

Week 3:

Intro:

Have you ever wondered about the origins of something? How something came to be? I'm a history nerd and I love learning the stories about the places around us. Like, how Midlothian got its name? Or, why the House of Burgesses' is named Chesterfield after Philip Stanhope, an Englishman and 4th Earl of Chesterfield Derbyshire, who is famous for saying: "An injury is much sooner forgotten than an insult"? As people, we are fascinated by how things came to be and how they are the way that they are. As I stroll the grocery aisles with a focused determination, I can't help but wonder why people are hoarding toilet paper, or how much I could get for the 12 rolls of Cottonelle I have stashed away. How did we get to a place where we as a society mistrust one another, our leaders, and/or experts in the fields of medicine, epidemiology, and public health?

Even before the outbreak of Covid-19, there was an underlying tension in our nation: one of distrust, frustration, and even anger. How did we get here? It is a question of history and sociology to many, but at its root, I believe it goes much further than that. The Heidelberg in questions 3, 4, and 5 reminds us of how we know our sin and misery. Yet, the question remains: how did we get to this place to begin with? This week in questions 6, 7, and 8, the Heidelberg answers these deeper questions for us.

Pray:

Pray that throughout this week, as you feel the disorder of the world around you, as you feel the anxiety, frustration, and anger within you, that you are reminded that you are a restless soul apart from the rest found in the finished work of Christ. Pray that through this week, God would remind you of the peace he gives and allow you to fall head first into the streaming waters of his grace.

Question 6:

Q. Did God, then, create man so wicked and perverse?

A. No, on the contrary, God created man good[1] and in His image,[2] that is, in true righteousness and holiness,[3] so that he might rightly know God His Creator,[4] heartily love Him, and live with Him in eternal blessedness to praise and glorify Him.[5]

[1] Gen. 1:31. [2] Gen. 1:26, 27. [3] Eph. 4:24. [4] Col. 3:10. [5] Ps. 8.

Question 7:

Q. From where, then, did man's depraved nature come?

A. From the fall and disobedience of our first parents, Adam and Eve, in Paradise,[1] for there our nature became so corrupt[2] that we are all conceived and born in sin.[3]

[1] Gen. 3. [2] Rom. 5:12, 18, 19. [3] Ps. 51:5.

Question 8:

Q. But are we so corrupt that we are totally unable to do any good and inclined to all evil?

A. Yes,[1] unless we are regenerated by the Spirit of God.[2]

[1] Gen. 6:5; 8:21; Job 14:4; Is. 53:6. [2] John 3:3-5.

Commentary:

Dale Bruner, a Bible scholar, has taught that the core relationships in life are with, "God, a garden, and a good friend." Genesis teaches us that worship is primary, and all relationships in our lives are oriented and sustained in a right relationship with God our creator. It also teaches our need for work, a relationship with creation itself, and that we are made to be in loving relationships with one another. In other words, Adam related to God and his world through, "Worship, work, and a woman."

Questions 6-8 of the Heidelberg address the doctrine of "the Fall." The doctrine teaches that although humans were created to reflect the character of God and to enter into relationship with him, each other, and creation, we broke our relationship with him through our sin. Thereby, we broke our relationship with creation and each other. Adam and Eve, our first parents, introduced sin into the world through their willful rebellion against God and disobedience to God's instructions.

The Calvinist tradition has long taught the doctrines of "original sin" and "total depravity." This doesn't mean that there is no good in anyone, but that all of us inherited Adam's sinful nature and that no part of us is left untouched by that evil. In other words, no aspect of us is perfect, no element of our endeavors is perfectly done, and you and I cannot be humans perfectly as

God intended. This brokenness affects our relationship with God, with creation, and with each other. We are selfishly oriented people and that is the great human dilemma. Without God, we are lost in our sin and selfishness.

This doctrine of good creation/fallen creation is important for a robust Christian worldview. In this light, we need to remember three things as we look at the world around us.

1. That creation is good.
2. Our world is a broken place.
3. Christ has given himself to redeem us and restore all things.

These three things give us a well-rounded view of the world rooted in the truth of the Gospel. They remind us that we can look at the beauty of the created world and marvel at its splendor, and praise God for it all; that we can be stirred by beautiful art because people reflect the image of the Creator; we can learn about the world through the insights of science.

They also remind us of the sobering truth of the human condition and the effects of sin. The evil we see around us is because of sin. Our world, as Cornelius Plantinga says: "Is not the way it is supposed to be."

Thankfully, these three reminders, that creation is good, that our world is a broken place, and that Christ has given himself to redeem us and restore all things, lead us to the hope we have in Christ. God the Son, in laying down his life for you and me as the perfect spotless sacrifice, paid the penalty for our sin. Moreover, in his resurrection, Jesus secured for us a hope and future. A future where all the effects of sin are undone.

Reflection:

From Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *"Creation and Fall/Temptation"*

The Fall of man in God's creation is both inconceivable and unalterably inexcusable, and therefore the "disobedience" does not exhaust the facts of the case. It is revolt, it is the creature's departure from the attitude which is the only possible attitude for him, it is the creature's becoming Creator, it is the destruction of creatureliness. It is defection, it is the fall from being held in creatureliness. This defection is a continual falling, a plunging into bottomless depths, a being relinquished, a withdrawal ever farther and deeper. And in all this it is not simply a moral lapse but the destruction of creation by the creature. The Fall affects the whole of the created world which is henceforth plundered of its creatureliness as it crashed blindly into infinite space, like a meteor which has torn away from its nucleus.

Scripture Readings:

Psalm 8 (Can you memorize it?)

Genesis 1:26-31

Genesis 3

Colossians 3:1-17

Psalm 139

Questions for Reflection:

When watching the news or reading the paper, do you see more evidence for a basic goodness or a basic evil in human nature? What about when you look at your daily experience?

Given that the Bible teaches that all of humanity was made in the Image of God, what are some examples you see in the people in your life that are reflections of the image of God?

Where are the places you see our world's brokenness most clearly? What does it look like for that place to be redeemed by God?

Which of the reminders is the easiest for you to believe and hold on to? Which is a struggle? Why is that? In what ways do you need the work of the Holy Spirit to soften your heart to turn toward the truth?