

Pictures Of Christ In Creation

The Lord willing, we begin, in this issue, to look at Christ " but we look at Him in an unusual way! I want for us to look at Christ not specifically from Scriptures. Of course, the best way to look at Christ is in the Scriptures. This is the clearest way to see Him. It is only from the Scriptures, by the working of the Holy Spirit, in faith, that we can know Christ, savingly.

Beginning in this issue, though, and in several subsequent issues, I want us to look at Christ in pictures! Not painted pictures, or sketches, or drawing, or photographs: but pictures that come to us in creation itself.

For us to do this, however, we need to have the Scriptures very close to us, in order to guide us. So let us look at the Scriptures, first, in order to see the ground of, and proof for, the reality of pictures of Christ in creation.

Some Scriptural Considerations Concerning Pictures of Christ in Creation

First, in Colossians 1:15-16 we read: For by Him [ie, Christ] were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by Him, and for Him: And He is before all things, and by Him all things consist. And He is the head of the body, the Church: Who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things He might have the pre-eminence.

Christ created all things, as the Word of God " without which Word "was not anything made that was made" we are told John 1:3.

Not only did Christ create all things, but they were created for Him. So that in all things Christ may have the pre-eminence: pre-eminence in all created things " all created things in heaven and earth; all created things, whether visible or invisible; all created things, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers; all created things were created by and for Christ that, in them, He might have the pre-eminence.

And part of this pre-eminence, at least, is declared by Christ, through the means of pictures of Him that exist within creation. Indeed, it would be surprising if this were not the case. After all, everything has been created by Christ, and for Him, specifically! Would we not, then, expect Christ to give pictures of Himself in this creation: so that the purpose of all of this " the glory of God in Christ gathering His Church " would be better facilitated.

We need all the help we can get. We are such weak and needy people. But Christ is gracious and loving to us: He has died upon the Cross for us; He has powerfully regenerated us, in time; He has given us His Word and Spirit, primarily, as a means to bring our salvation to completion. Also, Christ has given, for our help and understanding, the sacraments, and prayer. He has given us the fellowship of saints, and many other things " including pictures of Himself in creation.

Second, we read in Romans 1:19-20:

Because that which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God hath showed it unto them. For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse.

Now it is true that this text is talking about God with respect to His triune Being. But remember God created all things through His Son, the Word " Who is the pre-incarnate Christ. And so, in John 1:14 we read: "And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth."

Well, says Romans 1:19-20, the invisible things of the Son, the Word " ie, His eternal power and Godhead " these invisible things of God, and His Son, are seen by the visible things. They are known, or made manifest, by the visible things: by the things He created!

Third, this truth is reflected in the creeds, which faithfully summarise the Scriptures.

The Westminster Confession of Faith, 1:1, says: Although the light of nature, and the works of creation and providence, do so far manifest the goodness, wisdom and power of God, as to leave men inexcusable; yet they are not sufficient to give that knowledge of God, and His will, which is necessary unto salvation.

And, The Belgic Confession of Faith, art 2, under the heading, "By what means God is made known unto us," answers: We know Him by two means: First, by the creation, preservation and government of the universe, which is before our eyes as a most elegant book, wherein all creatures, great and small, are as so many characters [pictures? DH] leading us to contemplate the invisible things of God, namely His power and divinity, as the Apostle Paul saith, Rom 1:20. All which

things are sufficient to convince men, and leave them without excuse[emphasis added, DH].

Fourth, there are other Scriptures which show the validity and usefulness of pictures of Christ in creation. By good and necessary consequences, two of these can be found in Hebrews. Chapter 8:4-5 says:

For if He [Christ] were on earth, He should not be a priest, seeing that there are priests that offer gifts according to the law: Who serve unto the example and shadow of heavenly things, as Moses was admonished of God when He was about to make the tabernacle: for, See, saith he, that thou make all things according to the pattern showed to thee in the mount.

Chapter 9:23 adds: "It was therefore necessary that the patterns of things in the heavens should be purified with these; but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these.

Now it is true that these two texts refer to the tabernacle. And all the shadows and types of the tabernacle have passed away. Nevertheless, there is still a principle to be found here. And the principle is this: heavenly / Christ-centred things may be seen, by way of picture, in creaturely things.

John Owen makes some interesting comments with respect to these two verses. I will quote just a small part of his comment on chapter 9:23. Writes he:

This is the order of these things: The heavenly things themselves were designed, framed and disposed in the mind of God, in all their order, courses, beauty, efficacy, and tendency unto His own eternal glory. This was the whole mystery of the wisdom of God for the redemption and salvation of the Church by Jesus Christ. This is that which is declared in the gospel, being before hid in God from the foundation of the world, Eph 3: 8-10. Of these things did God grant a typical resemblance, similitude and pattern, in the tabernacle and its services. That He would make such a kind of resemblance of those heavenly things, as unto their kind, nature, and use, that He would instruct the Church by them, was an act of His mere sovereign will and pleasure. And this is that effect of His wisdom which was manifest under the Old Testament; whereon the faith and obedience of the Church were wholly to acquiesce in His sovereignty. And this their resemblance of heavenly things, which they had not from their own nature, but merely from the pleasure of God, gave them all their glory and worth; which the saints under the Old Testament did in some measure understand.[1]

Although at the direct command of God, according to His will and pleasure, there were, in the pattern of the tabernacle, creaturely pictures that represented heavenly, spiritual truths. To name but a few: the smoke of the incense picturing prayer; anointing the priests with oil, which oil was a picture the Holy Spirit; and, the table of shewbread and the golden candlestick picturing light and life in the Lord.[2] More than this, though, in this same pattern we see pictures of Christ, Himself: the lamb for sacrifice, and the shedding blood, most clearly point to our Saviour and His work.

But there is one more main text that I would like to consider which shows the validity and usefulness of pictures of Christ in creation: and this not as a direct command of God for a pattern, but it shows us how, in God's wisdom, He has placed pictures in creation for our knowledge and learning. In Genesis 1:14 we read: "And God said, Let there be lights in the firmament of the heaven to divide the day from the night; and let them be for signs, and for seasons, and for days, and years."

Among other things, the sun, and moon, and stars are to be for signs. But signs of what? Well, they are to be signs of many things. Let me suggest, for example, that falling stars are a sign, or picture to us, of the return of Christ.[3] And remember that special star which appeared, signifying the birth of Christ.[4]

But also, the sun is a sign of Christ Himself, and so are the stars. We will look at these more fully in a future issue, but let me just quote now Mal 4:2 "But unto you that fear My Name shall the Sun of righteousness [ie, Christ] arise with healing in his wings; and ye shall go forth, and grow up as calves of the stall." Christ the Son is the Sun of Righteousness. And what of Revelation 22:17 "Jesus have sent mine angel to testify unto you these things in the Churches. I am the root and the offspring of David, and the bright and morning star."

Here is what Rev Harbach says, in his commentary on Genesis 1:14:

All creatures reflect God's glory and tell us something of the heavenly kingdom. Our Confession makes this clear: "We know Him by two means: first by the creation, preservation and government of the universe; which is before our eyes as so many characters leading us to contemplate the invisible things of God, namely His power and divinity, as the Apostle Paul saith, Rom 1:20" (Belgic Conf, II). Romans 1:20 reads, "For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead." Beautifully expressed here is the thought that all creatures in the universe, great and small, whether telescopical or microscopical, are so many characters, signs, letters, or words which lead us to contemplate God! The whole universe is God-environed and God-oriented. The things of God are understood by the things that are made. Study such a great object as the sun, or consider the infinitesimal creatures in a drop of water: each one of these creatures is the embodiment of divine thought. A flower is a word of God. The moon is another word of God. Every creature in the universe as to its

being and essence is a symbol of something heavenly and spiritual. The creature is a signature of God. For the word "signs" (othoth) means an engraving, a mark, an instruction. God could not create or make a creature without it expressing a divine thought. For God cannot make a mute word; He cannot make a "brute fact"; He cannot make a mere abstraction. A vacuous, meaningless creature is unthinkable and impossible. For all things were made by the Logos, the Word, the divine Thought of the Triune God, and without Him was not anything made which has been made. All things were made by Him, and all declare the glory of God. They are all expressions which sing His praise. "Let the field be joyful, and all that is therein; then shall all the trees of the wood be joyful. Let the heavens rejoice, and let the earth be glad; let the sea roar, and fulness thereof" (Ps 96:12, 11).[5]

Keeping these things in mind, next time, the Lord willing, we will begin to look at some pictures of Christ in creation.

Rev. David Higgs

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FOOTNOTES

[1] John Owen, An Exposition of the Epistle to the Hebrews, Vol 6, (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1980) p 371.

[2] Cf Alfred Edersheim, Old Testament Bible History, (Grand Rapids: William B Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1980), Vol 2, pp 123-125.

[3] Matthew 24:29 "Immediately after the tribulation of those days shall the sun be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken."

[4] Cf, eg, Matthew 2:2, 7, 9, 10.

[5] Robert C Harbach, Studies in the Book of Genesis, (Grand Rapids: Published by a committee of members of Grandville Protestant Reformed Church, 1986), pp 27-28.

In the last issue of Evangelical Presbyterian I wrote the first article of a series on "Pictures of Christ in Creation." In that article we saw something of the warrant, in the Scriptures themselves, for recognising and learning from pictures of Christ in creation. Also we saw how the Reformed creeds "specifically The Westminster and Belgic Confessions of Faith" recognise the truths that there are pictures of Christ in creation, and that we may learn from them.

And, while these things are true, there are two other very important principles that we must remember about all of this. First, while we may learn things about God and His Christ in creation, we can learn nothing savingly! There are truths about Christ in creation, but these truths will not save us: only revealed truth in the Scriptures, as worked and applied by the Spirit of Christ, will save. And The second, when we see pictures of Christ in creation "as we do and will" we must have the Scriptures very close to us, in order to help us to understand what we see. With these principles in mind and practise, however, there is much benefit to the child of God in seeing something of Christ in the book of creation.

With these things in view, let us look at some pictures of Christ, in creation, by considering, first, those pictures of Christ that are human. Now, by this I do not mean to look at types of Christ in the Old Testament "although these are pictures too. Some of these Old Testament types, are, for example: Adam "a type picturing Christ, the Covenant Head of His people; Moses "a type picturing Christ, the Mediator; Aaron "of Christ the great High Priest; Melchizedek "both of Christ being Priest and King; David "of Christ being a King Who subdues and defeats our sins, and, Solomon "of Christ being the King of peace.

These individual types of Christ are wonderful pictures of Him, that powerfully reveal much to us of our Saviour. Rather than the Old Testament types, however, I want us to begin by considering human pictures of Christ that we can still see, living, today.

For convenience, we may recognise two subsections of human pictures of Christ. First, there are, in creation, pictures of Christ that involve human relationships. And second, there are pictures of Christ that involve several offices, or occupations, in which humans are involved. Now, this is a somewhat arbitrary division, but hopefully it will help us to remember these wonderful pictures of Himself that Christ has provided.

Let us begin, then, by considering pictures of Christ that involve human relationships.

And the first of these is that of a husband.

The Scriptures teach that Christ is a Husband to His Wife, the church. This is one of the most vivid and important pictures of Christ in creation: He is a Husband! The truth of this is taught throughout the Scriptures. You may be aware that the whole of The Song of Solomon is an extended metaphor about Solomon and his wife, Shulamith. This is a picture, for us, of Christ being the Husband of His church. Christ is our Husband.

But this truth is found in many other places in the Word. For example, in Isaiah 54:5 we read: For thy Maker is thine husband; the LORD of hosts is his name; and thy Redeemer the Holy One of Israel; The God of the whole earth shall he be called.

And, Jeremiah 31:31-32 says: Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah: Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt; which my covenant they brake, although I was an husband unto them, saith the LORD.

Further, in II Corinthians 11:2, God speaks to the saints at Corinth in these words: For I am jealous over you with godly jealousy: for I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ [emphases added in these three texts, DH].

Scriptures teaching this truth could be multiplied.

Well, people of God, this is the picture to us "Christ is our Husband!" but what does this mean? Let us look at this carefully, and discover, or, be reminded, of some wonderful truths concerning our Christ.

In the first place we must understand that all human husbands are but weak, imperfect, shadowy, incomplete and failing pictures of Christ. The very best human husband that you can possibly imagine is a sinner. We are all sinners, are we husbands.

And while this is true, and must never be forgotten, in the second place we are to know that insofar as we obey God in our duties and responsibilities as husbands, then we are pictures of Christ. Covenant children, young people, single adults, when you see a godly husband, treating his wife in a godly way, think of Christ! Children, when you see your father treat your mother according to loving Scriptural principles, then think of Christ! Wives, when your husbands care for you as Jesus cares for His church, then think of Him. And think just how much more perfect is our heavenly Husband's care of us. And think, further, how much more complete, and wonderful, and unselfish, and gracious, and everlasting His care is!

But, in the third place, let us be even more specific "just what is it in godly, earthly husbands that should cause us to ponder the same qualities in Christ, our Husband?"

First, husbands! we are to love our wives. Colossians 3:19 says: "Husbands, love your wives, and be not bitter against them." The sort of love described in this text is that which will not allow bitterness to creep in. We husbands are not to worry over, and inevitably get bitter because of, the toothpaste tube that is squeezed in the middle instead of the end. And the point is this: if our love for our wives is strong enough to be able to die for them, then we won't worry about a toothpaste tube, or anything else that is not sin in our wives. This love, then, is a deep love that is sweet, and edifying, and pleasant, and consistent. Christ, as our Husband, loved us so much that He did die for us! Ephesians 5:25 declares: "Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it."

And so it is, husbands, that in love, we are to nourish our wives, and we are to cherish them: this is what Ephesians 5:28-29 teaches: So ought men to love their wives as their own bodies. He that loveth his wife loveth himself. For no man ever yet hated his own flesh; but nourisheth and cherisheth it, even as the Lord the church.

To nourish our wives means that we nurture them with tenderness and concern. We help them, gently, to become stronger and more vigorous "in all spiritual and emotional ways. We protect them, and help them, and regard them with deep affection, in love!

To cherish our wives means, literally, that we husbands keep them warm. With tender love we foster all that is good within them. With gentle concern we hold them to ourselves, embracing all that is good and wholesome about them.

This is a deep, deep, special sort of love, then, that husbands are to have for wives. And it is out of this deep and special love that flow a number of other things we husbands should cultivate.

Now, remember, we are considering the question: just what is it in earthly husbands that should cause us to ponder the same qualities in Christ, our heavenly Husband? The first of these is the deep and special love that godly husbands have for their wives: when we see this love in godly husbands we should think of the even more special and infinitely deeper love that Christ, as our Husband, has for us, His church, as He nourishes and cherishes us.

Secondly, in answering this question, and flowing out of this deep and special love, we husbands are to sanctify our wives: this is closely connected with nourishing and cherishing them. Ephesians 5:25-26 says: Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it; That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish [emphasis added, DH].

We husbands are to love our wives even as Christ also loved the church. With the same sort of deep and special love that would enable us even to die for our wives. Christ's love was so great that He did die for us, His church. And the specific reason He died for us is that He might sanctify and cleanse us. But the implication is that our love as earthly

husbands ought to be of the same ilk: it should desire, and work towards, the sanctification of our wives.

But how? How can we husbands sanctify our wives? This is, I believe, a legitimate and proper expression: husbands! sanctify your wives. The expression, as such, is not found in the Scriptures, but the strong implication is here in this text. And, in Job 1:4-5, we read this interesting account of the Patriarch and his children: And his sons went and feasted in their houses, every one his day; and sent and called for their three sisters to eat and to drink with them. And it was so, when the days of their feasting were gone about, that Job sent and sanctified them, and rose up early in the morning, and offered burnt offerings according to the number of them all: for Job said, It may be that my sons have sinned, and cursed God in their hearts. Thus did Job continually [emphasis added, DH].

I remember, a number of years ago, preaching this text as a baptism sermon, and exhorting the parents to sanctify their children. But how can we, mere humans, sanctify anyone?

We canâ€™t! Only God can sanctify anyone: child or wife. But, God uses means. One of the means He uses to sanctify covenant children is their godly parents. One of the means He uses to sanctify wives is godly husbands. This is what it means to sanctify our children. This is what it means to sanctify our wives, husbands. God uses us.

But still the question comes: how?

Husbands, we are to sanctify our wives by praying with them, and for them: lovingly, gently, consistently, instructively, and relevantly; but not preachingly, or in a badgering, boorish, bitter way.

We are to sanctify our wives by sensitively instructing them. And we must be able to do this. I Corinthians 14:34-35 says: Let your women keep silence in the churches: for it is not permitted unto them to speak; but they are commanded to be under obedience, as also saith the law. And if they will learn any thing, let them ask their husbands at home [emphasis added, DH].

We are to sanctify our wives, also, by being good examples to them. And helping them in every way in which they need help. And by regularly taking them to the public ordinances. And regularly providing the means of grace: in the setting of the whole family; and in private, with you and your wife alone. And in standing by her side through thick and thin, while never going against the principles of the Word.

In these ways, and more, we are to sanctify our wives. And when we see godly husbands living with their wives in this manner, let us think of Christ and how He died that He might sanctify us: and that due to His death we are sanctified; this more and more every day, definitely, effectively, and, when we meet Him face to face, perfectly.

Thirdly, there is even more, for, in love, we husbands are to call our wives blessed, not only, but to treat them as such, and we are to praise them. Proverb 31:28 teaches us this. We read there: â€œHer [i.e., the virtuous / godly woman, DH] children arise up, and call her blessed; her husband also, and he praiseth her.â€• â€œBlessed are you, my darling, because you are such a wonderful help, so eminently suitable for meâ€• â€œ do godly husbands remind their godly wives, by such (if not these exact) words, and actions. â€œBlessed are you for the graces Christ has put within your heart. Blessed for the godly way in which you train and nurture our children. I praise you for all of this, to your face, and before others.

â€œI praise you for the beauty of your heart. And for this same beauty that shines through, radiantly, to make you lovely in outward appearance. And for your love, and concern, and selfless giving. And for making me a whole person, and manly, and extraordinarily loved.â€•

In these ways, and many others, godly husbands, in love, praise their godly wives.

Just one last point â€œ having just touched on a very few of the qualities that we should see in godly husbands. Husbands! we must also honour our wives. The Holy Spirit tells us, in I Peter 3:7, Likewise, ye husbands, dwell with them according to knowledge, giving honour unto the wife, as unto the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life; that your prayers be not hindered [emphasis added, DH].

We must honour our wives. Dear believer reading this article â€œ especially believing husbands â€œ contemplate carefully this truth of Godâ€™s Word. I know some husbands who are so concerned with their authority, as the heads of their wives, that they are nothing more than tyrants. They continually harp about their authority. And they squash love! And they annihilate honour. Christ is never like this, but, in tender love, He honours us.

And the first thing to note about this, husbands, is that we cannot honour our wives unless we dwell with them according to knowledge. Husbands! spend time with your wives in loving fellowship. Talk with her â€œ about anything and everything. Now this is not easy for us men, is it? We do not find it nearly as easy to talk, as do our wives: but how can we better know our wives?

Talk with your wife, not only, but enjoy your wifeâ€™s company. And enjoy her delights, and interests, and sense of humour,

and foibles, and idiosyncrasies, and graces, and appearance, and smell, and affection, and everything about her!

And when you do get to know her, and appreciate her for all that she is, then you will not be able to do anything else but honour her! You will honour her before her face, and privately. You will honour her before your children. And, you will honour her in all public situations.

We have barely scratched the surface as to the qualities and responsibilities of a godly husband: but, as we could well write a whole series of articles on this subject alone, I am going to finish this one with a number of questions which lead to the concluding “and, I hope, instructive and unforgettable” point.

Husbands! do you, in some respects at least “in principle, if not perfectly” live with your wives in these ways? Children! do you see your fathers attempting to live with your mothers, in these godly ways? Young people! “and those of you not so young, but unmarried” do you see in the husbands of our church something of what the Scriptures require of us?

If your answer is “Yes,” then you have, in these husbands, a picture of Christ. For our Husband, Christ, treats us in all of these ways, perfectly and completely.

I want to encourage you: when you see husbands treating their wives in godly ways, think of Christ. Think of His perfect love for us. Think of His union with us: such a union that He dwells with us according to perfect knowledge. And, because of this, be reminded of the glorious fellowship He has with us; and the immense honour He bestows upon us. When you see godly husbands in the church, think also of how Christ teaches us; and sanctifies us; and of His perfect knowledge of us, and of our needs, and wants. See in godly husbands some small, imperfect, yet recognisable picture of our perfect Husband, Christ.

Rev. David Higgs
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