

The Festival of Ash Wednesday
Concordia Lutheran Mission
Terrebonne, Oregon

"Godliness Comes from the Image of God Restored in Man through Absolution and Faith, the Gospel."

**"According to his divine power hath given unto us all things that *pertain* unto life and
godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue..."**

II Peter 1:3

Introduction

What does Godliness mean? Godliness means to be like God.

To be like God means we must know who God is and what He does. This is also called the Image of God.

Clearly, the fact that questions like this arise show us we are not Godly nor do we possess Godliness. For if we possessed these virtues, we would not be asking such questions. But the sad fact is we do not know who God is and what He does. Consequently, we are not Godly nor in our ignorance *can* we be Godly.

This ignorance of Godliness came about through the fall of man. In the Garden of Eden man disobeyed God's Word and rejected God. Man's Godliness obviously ceased and man perished.

But the Image of God is restored through the Gospel. For the Gospel gives the Knowledge of God, namely, *who* He is, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, One God in Three Persons, and *what* He does, namely our Creator, Redeemer, and Sanctifier, namely He who created us now redeems us from our sins through Christ our Savior and sanctifies us in Godly living through the dispensing of the forgiveness of sins and righteousness through the Gospel.

From the Gospel flows all Godly living, virtue, piety, patience, keeping us, thereby, Godly and members of Christ's eternal Kingdom.

I. Godlessness is the Loss of the Image of God through Sin.

A. Original sin creates evil man.

Today is the Festival of Ash Wednesday and the beginning of the Season of Lent. Ash Wednesday is a Festival that is penitential in nature and the Season of Lent is a penitential season. During the penitential seasons we especially meditate on our fallen condition because of our sins and its horrible consequences, lovelessness, Godlessness, death, and eternal damnation.¹ We also meditate on Christ's Passion through which He delivered us from this horrible life and evil end. Lent, then, is a season of repentance. Through repentance, i.e. through turning away from our sins and to the forgiveness of sins in Christ, we gain life eternal and are preserved in this eternal life throughout this life into eternity.

Wherever, however, the Gospel is not embraced and cultivated, the horrible results of sin begin to manifest themselves. For example, by the time World War II rolled around, Europe had largely forsaken the Gospel, unleashing the flesh and giving rise to atheistic regimes like the Third Reich and Fascist Italy. One famous and popular British philosopher and popular radio talk show host² at the time said that the horrors and savageries of World War II convinced him of the doctrine of original sin. The doctrine of original sin means that man became totally evil and corrupt after he rebelled against God in the Garden of Eden. The Lutheran Church states:

... God's Word testifies that the intellect, heart, and will of the natural, unregenerate man in divine things are not only turned entirely away from God, but also turned and perverted against God to every evil; also, that he is not only weak, incapable, unfit, and dead to good, but also is so lamentably perverted, infected, and corrupted by original sin that he is entirely evil, perverse, and hostile

¹Hence, the ashes of Ash Wednesday. Ashes reflects our mortal condition because of our sins. "... till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou *art*, and unto dust shalt thou return." **Genesis 3:19**. "And Abraham answered and said, Behold now, I have taken upon me to speak unto the LORD, which *am but* dust and ashes" **Genesis 18:27**

²C. E. M. Joad. "Joad was one of the most prominent British intellectuals of the 20th century. He was as famous as George Bernard Shaw and Bertrand Russell in his lifetime. He performed the difficult task of popularising philosophy, both in his books and by the spoken word, and helped to maintain the popularity of his specialist subject even after his death. ... Joad was invited to appear at the Socratic Club, an undergraduate society at Oxford University, where he spoke on Jan. 24, 1944, on the subject, "On Being Reviewed by Christians." This was a stepping stone in Joad's life, particularly at a time when he was reexamining his convictions. This reexamination eventually led to his return to the Christian faith, an event that he mentioned in his book, *The Recovery of Belief*, which was published in 1952. C. S. Lewis, President of the Socratic Club, is mentioned twice in this book, once as an influence on Joad through Lewis's book *The Abolition of Man*. Part of his legacy, then, was to return to the faith that he had set aside as an Oxford undergraduate and to defend that faith in his writings." *Wikipedia*, s.v. **C. E. M. Joad**, "Legacy".

to God by his disposition and nature, and that he is exceedingly strong, alive, and active with respect to everything that is displeasing and contrary to God.³

This evil nature of man manifested itself in the many brutalities, cruelties, and savageries of World War II, and drove this British philosopher from unbelief back to the faith.

It should not surprise us that original sin turns man into a horrible and evil creature. For original sin is rebellion against God. And to rebel against God is to say we desire there be no God. And to desire there be no God is to desire the murder of God. Deicide, the murder of God, is man's first crime and original sin from which all sin and crimes flow. Luther writes:

Therefore an unbeliever is a murderer of God and of man, whether he be called Abraham's seed or anything else. For if he could kill God, suppress the truth, and exterminate the divine Word, he would do so. Subsequently he also becomes a murderer of man.⁴

If man by his fallen human nature desires the murder of God, what's to stop him from desiring to inflict any manner of savagery upon his neighbor? In short, nothing. This is the defining character of fallen man and also it is the defining character of those atheistic regimes of World War II. Dispensing with God, they quickly became wholesale murderers of men. The fallen human nature was unleashed in many ways in Europe because in many ways and areas of Europe, Europe was rejecting the Gospel. Consequently, many aspects of the fallen human nature were unleashed and the fallen human nature manifested a portion of itself in the savageries of World War II.

Original sin, then, turns man from a Godly creature to an evil and Godless creature of indescribable magnitude.

B. Original sin is the loss of the Image of God and Godliness therein.

Obviously, original sin means anything but Godliness. Clearly, original sin produces Godlessness and is Godlessness.

³*The Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration*, Article II. Of Free Will.17. "Gen. 8, 22: *The imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth. Jer. 17, 9: The heart of man is deceitful and desperately wicked, or perverted and full of misery, so that it is unfathomable.* This passage St. Paul explains Rom. 8: *The carnal mind is enmity against God. Gal. 5, 17: The flesh lusteth against the spirit; and these are contrary the one to the other. Rom. 7, 14: We know that the Law is spiritual; but I am carnal, sold under sin. And soon after, 18, 23: I know that in me, that is, in my flesh, dwelleth no good thing. For I delight in the Law of God after the inward man, which is regenerate by the Holy Ghost; but I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin."* Paragraph 17

⁴*Luther's Works*, Vol. 23, p. 418.

Original sin produces Godlessness and dispatches Godliness by casting away the Image of God. Man was created in the Image of God. In *Catechism* we learned that the Image of God is:

What was the image of God? The image of God consisted in this -- A. That man *knew God* and was *perfectly happy* in such knowledge.... B. That man was *perfectly holy* and blessed....⁵

Man obviously lost the Image of God in the Garden of Eden; for, after he sinned, man no longer had the happy knowledge of God. Adam's guilty conscience weighed heavily upon him and caused Him to flee God. When God walked in the Garden in the cool of the day after Adam sinned, he did not rush to His Creator and embrace Him, but rather fled in fear and dread because he was no longer Godly. The Rev. Dr. Francis Pieper writes of this loss of the happy knowledge of God:

[Sin] is the death of the soul, or "spiritual death," i.e., the disruption of the communion of the soul with God. Only by the communion with God, for which it was created, does the soul live -- by cleaving to, believing, trusting, and loving God. But sin breaks this communion abruptly. The evil conscience cannot but flee from God. By the sin which Adam had committed he was separated from God inwardly, in his soul, to such an extent that he also fled from God outwardly when he heard the voice of the Lord in the Garden. And, as Luther remarks, when Adam fled from God, "he was in the midst of death and hell"⁶

Hell obviously is not the place of Godliness. And man flees God because man is no longer holy. St. Paul writes that in part the Image of God consisted in "righteousness and true holiness"⁷. Lacking true righteousness and holiness man now flees the Holy God. Lacking true righteousness and holiness man now walks in fear and dread of the Holy God and no longer has the happy knowledge of God. Lacking true righteousness and holiness, fallen man no longer possesses the Image of God.

Original sin, therefore, deprives man of the Image of God. And lacking the Image of God makes man obviously not Godly but rather Godless. Original sin produces not a life of Godliness but rather man now lives a life of Godlessness and in a state of Godlessness.

⁵Question 113, p. 97

⁶*Christian Dogmatics*, Vol. I, p. 535

⁷**Ephesians 4:24**

II. Godliness is Restored through Absolution and Faith, the Gospel.

A. Christ assumed man's Godlessness and thereby restored to man Godliness, namely the Image of God.

But God did not leave us in this Godless state but assumed the guilt of our Godlessness and redeemed us through Christ Crucified. Jesus said on the Cross:

And about the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani? that is to say, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?⁸

Likewise David writes of Christ being forsaken of God and lacking God:

For thou has made Him to do without God for a little while.⁹

Luther writes of Christ suffering God's absence:

In this verse David describes how miserably Christ will be forsaken. No human words can describe this as clearly, briefly, and simply as it is here. He is not speaking of the physical suffering of Christ, which was also great and difficult, but of His sublime, spiritual suffering, which He felt in His soul, a suffering that far surpasses all physical suffering. He describes the highest degree of this suffering and says: "Thou wilt let Him be forsaken of God for a little while." What this is, no man on earth understands, and no man can reach or express it in words. For to be forsaken of God is far worse than death. Those who have tasted and experienced a little of this may ponder it, but people who are carnally secure, coarse, untried, and inexperienced know and understand nothing of it. When God gives us a purse full of money, a field full of grain, and a cellar full of wine, and when He lets us be without cross and temptation and enjoy ourselves, then we have a good time and come to think that everything is rosy and that we are sitting in God's lap. But when God conceals and hides Himself and lets the devil do with us what he pleases, then there is trouble and sorrow, yes, there is death itself.¹⁰

But Christ's suffering God's absence and forsaking Him came to an end because Jesus in fact atoned for all the sins that separated us from God and cast us into Godlessness. David continues:

⁸**St. Matthew 27:46**

⁹**Psalm 8:5**

¹⁰*Luther=s Works*, Vol. 12, pp. 124, 125

... and hast crowned him with glory and honor.¹¹

Here David indicates the end of Jesus' suffering, His resurrection, and His glorification. Luther writes:

Now there follows His joyful resurrection from the dead.

But Thou wilt crown Him with honor and adornment.

Him whom no one will support, who is forsaken by God and the whole world, Him Thou wilt snatch from suffering to peace, from anguish to consolation and joy. Because of the contempt, mockery, and shame He has endured Thou wilt adorn Him with honor. Because of the ugly form He had on earth Thou wilt dress Him preciously, so that He will be dressed, adorned, and crowned on all sides. Not only will He be beautiful in body and soul for His own person, full of eternal life, full of joy, salvation, wisdom, power, and might, full of heavenly majesty and deity, so that all creatures will regard and adore Him; He will also be gloriously adorned and decorated with His Christians and believers on earth and with the elect angels in heaven, in this world and in the world to come.¹²

Plainly, God is pleased with Christ's Work and consequently crowns Him with honor and glory. God is pleased with Christ's Work and His entire life, repeatedly saying, "This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased."

Christ restores Godliness to man by taking away our Godlessness through His suffering and death and replacing our Godlessness with His Godliness.

B. Knowledge of Christ's Work on the cross, i.e. the Gospel, gives God's grace and peace and thereby restores the Image of God and therefore Godliness in man.

And the knowledge of this Blessed Work of Christ on the Cross through the Gospel restores in men the Image of God and therefore Godliness. St. Peter writes:

¹¹**Psalm 8:5**

¹²*Luther's Works*, Vol. 12, p. 128

Grace and peace be multiplied unto you through the *knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord*.¹³

Here St. Peter makes plain that the Knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord gives peace. This Knowledge gives peace because we know that through Jesus' Passion God is no longer angry with us and indeed is pleased with us for Christ's sake. Therefore we no longer flee God in fear and dread into Godlessness but run to God and embrace Him and thereby become Godly. In other words, the Gospel restores the Image of God and thereby Godliness in man. For the Knowledge of God includes the happy knowledge of God, namely that God no longer reckons our sins against us but freely forgives them for Christ's sake.

The Knowledge of God in the Gospel, therefore, restores the Image of God in man. And with the restoration of the Image of God in man obviously comes Godliness. For now man's will is perfectly aligned with the will of God. St. Peter, therefore, writes:

According to his divine power hath given unto us all things that *pertain* unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue: Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.¹⁴

The Rev. Dr. Francis Pieper writes:

The image of God in man consisted in much more than in his possession intellect and will, in his personality; it consisted in the right disposition of his intellect and will, in his knowledge of God and the will to do only God's will.¹⁵

Through the restoration of the Image of God by the Gospel, God's will is now again done on earth in the Godliness of the Gospel. In *Catechism* we learned:

Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. *What does this mean?* The good and gracious will of God is done indeed without our prayer; but we pray in this petition that it may be done among us also. *How is this done?* When God breaks and hinders every evil counsel and will which would not let us hallow the name of God nor let His kingdom come, such as the will of the devil, the world, and our

¹³ **II Peter 1:2** This Knowledge is also the source of eternal life. "And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent." **St. John 17:3**

¹⁴ **II Peter 1:3, 4**

¹⁵ *Christian Dogmatics*, Vol. I, p. 516, 517

flesh; but strengthens and keeps us steadfast in His Word and in faith unto our end. This is His gracious and good will.¹⁶

The Knowledge of God that gives grace and peace is the Gospel. And the Gospel restores in man the Image of God and therefore restores in man Godliness.

C. The Godliness restored by the Gospel produces virtue.

And not surprisingly with the restoration of Godliness through the Gospel proceeds virtues, i.e. moral strength in thought, word, and deed. The prophet Isaiah writes of Christ's virtues which becomes ours by the Gospel through faith:

And the Spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him, the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD....¹⁷

These virtues of Christ of the Sevenfold Gifts of the Spirit becomes ours through the Gospel, i.e. through absolution and faith. Jesus says:

Then said Jesus to them again, Peace *be* unto you: as *my* Father hath sent me, even so send I you. And when he had said this, he breathed on *them*, and saith unto them, Receive ye the Holy Ghost: Whose soever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; *and* whose soever *sins* ye retain they are retained.¹⁸

St. Peter writes:

And beside this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge; And to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness; And to godliness brotherly kindness and to brotherly kindness charity.¹⁹

With the restoration of the Image of God comes Godliness, virtues that are reflective of God's own virtues²⁰. In other words, man is again in the Gospel *recreated in the likeness of God, or Godly, or possesses Godliness.*

¹⁶*The Small Catechism, III. The Lord's Prayer, The Third Petition.*9-11

¹⁷**Isaiah 11:2-3**

¹⁸**St. John 20:21-23**

¹⁹**II Peter 1:5-7**

²⁰ Owing to the difference between God the Creator and man the creature, the divine aseity [self-existence] and eternity could not have been communicated to man, and the other

D. By continuing in the Gospel men continue in Godliness unto the life everlasting.

And continuing in the Gospel men continue in Godliness unto life everlasting. For just as God Himself doesn't end, neither then does the virtue of Godliness end. St. Peter, therefore, writes:

For if these things be in you, and abound, they make *you that ye shall* neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. But he that lacketh these things is blind, and cannot see afar off, and hath forgotten that he was purged from his old sins.²¹

If one does not continue in Godliness, it's because he has ceased to continue in the Gospel, having forgotten, as St. Peter says, "that he was purged of his old sins", namely he has forgotten absolution, the Gospel.

But remaining in the Gospel men become and remain Godly in this life. And this Godliness continues beyond this life into life eternal because Godliness, like God, goes on forever. St. Peter, therefore, writes:

Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things, ye shall never fail: For so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.²²

Conclusion

Godliness, then, comes from the Gospel. For the Gospel restores in man the Image of God. And the Image of God means that man is now again like God and bears the likeness of God.

divine attributes, for instance, the wisdom, lordship, etc., were only reflected in man. God is wise, and man is wise; God rules, and man rules. But God possesses unlimited, man only limited wisdom, dominion, etc." Francis Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, Vol. I, p. 515.

²¹**II Peter 1:8-9**

²²**II Peter 1:10-11**

And where Godliness is restored, there also eternal life is restored. For just as God goes on forever, so the Godly go on forever in Christ's eternal Kingdom.

Amen