examples –  
we could include a host of others:  
your eyes are an image of God's eyes  
(he does not have *physical* eyes –  
but his eyes see all things,  
and so he gave us eyes so that we could see some things!)

your right hand gives you power to do some things –  
just like God’s right hand gives him the power to do all things.

The image of God is not limited to the soul – it also includes the body.

Third, “dominion over the creatures” is essential to the image of God:  
this is the point made by Psalm 8.

What is man that you are mindful of him?  
The son of man (literally “ben-adam,” Son of Adam) that you care for him?  
Yet you have made him a little lower than the heavenly beings  
(literally than “elohim” – God)  
You have crowned him with glory and honor.  
You have given him dominion over the works of your hands;  
you have put all things under his feet,  
all sheep and oxen, and also the beasts of the field,  
the birds of the heavens, and the fish of the sea.

Psalm 8 reflects on the language of Genesis.

Who is the son of man in Psalm 8?

Is it all humanity?

Not directly.

The son of man, the ben-Adam of Psalm 8 is the Davidic king.

The son of David has been crowned with glory and honor  
and given a share in the rule of God’s kingdom.

And yet, as Israel continued to sing Psalm 8,  
they could not help but see that *they too* were included –  
because they were connected to the Son of Man – the ben-Adam.

And so while we sing Psalm 8 as pre-eminently a song of our Lord Jesus Christ,  
we also sing as those who have been joined to the life of the Son of Man.

Sing Psalm 8

Read Colossians 1

Today we are looking at what the scriptures teach about the covenant of life  
(sometimes called, the covenant of works):

**Q. 12. What special act of providence did God exercise towards man in the estate wherein he was created?**

*A. When God had created man, he entered into a covenant of life with him, upon condition of perfect obedience; forbidding him to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, upon pain of death.*

The Westminster Shorter Catechism sets up its discussion of the covenant of life with a reminder of the creation of man.

In doing so, they are reflecting how Genesis 2 does the same thing.

God entered into a covenant of life with Adam.

If Adam had obeyed, and walked in covenant with God,  
then all of his posterity, all of his descendants,  
would have lived forever in eternal blessedness.

Sometimes we call it a covenant of works—but I think the catechism’s phrase is better.

Certainly Adam was required to obey God perfectly,  
but that’s not what the covenant was about.

The covenant was about life—it was about Adam’s inheritance as the son of God.

God formed Adam in his image, and breathed the breath of life into him.

To be created in the image of God is to reflect him.

Adam is said to be “after God’s likeness.”

This language of likeness and image shows how Adam is created as a son of God.

He is not a “natural” son, but an adoptive son.

Only the eternal Son of God is a son of God by nature.

The angels are created as God’s servants,

but God desired to have a different relationship to man.

He wished to be our Father.

Therefore he created us in his image.

So let’s start by looking at what it means that “God had created man”

and how this sets the stage for the covenant of life in verses 15-17.

## 1. When God Had Created Man (2:4-14)

### a. The Man (v4-7)

<sup>4</sup> *These are the generations of the heavens and the earth when they were created, in the day that the LORD God made the earth and the heavens.*

<sup>5</sup> *When no bush of the field<sup>[a]</sup> was yet in the land<sup>[b]</sup> and no small plant of the field had yet sprung up—for the LORD God had not caused it to rain on the land, and there was no man to work the ground,<sup>6</sup> and a mist<sup>[c]</sup> was going up from the land and was watering the whole face of the ground—<sup>7</sup> then the LORD God formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living creature.*

Genesis 2:7 says that God formed the dust man from the ground.

We often say that God formed *man* from the dust of the ground.

But the ESV is a better translation:

God formed the *man of dust* from the ground.

(Paul certainly thought it should be translated that way:

he speaks of how we have borne the image of the “man of dust”  
in 1 Corinthians 15).

God has highly exalted man.  
He created us in his image and gave us dominion over all his creatures.

But you must remember that you are dust.  
God’s final words to Adam before casting him out of the garden will be:  
“you are dust, and to dust you shall return.”

It is virtually impossible to imagine what it would have looked like!  
Did God craft a mannequin out of dirt?  
Again scripture will not satisfy our modern curiosities!

Remember that the ancients did not think in terms of the periodic table!  
God took X% carbon and iron and water...

No, God took the *adamah* (the ground – the stuff of earth),  
the same stuff which had brought forth the plants and the animals at his command,  
and he formed the Adam.

And he breathed into his nostrils the breath of life,  
and the Adam became a living creature.

He was formed out of the same stuff as all the animals –  
so we would expect that his genetic code would be similar to theirs –  
but the formation of Adam’s body (as well as his soul)  
is a special act of creation.

When God created the animals, they became living creatures (*nephesh hayyah* –  
living soul – 1:24).  
And when God breathes the breath of life into Adam, he becomes a living creature  
(a living soul).

What distinguishes between man and the animals?  
Both are formed out of the same “stuff” of earth.  
Both are called “living souls” – living creatures.  
The difference is not “reason” or “language” –  
the difference, according to the scriptures, is that God created Adam in his image,  
after his likeness, and gave him dominion over the creatures.

In Genesis 5:1-3 we hear that Adam had a son in his likeness and according to his image.  
There is a resemblance between father and son  
which is expressed in terms of image and likeness.

Adam was the son of God who was created to reflect his Father's glory.

And as the son of God he was to rule over the earth.

Think about how this theme continues throughout the scriptures:

When God calls Israel out of Egypt he says to Pharaoh,

*Israel is my son, my firstborn,*

Israel is called to do and to be what Adam failed to do and to be.

When Israel fails, God calls David and his sons to rule over the creation.

The son of David is the firstborn of God –

he is the one who inherits the nations.

The son of David is the one who exercises dominion over the earth.

The kingdom of God comes when the son of David rules.

This is why we read Colossians 1.

Paul says that

*He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation.*

*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.*

*And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together.*

Jesus Christ is the image of the invisible God.

He is the eikon – the image that reveals the Father.

The preposition is important.

There is a difference between Genesis 1:

Adam was created *in* the image of God –

and Colossians 1:

Jesus *is* the image of God.

Hebrews 1 also speaks of how the Son 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.”

Jesus is not merely “in” the image of God –

he is himself the image of God –

the one after whose likeness we were created!

This is why Paul says in Colossians 3:10 that those who are in Christ

*have put off the old self with its practices and have put on the new self,*

*which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator.*

Because Jesus Christ is the image of God,  
those who are in him begin once again to reflect God.

**b. The Garden (v8-9)**

<sup>8</sup> *And the LORD God planted a garden in Eden, in the east, and there he put the man whom he had formed.* <sup>9</sup> *And out of the ground the LORD God made to spring up every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food. The tree of life was in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.*

In verses 8-9 we hear how God planted a garden in Eden for the man whom he had formed.

You need to make sure that you get the picture here:

there is a land called “Eden” – the word means “pleasant, lush, delightful.”

And in this delightful land of Eden,

God plants a garden.

Eden is not the name of the garden.

It is the land in which God plants the garden.

And the garden is planted in the east.

There is big difference between the east *in* Eden  
and being east *of* Eden!

If you are in the east *in* Eden, then you are in the Garden of Delight!  
But if you are east *of* Eden, then you are cast out into dust and death  
(as we’ll see in chapter 3!)

But notice how God is a gardener!

It does not say that God spoke and a garden came into existence.

It says that the LORD God planted a garden in Eden.

In the same way that the image of the Potter will be used by the prophets,  
so also the image of the Gardener, the Vinedresser, will continue.

Before God gave us these tasks,

he himself engaged in crafting and tilling.

And he created us in his image, and so we mirror back his likeness.

He is the true craftsman and gardener.

Every time you build something you are reflecting God’s craftsmanship.

Every time you plant something you are imitating his gardening.

Every time you design something you are imitating the great Designer.

Every time you manage a project you are reflecting the great Organizer.

All of your daily labors are a reflection of your God.

Which also means that every time you use these gifts sinfully,

you are mocking him.

But God also planted two trees in the garden:

the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

This is called “foreshadowing”!

We are not yet told anything about these trees.

Simply that they are planted in the middle of the garden.

### **c. The Rivers (v10-14)**

<sup>10</sup> *A river flowed out of Eden to water the garden, and there it divided and became four rivers.*

<sup>11</sup> *The name of the first is the Pishon. It is the one that flowed around the whole land of Havilah, where there is gold. <sup>12</sup> And the gold of that land is good; bdellium and onyx stone are there.*

<sup>13</sup> *The name of the second river is the Gihon. It is the one that flowed around the whole land of Cush. <sup>14</sup> And the name of the third river is the Tigris, which flows east of Assyria. And the fourth river is the Euphrates.*

Verses 10-14 then describe the river of Eden that waters the garden and then divides into four in order to water the whole earth.

The picture here is important!

The temple was designed to mirror this river – with two “streams” of water chariots flowing from the “sea” of bronze.

And of course Ezekiel’s temple (and later, the New Jerusalem in Revelation) would have streams of living water flowing out for the healing of the nations.

So where is Eden?

The references to Assyria, Havilah, and Cush are important.

What is in the middle of Assyria, Arabia, and Africa?

The Promised Land.

Later in Genesis God will promise to Abraham all the land between the Euphrates and the Brook of Egypt (the Nile).

In other words, God will promise to Abraham a land that appears to be exactly where Eden was.

In Genesis 13 Abram and Lot separate, and Lot sees that the Jordan Valley was “well watered everywhere like the garden of the LORD” (13:10)

Deuteronomy 6-11 portrays the promised land as a good land, where you will lack nothing.

In Egypt you had to work hard to irrigate the land, but in Canaan, the land of life and abundance, God himself cares for the land and waters it (just like the land of Eden!)



So the way that the garden of Eden is described in Genesis 2  
would have reminded the Israelites of the Promised Land.  
And the river flows from the garden to the surrounding nations,  
from the garden to the four corners of the earth.

The water that flows from Eden  
flows to the nations – Assyria, Arabia, and Africa (the known world).  
All the world is blessed by the river that flows from the Promised Land.

## **2. The Covenant of Life (2:15-17)**

### **a. The Stipulations of the Covenant: to Work and to Guard (v15)**

<sup>15</sup> *The LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it.*

In verse 15 we see the stipulations of the covenant.

We see what God required of man:  
to work the Garden and to keep it (or to guard it).

Every covenant includes the obligations of both parties of the covenant.

Likewise, it specifies the blessings and curses that will result  
from covenant faithfulness or covenant-breaking.

In Genesis 2, we don't hear all the details.

We hear about what man is supposed to do—  
and we hear about the curse that will come upon disobedience—  
but we do not hear about what God is supposed to do,  
or what blessing will result from obedience.

I would suggest that this is because these things are inherent in the relationship.

God is Adam's father.

Therefore he will care for his son as a father should,  
and he will give his son an inheritance when he reaches maturity.

Adam's tasks, then, are set up to train him for his inheritance.

And the warnings are given to let Adam know that his inheritance  
is dependent upon whether or not he will continue to reflect his father's likeness.

This is why the language of "covenant of works" is not quite as useful.

The phrase "covenant of works" is acceptable, because it is true that Adam had to obey,  
but his works could not earn eternal life.

By virtue of his creation in the image of God, in covenant with his Father,  
his inheritance was already promised.

His works were required, but not as the meritorious cause of eternal life.

Rather, they were required as the condition for remaining in covenant with God.

Adam is supposed to work the garden,

and he is supposed to keep it.  
The word here means to “guard” or keep watch.  
In the tabernacle, this is what the Levites did.  
They “kept” or “guarded” the tabernacle.

The garden is the sanctuary in Eden –  
it is the place where God meets with his people,  
the Holy of Holies where man may worship God.

But why does someone need to guard the garden?  
We have heard that everything God made is “very good.”  
But now we have the first clue that there may be trouble in paradise –  
because Adam is called to “guard” it.

**b. The Conditions of the Covenant: Do Not Eat of This Tree (v16-17a)**  
*<sup>16</sup> And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, “You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, <sup>17</sup> but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat,*

And then we hear of the conditions of the covenant in verses 16-17a.

We heard in 2:9 that there are *two* trees in the midst of the garden.  
The tree of the knowledge of good and evil and the tree of life.

What are these trees doing here?

First, we should make it clear that these trees are not “magical” trees.  
There is nothing in the fruit of these trees that automatically confers anything.  
A fruitfly that sucked on the fruit of the tree of life  
would not thereby live forever.  
A worm that burrowed into the fruit of the tree  
of the knowledge of good and evil  
would not thereby gain any special knowledge.

These are *sacramental* trees.  
Their blessings (or curses) only come about through the word and promise of God.

And we should note that God forbids only one tree.

Adam and Eve may eat of every tree of the garden (including the tree of life).  
The *only* exception is the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

It is entirely possible that they ate of the tree of life while they were in the garden.  
Because the tree of life does not confer immortality in a magical way.  
Rather, as the very idea of “eating” suggests,

as long as Adam partook of the sacrament of life (the tree of life)  
in a worthy manner,  
he would continue in fellowship with God.

And that is why God will remove him from the garden after the fall.  
If Adam continues to partake of the tree of life (the sacrament of life)  
while he is under the curse of death,  
(in other words, if he partakes unworthily)  
then he will fall under a still greater judgment.

This is still true today.  
We partake of the sacrament of life in the Lord's Supper.  
Jesus is the tree of life and by partaking of him we partake of that tree.  
You can see how Paul's warning in 1 Corinthians 11  
is rooted in God's warning in Genesis 3:  
the one who partakes unworthily of the sacrament of life  
eats and drinks judgment upon himself.

This is the point in verse 17b:

**c. The Curses of the Covenant: You Shall Surely Die (v17b)**  
*for in the day that you eat<sup>d</sup> of it you shall surely die."*

The curse of the covenant is that unworthy partaking  
of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil will result in death.

By listening to a false voice—the voice of the serpent,  
and partaking of a false covenant meal—the tree of the knowledge of good and evil  
Adam turned from the true and living God—and turned from his glorious inheritance,  
to embrace a covenant of death, and an inheritance of sin and misery.

This covenant of works—or covenant of life—encompasses all of Adam's descendants.

All who are in Adam are born as covenant-breakers.

We'll look next week at the doctrine of original sin.

All who are in Adam are bound by the same covenant that he failed to keep.

And a broken covenant of life, is nothing but a covenant of death.

James 2:10 speaks of the universality of the covenant when he says,

“For whoever keeps the whole law, but fails in one point,  
has become accountable for all of it.”

Adam broke the covenant in only one place,

but to break the covenant in one place is still to break the covenant.

This is why the Messiah had to be born of a Virgin.

If a son of Adam was his father, then he too would receive the taint of original sin.

Rome is too egalitarian on this point.  
They assume that if a normal daughter of Adam was Christ's mother,  
then he would be tainted by sin—  
so they have to create the fiction of Mary's immaculate conception.  
But the true answer is that the covenant is passed through the father's seed.  
And since God is Jesus' father,  
therefore he is free from the taint of Adam's sin.

The covenant of grace is the solution to the broken covenant of life.

Jesus succeeds where Adam fails.

Jesus kept the covenant of life.

He not only obeyed God perfectly,

but he also paid the debt that we owed.

Adam could never have been said to merit eternal life by his obedience,

and so Jesus did not earn eternal life *for himself* by his obedience.

Jesus receives eternal life from the Father

because that is the inheritance promised to the faithful Son.

But what about us?

We have earned death (for the wages of sin is death,

but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.).

By his faithful obedience to the Father in his death and resurrection,

Jesus has paid the price for our demerit,

and purchased us for God.

Therefore it is right to say that we have eternal life only by the merits of Christ.

As Venantius Fortunatus said in the sixth century:

“Through his merit we inherit light and peace and happiness.”

And again

“Praise the Spirit; through Christ's merit he doth us salvation bring.”