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OUR CREATION AS GOD'S MASTERPIECE

(Lord's Day 3, Question 6)

Psalter 272:1, 2, 3

Scripture: Genesis 1:26-31; 2:15-25

Psalter 14:1, 3-7

Psalter 383:1, 2, 3, 5

Psalter 417

Dear congregation:

We ask your attention for Lord's Day 3, Question 6 of our Heidelberg Catechism:

Question 6: Did God then create man so wicked and perverse?

Answer: By no means; but God created man good, and after His own image, in true righteousness and holiness, that he might rightly know God his Creator, heartily love Him and live with Him in eternal happiness to glorify and praise Him.

With God's help we want to consider with you:

Our Creation as God's Masterpiece

1. We Were Created Good
2. We Were Created After God's Image
3. We Were Created to be God-Centered

I repeat: Our Creation as God's Masterpiece: We Were Created Good, Created After God's Image, Created to be God-Centered.

Dear congregation, we have been considering on several occasions the sad and tragic reality that we are law-breakers, that through the law the Holy Spirit will teach us our misery. We have seen in the previous sermon that that misery is so bad that our entire direction of life is always prone or bent towards hating God and hating our neighbor. It may well be that once we

have considered these solemn, tragic truths, that we will think to ourselves, "Now surely our instructor is ready to bring in the gospel. After Lord's Day 2 with its thorough deprecation of our human nature, the time is ripe for the gospel." But that is not the case. Our instructor wants to take us deeper. He wants to show us the root, the origin, and the cause of our misery. He will explain why our hearts are bent toward backsliding and toward hating God and our neighbor. He wants to take us back to Paradise to show us the origin, the broad extent, and the thoroughness of our sin and our misery. Only when we are led back to Paradise experientially will we truly learn to accept what we have become, what we are by nature, but also that it is all our own fault and guilt, because we were not created as God- and man-haters.

Our instructor anticipates the question of the soul that is struggling under conviction to find some way of self-defense or some way of escape. "But did God then create man so wicked and perverse?" If our deceitful hearts can convince ourselves that we were created corrupt, prone to sin, and to hate God and our neighbor, we can then excuse our sins by saying, "Lord, Thou hast made me thus." Thus it is very important that this question which brings us face to face with how we were created is surfaced here so that we don't find a loophole of escape, don't find a reason to charge God with our depravity. "Did God *then* create man so wicked and perverse?"

Our instructor gives a concise, remarkable answer, in which he powerfully shows us that there is a great contrast between how God created us and how we are. He contrasts our exalted position with how deeply we have fallen. This contrast means, even though he doesn't say it yet so fully as he will in the next questions, that we are fully responsible and accountable for all our sin because we were created sinless. Our misery, congregation, our sinful misery, lies only upon us. God, he says, *by no means* created us prone to hate God and to hate our neighbor, but God created us good. We did not make our nature. God made our nature, and God made our nature good. He says it simply: *good*. There is nothing in the making of our nature that was inclined to sin or prone to evil. We have done all our own sinning from beginning to end. We were created good in body; we were created good in soul. There was nothing lacking, nothing wrong, nothing evil in our heart. Elihu says, "Far be it from God

that He should do wickedness and from the Almighty that He should commit iniquity." The psalmist says, "Jehovah is righteous in all His ways and gracious in all His works." God Himself says, "And God saw everything that He had made, and behold, it was very good." God Himself, holy and spotless — that God who saw evil from afar and who charges the holy angels with folly in His sight — that God looked upon you and me in our covenant head, Adam, and *He* saw no evil. "Lo, this only have I found," said Solomon, "that God hath made man upright, but they have sought out many inventions." God says as it were, "All My creation is very good" — the creation of the first day when the earth appeared as an unformed mass and light came into being; the creation of the second day, the broad expanse of the atmosphere; the third day, the dry land appearing and the decking it with flowers and grass, shrubs and trees; the fourth day, the sun shining in the heavens, the moon and stars to be guardians of the night; the fifth day, the fish in the waters, the birds in the air; the sixth day, the animals of all sorts; and finally, to complete all of this beautiful, harmonious creation, God comes with His masterpiece. He says within His own triune Being, "Let Us have a consultation, let Us make man in Our image." God set the stage, so to speak. God made creation as a beautiful palace with all its belongings and all its helpers, but it was still missing its leading inhabitants. It was still missing God's masterpiece, the crown of His creation. God held a holy counsel, "Let Us make man after Our likeness."

God made us, congregation, as He made nothing else in all His creation. He made us higher than He made any of the animals. When it came to the animals, He just spoke a word and they were created, but when it came to us He held counsel as Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. When He made the animals, He made them in a moment, and they were; but when He made man, He formed us as a piece of skilled workmanship from the dust of the ground to be the crown of His creation. When He made animals, He gave them a body in a moment, and they existed. But when He made man, He not only formed his body carefully, as a skilled craftsman; He also breathed into our nostrils the breath of life, and we became a living soul. He made us to be thinking, spiritual creatures with mind and soul. He not only gave us a body, but also an immortal soul. And then to man He joined woman, and again He carved woman so to speak, carefully forming her out of the rib of man to complement the man, so

that He could set man and woman, with body and soul, as king and queen over His earthly kingdom in the midst of the palace of the Paradise garden. Thus Adam and Eve came out of His hand and were placed in the midst of this entirely prepared creation which was filled with harmony and glory and beauty, the whole of creation praising and glorifying God. Oh congregation, what must it have been for Adam and Eve to be set in the midst of this garden, fully conscious of its beauty, of its glory and of its holy, majestic Creator! When they were formed thus by God's hand with full consciousness of mind and soul, and as they walked in the midst of this beautiful Paradise, surrounded with beauty, harmony, glory, no death and no infirmity, seeing the fullness of the majesty of creation and the glory of their Creator, how could they help but cry out, "Oh God, how great Thou art"?

Thus it shall be, congregation, when poor, fallen sinners who are recreated after the image of Christ, shall enter the glorious and beautiful Paradise of everlasting bliss, saved by free and sovereign grace, to magnify a glorious, triune God. Oh, when they are placed in the Paradise of heaven, in the full consciousness of the beauty and glory of their God and Savior, shall they not cry out, "Oh God, how great Thou art"? But between that earthly Paradise and that heavenly Paradise lay our sin, our fall, our spoiling of God's beautiful creation.

What a tragedy that sin with all its bitterness and abhorrent consequences tarnished this glorious, beautiful harmony! My dear flock, it is sin that has destroyed everything. It is sin that divides. It is sin that pains. It is sin that is the root cause of all sickness and death and sorrow, division and strife. Sin, your and my sin is the cause of all these things. That has to become a bitter reality for me and for you. The glory of our creation has to magnify the bitterness of our sin. We came out of God's hand pure and spotless, never prone to hate God or our neighbor. But now we are filled with sin. We are always prone to go the wrong way, always prone to defend ourselves, always prone to set God down and to set up ourselves.

We have destroyed God's image, and that image was a very important part of our creation, for God created us not only good, says our instructor, but after His own image. We know from Ephesians 4:24 and Colossians 3:10 that that image consists of knowledge, of righteousness, and of holiness. Thus we were God's office-bearers in creation. We were prophets who had

right knowledge — right knowledge of God, right knowledge of ourselves, right knowledge of our creation. We read to you that Adam even named the animals rightly. He could feel their real essence. He had a right knowledge of everything. He had right wisdom, he had a right love, a right joy, a right delight in the things of God. He was a prophet in the midst of creation, created after the image of God's knowledge. But he was also a priest, created after the image of God's righteousness. He lived rightly. He had no hypocrisy, no corruption. His will, affections, and entire being were focussed rightly upon God. Adam and Eve lived God-centeredly. Everything they did, everything they said, the deepest thoughts they had glorified God. They lived as priests of righteousness. But also they lived as king and queen of holiness. They were created not only after God's image in righteousness and knowledge but also holiness. Their whole being was lived unto God. Their whole life was sacred. They lived to walk with God in the garden in the cool of the day. Their affections, their will, their desires — all was holy. Oh what a blessing, congregation! All was perfectly holy. They worshipped God in spirit and in truth, with purity of heart. They had no troubles with lukewarmness, no troubles with ups and downs in their spiritual pilgrimage. With constancy they lived holily in the sight of God. They lived in immediate communion with the Lord. They lived in covenant with God. God came down and they voluntarily and willingly entered into covenant with Him, in which it was required that they could not eat of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, but of all the other trees of the Garden they could freely eat. The implied promise was that they would receive eternal life upon continued obedience, but death would certainly follow disobedience. Thus Adam and Eve were created perfectly good and holy, after God's image in knowledge, righteousness, and holiness.

It can well be that this wonderful, glorious creation, called the state of rectitude, can cause many questions to arise in our hearts. Many times the question arises, "If God who is perfectly good created us perfectly good, where did evil come from? If evil came somehow from God, is not God the author of sin?" What does the Bible mean when it says, "I make peace and I create evil"? Or again, "Shall there be evil in the city and I have not done it?" Is there not some way, if we were created perfectly good, that God must be charged with evil? How can it be that we did evil when we were created perfectly good?

Congregation, we will never understand this mystery altogether and we may only probe this mystery as far as God's Word allows us to probe. What does God's Word say about it? God's Word says this: First of all, no evil can ever be associated with God in the sense of sin. In the Bible, however, our English word "evil," especially in the Hebrew language, has two words which are both translated "evil." One word means *an unpleasant state due to our circumstances*. Thus, that is evil as the result of sin or the consequences of sin. The other word for evil refers to sin itself, sin in its corrupt nature, sin in its own sinfulness. You have to keep these two words separate when you think of God, because in the Bible the consequences of sin are called evil and sin itself is also called evil. When God says, "Is there evil in a city and I have not done it?," God does not mean to say that He has done the sin in the city, but He has directed the consequences of sin in a city, to punish the city. He sends hunger into a city, He sends a sword into a city, He sends trials into our families or into our own lives. So is there not evil done in a city, in a family, in our own lives, and the Lord has not done it? Calvin says of this text, if you are to understand it rightly, you have to substitute the word "calamity" for evil. "Is there calamity in a city, are there consequences of sin in a city, and I have not done it?" God's Word never says that God does evil in the sense of sin itself. Rather, we read in Matthew 7:18, "A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit." All evil is *our* fault. There is nothing evil in the sense of sin that could ever have any connection with God's doing.

"Yes," you say, "but that still doesn't answer my deepest question: If we were created good, how could we do evil in the sense of sin?" Then we must answer, congregation, that God desired the crown of His creation to serve Him voluntarily. He put man on a higher level than the beasts of the field who habitually serve Him. But man was placed on a higher level, was given a free will in Paradise. Now our will is bound, bound to sin, but in Paradise we had a free will. God laid a choice before us: either the tree of knowledge of good and evil, you shall die, or do not eat of it and you shall live. He left open the possibility that we, against our own nature and against the way He had created us, would not glorify Him, but we chose to destroy ourselves. We know, of course, that all of this in a mysterious and solemn way lies hidden in God's decree from all eternity, and we know

that God will use even the fall and sin to His glory, especially to the glory of His justice. But that does not mean and it cannot mean that any sin was ever connected with God. Rather, we, the crown of His creation, went against the very proneness of our nature, of our creation, and fell deeply, as we hope to hear the Lord willing from the next question. God took special pains to create us as He wanted to create us, after His own image and His own likeness, in righteousness. We had no tendency to sin, but we went against our natures and against God and against creation, against everything we saw roundabout us, and we chose to sin. Still today, until our last breath we are bearing the awful consequences of our sin, for when we sinned in Paradise we not only took guilt upon our consciences, but we fell. We actually died spiritually and our whole nature reversed itself so that before we sinned we were, as one of the forefathers said, living at the top of our nature, living in perfection, glorifying God purely, but we fell to the bottom of our nature, a nature which we have made evil, so that now we are born after the image of Adam. Hence we are prone to hate God, prone to hate our neighbor, prone to evil, prone to go directly contrary to the purpose of our creation. The purpose of our creation was that we might rightly know God our Creator, heartily love Him and live with Him in eternal happiness, to glorify and to praise Him. In one word, we were created not only good and after God's image, but we were created to be totally God-centered, and in our fall we reversed this purpose — we turned everything inside out. Now we are self-centered. We will see more of that in our third thought, after we sing from Psalter 383, stanzas 1, 2, 3, and 5.

God created us after His image and His likeness. We must not understand that word "likeness" to mean that we were to be God, but God created on the creaturely level a masterpiece, a crown of His creation to reflect Him and to reflect on earth in a creaturely way His nature, His holiness, His righteousness, His knowledge. Let me say it as plainly as I can: We were not to *be* God, but we were to *reflect* God. We were not to be creatively constructive, but to be reconstructive, to do what God said, to reflect God in everything. We were created thus to think God's thoughts after Him. We had a body but we were to be spiritual in our bodies and our whole physical makeup, together with our soul, was to reflect the spiritual character of God. Thus God wants in a creaturely way to be able to reflect on earth His own nature. He put man in charge of the whole of Paradise and gave

him labor to work and to dress the garden and to keep it. Everything of our creation was designed that we would be wholly God-centered, not only centered with our affections and our emotions and our will upon God, but we ourselves were to reflect God-centeredness in the midst of creation as the masterpiece, crown, and glory of creation. Thus God took such pains to form every part of our being, to be capable of glorifying Him with our eyes, with our hands, with our feet, with our hearts, with our mind, and with the totality of our being.

We have to consider, congregation, what we know today about the human body — how complex, how detailed God worked when He created us. Even the outward parts of our body are marvellously formed. I'll mention just a few things: Did you know, for example, that four weeks after conception an unborn baby is already ten thousand times larger than it was at conception? Did you know that at four weeks after conception a baby's eyes, ears, mouth, brains, kidneys, and liver are beginning to form? Fingers are forming. Six weeks after conception the brain of an unborn child is already sending impulses out to the other organs. The heart is already beating fast; the stomach, the liver, the kidneys are all functioning well in a normal unborn child six weeks after conception. Then consider not only the terror of abortion in this regard, but consider the heinousness of every sin and what damage we do when we consider what we are after we are born. Consider only that our human body begins as two little cells, cells which split, divide, and multiply until they become a mature human being which is made up of one hundred trillion cells. And every one of those cells is a calling to center upon our Creator. It would take one thousand six-hundred-page books to detail what the first two cells have contained within them. Like an acorn has contained within it a whole oak, so those two cells contain within them the determining already of a person's skin and hair color and much of his personality and character. It is phenomenal, congregation. Isaac Newton said, "If one only knew what his thumb contained, he could not not believe in a Creator." Just your thumb! Did you know that your skin is so sensitive that it can tell the difference between a smooth piece of glass and one that has one/two thousand five-hundredths of an inch difference? That's how sensitive God made the end of your finger, purposely to warn you of danger. That way you can feel pain which helps

protect your body. In all these ways and many more, God has made us in a wonderful manner. Think of our eyes. At the back of our eyes there are one hundred and seven million cells — just at the back of our eyes! Seven million are used to detect thousands of shades of colors, and a hundred million are rods which operate in low light and help us see shades of black, white, and gray.

Why am I saying these things to you? To impress upon you that God made us to serve Him and He fashioned us. Your mind is far more complex than the largest computer that has ever been constructed to this very day! God made you and me with our mind, with our fingers, with our eyes, with all these millions, billions, and trillions of parts that belong to us, to serve Him, to heartily know Him and love Him and live with Him in eternal happiness, to glorify and praise Him. That, my dear friend, is the tragedy of sin, for we have taken this glorious, valuable masterpiece of God's creation and cast it into the dust. I say "valuable masterpiece" because we are all valuable, since we have, above all, a never-dying soul. Yes, we are priceless, congregation. Total depravity doesn't mean that we are not valuable. If a soul is lost in hell forever, it is a tragic loss that cannot be measured in an infinite number of dollars. We are worth more, every single person sitting here, than all the money in the world. Not a trillion or ten trillion dollars can buy the value of your soul, my friend! What a tragedy it is when we then take our valuable soul and our complex bodies and transgress the very purpose for which they were made; when we take those one hundred seven million cells with our eyes and use them to sin; when we take the hundred trillion cells in our body, follow the pathway of unrighteousness and defy our glorious Maker and Creator! Sin is a travesty against the Most High God! Sin is treason against our glorious Creator. Sin is awful. Sin is destructive.

Oh my dear flock, our deceitful, wicked, corrupt hearts are beyond words. If we see ourselves rightly as the masterpiece of God's creation in Paradise, it is an eternal wonder that God ever allowed man, Adam and Eve, to take one step out of Paradise, and an eternal wonder today that He allows dust (for that's what we are made of, to humble us) to walk upon the dust of this earth! We do not deserve to live, congregation. Then we do not have to look at our neighbor. I have to look at

myself as your pastor, especially for the guilt that lays upon me. Then I have to say, "Oh God, what a wonder that we may not only bring the Word but that we may live among the people Thou hath entrusted to us." But then it must also be a wonder for all of us, congregation, that we are alive — also for the holiest of God's people. We have all sinned thousands upon thousands of times! What a tragedy it is that we have not only offended man! If we see how we were created, then we will cry from the depths of our heart, "Against Thee, Thee only, have I sinned and done evil in Thy sight, that Thou mightest be justified when Thou judgest and be clear when Thou speakest."

When the angels sinned, God gave no way of redemption. God offered them no savior. And the greatest of all miracles, congregation, is that God offers a Savior to such creatures, made so gloriously and fallen so deeply. He offers a Savior to save them from their sin, to restore them to His image, to make them prophets, priests, and kings again after the similitude of Christ, and to bring them unto glory, where they will have palm branches in their hand to be made kings and priests unto the Most High God. It is unfathomable: the love of God in giving His own Son and reckoning His Son as the guilty One though He were perfectly innocent, charging Him even unto death so that lost, corrupt sinners who have transgressed His glorious creation might live, so that Barabbases might be freed from the cross. The staggering thing is that God has paid the full price, knowing the deceitfulness, the corruption of our hearts, knowing that nothing could depend upon us. He has done everything Himself. He has finished the full price to bring in a recreation, to restore man to know God, to heartily love Him, and to live with Him in eternal happiness, to glorify and praise Him. He has done that all through the price of His only-begotten Son, and He comes now to us rebellious sinners and says, "Come and buy without money and without price."

Do you not see that the gospel is magnified in its glory by the very glory of our creation and the depth of our fall? Its amazing, staggering freeness, simplicity, glory, beauty, and harmony are all extolled by Jesus Christ and by the Father who gives Jesus Christ and by the Spirit who troubles Himself to make room for Jesus Christ in that corrupt soul which has tarnished every part of the body in which the soul is housed, from the top of the head to the sole of the foot. Oh the wonder of creation makes

the wonder of recreation, regeneration, all the greater! You and I will never realize the glory of recreation, the wonder of salvation until we have been brought back to Paradise to see there the wonder of our original creation and the tragedy of our profound fall. To be self-centered, congregation, as a creature of God — that God who can cut the thin thread of our lives at any moment — is to miss the entire purpose for which we are here on earth. Self-centeredness makes us ripe for immediate and profound damnation. Therefore Jesus says to me and to you, "Ye must be born again."

Therefore, what need we have, my dear flock, to bow in the dust before God, and to say: "Lord, I have not used my complex fingers and hands, my complex eyes, my complex soul, in a way well-pleasing unto Thee. I am a transgressor with putrifying sores throughout my entire being. But oh God, I bow before Thee as one who cannot regenerate myself. I cannot recreate myself; I bow before Thee, corrupt, knowing with my mind that as glorious as my creation was, my recreation is even a more stupendous wonder. But oh God, I have heard in Thy Word that Thou doth love to glorify Thy Name through recreation! Wilt Thou not go against my natural will and against my depravity and against my proneness to hate God and my neighbor to recreate me and to glorify Thy Name? Oh, that I may turn from my self-centered way and turn to glorify Thee, that I may again rightly know Thee and love Thee and praise Thy holy Name!"

Dear congregation, do you feel the need to be recreated? Does your sin trouble you? Does it bother you that you have missed the purpose of our creation? Do you need the almighty power of God to recreate? And children of God, do you need the almighty power of God to *keep* you recreated? What a tragedy it is also in the lives of God's people, that they are prone to backslide, prone to slip back to that fallen nature, prone to go the wrong way! Oh God, recreate us, keep us recreated, renew us, renew a right spirit within us, restore unto us — that must be our prayer, dear children of God — the joy of Thy salvation. Make us more God-centered. Make us to be more done with ourselves. Make us more to live unto Thee. Save us from our miserable, miserable tendencies to dethrone Thee and enthrone ourselves, make us bow in the dust and crown Thee "Lord of all." Blessed are they who may bow in the dust at Calvary and bow in the dust before the right hand of the Father, and may rely

upon the power of God in Christ to work within them what they cannot work in themselves. The best times in our life, congregation, are those times when we are nothing and God in Christ is everything. May God grant that also unto you in this life and to me, but above all, grant us such times to prepare us for that great eternity, when for His people this will be a perpetual reality, a reality always in exercise. For there God shall always be their center, their focus, and their all-and-in-all. There they shall be glad that it is so, glad to be done with their old-man nature, glad to leave their sin-clothes behind in the empty sepulcher, and above all, glad that God is the centerpiece of heaven and that their whole being may just praise Him, rightly know Him, love Him, and glorify Him forever and ever. Amen.

Psalter 417:All stanzas