



NEW LIFE

BIBLE-PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

44 Salusbury Road, London NW6 6NN

Charity No. 1060655

Tel: 020 7328 0869 (Manse)

Email: newlifeplondon@yahoo.co.uk

Website: www.newlifebpc.org.uk

“For the Word of God and for the testimony of Jesus Christ” (Rev 1:9)

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Paradise Lost

*By Dr David VanDrunen, Part 3 of 4 of “Paradise Lost and Regained”
Adapted from TABLETALK from Ligonier Ministries – December 2008*

In the second chapter of Hebrews, the author notes that God did not appoint angels, but human beings, to rule the world to come (v. 5), and he quotes Psalm 8 to prove it: “You made him for a little while lower than the angels: you have crowned him with glory and honor, putting everything in subjection under his feet” (Heb. 2:7-8). Then the inspired author makes a statement that is both obvious and profound: “At present, we do not yet see everything in subjection to him” (v. 8). This statement is obvious because everyone recognises that we human beings have filled this world with injustice, suffer in all sorts of ways, and ultimately die. But this statement is also profound, because our present predicament is not really the natural state of the human race. God created us in His own image and likeness. He bestowed upon us tremendous capabilities, gave us a remarkable commission to exercise dominion over the world, and offered the hope of everlasting life. Thus, to say that we do not now see the world subject to man is profound – profoundly tragic. What happened? How did human beings, created in such a high position, end up mired in our present woe, and why does the world around us share our misery?

If we are to appreciate the depth to which we have sunk, we should contemplate again the height from which we have fallen. The full biblical witness suggests that the image of God in creation involved a number of interrelated matters. Protestant theology has often described the image as consisting of three attributes – knowledge, righteousness, and holiness – and have pointed to explicit biblical support of this claim. Ephesians 4:24 explains that in Christ we recover “true righteousness and holiness” and Colossians 3:10 describes Christians as those who have “put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator.” When we turn back to the opening chapter in Scripture we find that knowledge, righteousness, and holiness were not simply attributes that Adam was to possess, but attributes that he was to put into practice. In the first statement about human creation, the image of God entails having a task to perform: “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’ (Gen 1:26). Genesis 1 describes God as exercising supreme dominion over this world, and thus it comes as no surprise that those created in His image should exercise dominion in this world under His authority.

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Immediately after this statement, we learn that God created man “male and female” (v. 27) and gave them another task to accomplish alongside their exercise of dominion: “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that move on the earth” (v. 28). As God in Genesis 1 was extraordinarily fruitful, bringing forth life from nothing, so His image-bearers were to be fruitful and life-producing in their own creaturely way.

What then was lost in the fall? In Genesis 3 we find that God’s curse upon fallen Adam and Eve strikes precisely at the exercise of their image-bearing tasks. In Genesis 1:27-28 God commanded them, as male and female, to be fruitful and multiply, but now in 3:16 He says to Eve: “I will surely multiply your pain in childbearing; in pain you shall bring forth children. Your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you.” In Genesis 1:26 and 28 God called them to exercise dominion over every creature inhabiting this world, but now in 3:17-19 God states that they will expend practically all of their energy just coaxing their daily bread from the stingy ground, until the ground claims them as its own: “Cursed is the ground because of you; in pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life; thorns and thistles shall bring forth for you; and you shall eat the plants of the field. By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread, till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for you are dust, and to dust you shall return.” What an ironic turn of events! Fallen human beings are doomed to misery and futility in striving to do the very things that God commissioned them to do as His image-bearers. And then they must face everlasting death in the world to come.

How, therefore, should we describe the condition of humanity and the created order after the fall? One important biblical answer is that the corruption of sin has thoroughly pervaded human nature and left us unable to act in ways morally pleasing to God. Another crucial biblical answer is that God has put a curse upon the whole of creation so that it does not function as originally designed. Sinful human nature and a twisted created order conspire together, as it were, to bring about the world as we know it, filled with its troubles and tragedies. We may briefly observe both of these factors.

First, the fall has left human nature corrupted by sin. Paul, we observed above, spoke of the image of God in terms of knowledge, righteousness, and holiness. But what is Paul’s verdict upon fallen humanity? “None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands, no one seeks for God” (Rom. 3:10-11). Already at an early point in biblical revelation, Scripture communicates just how thoroughly sin has overtaken human nature: “The LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually” (Gen 6:5). The holistic character of sin shines through: every intention, only evil, continually. To be sure, God has bestowed His common grace upon the world, by which he restrains sin from breaking out in full force. All people, even those without Scripture, “knew God” through His revelation in nature (Rom. 1:20-21), and their consciences bear witness to His law (2:14-15)/ God thereby maintains a measure of justice in this world and allows people to continue pursuing ordinary human tasks (Gen. 9:1-7). But all of this does sinful human beings no spiritual good.

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Though unredeemed sinners may do many things that outwardly conform to God's law, the poison of sin has left them unable to do anything that is truly pleasing to God. Paul speaks clearly to this point in Romans 8:7-8: "the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God's law; indeed, it cannot. Those who are in the flesh cannot please God." It is no wonder, then, that our Lord said: "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God" (John 3:3).

Second, the curse of sin has extended to the whole of the created order. As noted above in regard to Genesis 3, the ground, which in the garden of Eden brought forth abundant fruit, now yields its produce ungenerously and inconsistently. The human body, created to work and reproduce in reflection of its Creator, now labours in sweaty toil and gives birth in agony. It gets sick, becomes feeble, dies and decays. Common grace is operative here as well, of course. The psalmist reminds us that the "heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork" (Ps. 19:1). But in the bracing words of Romans 1:18 Paul tells us what else the heavens declare: "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth." Creation itself testifies of God's wrath and judgement. Later in Romans Paul compares the state of creation to the state of a woman in labour, thereby bringing together the themes we observed in Genesis 3. "For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it... We know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now" (Rom. 8:20, 22). When we contemplate the floods, fires, droughts, tornadoes, earthquakes, and hurricanes that devastate this earth, how often we must remember that this world is not the way God created it to be. His wrath and curse lies heavy upon it.

At the beginning of this article, Hebrews 2, after reflecting on God's creation of human beings, reminded us that "at present, we do not yet see everything in subjection to him" (v. 8). Indeed, that is true. Of course, we must never forget that the main point of Hebrews 2 is the author's very next words: "But we see him... namely Jesus" (v. 9), just as we must never forget that Paul's main point in discussing creation's groaning in Romans 8 is that the creation groans "in hope" (v. 20). The groaning of creation and the misery of man are not the end of the story. But it is precisely the earlier, tragic chapters of this story that enable us to make sense of the glorious concluding chapters.

WELCOME TO NEW LIFE B-P CHURCH LONDON

Our worship services begin promptly at **11.00 am** and **4.00 pm**.

Please stay back for Bible Study and fellowship lunch after the morning worship and for tea after the evening service. Do invite your friends to come to Church.

Worship Services			WELCOME
Morning	<i>Today: 23/08/2009</i>	<i>Next Week: 30/08/2009</i>	We extend a warm welcome to all worshippers this Lord's Day. We like to welcome Johanna Kalen to our worship services last Lord's Day.
<i>Chairman:</i>	Joey Seow	Jonathan Kim	
<i>Preacher:</i>	Rev Timothy Ki	Eld George Chew	
<i>Message:</i>	Faith and Christian – Part 1	Who is Jesus?	
<i>Text:</i>	Hebrews 11:1	Matthew 16:13-17	
<i>Organist:</i>	Anthony	Anthony	
Evening			
<i>Chairman:</i>	Joey Seow	-	
<i>Preacher:</i>	Rev Timothy Ki	-	
<i>Message:</i>	Faith and Christian – Part 2	No Evening Service	
<i>Text:</i>	Hebrews 11:6	-	
<i>Pianist:</i>	Joy	-	
Other Duties			NEWS/ANNOUNCEMENTS
	<i>Today: 23/08/2009</i>	<i>Next Week: 30/08/2009</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Please note that there will not be an Evening Service next Lord's day (30th August 2009)</i> • <i>Calling of Resident Minister:</i> Continue to pray for the Lord's calling for Rev Timothy Ki to serve as our resident minister. Rev Ki & Mrs Ki will be returning to Australia on the 24th August. Pray for journey mercies and his visa application. • <i>DHW Bible Study today:</i> Today, we will cover Lesson 15 (Genesis 21). Please spend the upcoming week preparing for Lesson 16 (Genesis 22). • <i>Pray for those who are sick:</i> - Yetta's mum (upcoming chemotherapy sessions), Constance (ankle), Douglas (knee pain), Barbara (Alzheimer's), Prema (thyroid and skin condition), Eld Jack Ford (old age and knees), Margaret (Asthma, Hay fever, lost her voice), Brian (awaiting appointment for wisdom tooth extraction), Jonathan (Gout). • <i>Pray for those who are on travel:</i> Sophia, Lee-Wei, Grace (S'pore), Nicolas (Belgium), John & Sharon (Peterborough). • <i>Pray for those who are still progressing with their studies:</i> Yetta, Hubert, Joshua • <i>Pray for those seeking employment:</i> Joy • <i>Pray for visa applications:</i> Grace (China and UK), Joshua (Student visa), Joy (Post studies visa) • <i>Pray for the upcoming UK Students meeting</i> in Singapore on the 12th September at New Life BP Church. • <i>Please note that there will be parking restrictions in place around the church for the next few weeks.</i>
<i>Ushers</i>	Daniel / Joy	Daniel / Yetta	
<i>Sunday Sch:</i>	No Sunday School	No Sunday School	
<i>Lunch:</i>	Constance	Maureen	
<i>Washing-up:</i>	Volunteers	Volunteers	
<i>PA Crew:</i>	Joshua	Brian	
Appointments of the Week			
Fri 28 Aug	7:30pm	Young Adults Fellowship: No YAF	
Sat 29 Aug	4:00pm	Prayer Meeting & Bible Study: Led by Jonathan Kim	
<u>Worship Service Collections</u>			
Offering: £603.22		Lunch: £48.90	
<h2 style="margin: 0;"><u>Loving Unlovely People</u></h2> <p style="margin: 5px 0 0 40px;"><i>Adapted from "In Green Pastures" by J.R. Miller, D.D.</i></p> <p style="margin: 5px 0 0 40px;">There are some people whom it is very easy to love. They are congenial to our tastes. They have amiable qualities or charming manners, or they have befriended us, or they are our social companions. But there are others, good enough, yet not congenial, not amiable, not to our taste. They have unlovely and disagreeable traits. Faults mar the beauty of their character. Yet if we are Christians we should not fail to show brotherly love toward any. We must seek that charity that bides the multitude of sins and faults.</p>			