

# **The Daily Renewing of the Christian in the Image of God**

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

Beloved brothers and sisters in Christ Jesus!

When God saw everything He had made, all was very good according to the testimony of Scripture, but the most glorious of all His visible works was man. True, God created all creatures out of love and impressed upon them clear traces of His goodness. But it pleased God to bestow all fullness and all wealth of His love and goodness upon man above all others. Therefore when God wanted to create light and the firmament of heaven with its ornaments, He only said, "Let there be!" and they were. And when God wanted to create the plants and animals of the earth, He only called out, "Let the waters move, let the earth bring forth!" and so they sprang up. But when He finally decided to call man into existence, the heavenly Father specially consulted with His eternal Son and with the Holy Spirit concerning the greatness and glory of this work which was to transcend all earlier creation, and said: "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness." And then, Moses testified, "God created man in His own image, in the image of God created He him."

Beloved, in these words we are shown first the inexpressibly glorious state in which man once was when he went forth from the hand of the Triune God. Oh, what a state that must have been when man still bore the image of the great, glorious God in himself! Human reason could never disclose to us wherein this image of God in man consisted, had not God Himself revealed it to us in His holy Word. Even the unbelievers of our day eagerly accept the teaching that man is a divine race and created in God's image. They say that this high nobility consists in those traits wherein man is above the other visible creatures even now. God's image, they say, still shines now in the spiritual essence of our soul, in the light of our reason, in the freedom of our will, and in the upright stance of our body which points toward heaven. But all these things are but shadows of our former glory, like footprints remaining in the sand after the foot itself has hurried away.

According to God's Word, the image of God consisted in things which no man any longer brings into the world. It was a reflection of divine glory. Man's reason was filled and saturated with a pure light, in which man perceived clearly and without error his Creator and His will, the essence of all creatures and of himself. Man could grow in wisdom without any wearisome research and without any instruction, like the child Jesus, and this was the image of divine wisdom. God's holiness and justice were mirrored in man's will; God's goodness, forbearance, and patience in man's disposition; God's love and mercy in man's inclinations and desires; God's truth, kindness, gentleness, and friendliness in his conduct. There was nothing in man which would have resisted the good. Neither in soul nor in body was there any evil incitement, any sinful lust or desire. That glorious knowledge in man's reason, and this pure righteousness in his will were the chief elements of the divine image. However, many other glorious things were part of this image. God is almighty, the Lord of heaven and earth. This was portrayed in man's exercise of a perfect

dominion over all visible creatures at that time. Then the lion obeyed his words and commands as willingly as the lamb. God is eternal. This was mirrored in man's immortality of body and soul. For as long as man still bore the image of God in himself, death couldn't destroy his body which was a pure unspotted temple of the Holy Spirit. God is blessed. Before Him there is fullness of joy, and at His right hand pleasure forever. This was mirrored in the blessedness of man which he enjoyed already here. In man's conscience there was rest and peace. Neither fear nor care troubled the boundless joy of his heart. He enjoyed work which tired neither his spirit nor his body. Neither pain nor sickness could touch him. Neither heat nor cold could injure him. The earth, too, was full only of the goodness of the Lord. It did not yet bear thorns nor thistles, but extended its hands to man only with gifts of joy. And paradise where man dwelt was the image of God's heavenly mansions where He reveals His divine majesty. Then the world was still an annex of heaven, ruled by man as a visible image of the invisible God, and man's soul was a quiet showplace of God's glory where there was only pure light, pure love, pure joy, pure holiness and righteousness.

Where is this blessed state now? It has disappeared. Man, who bore God's image in himself when first created, now bears at his coming into the world the image of Satan, namely error, sin, misery, and death. Now our reason is by nature darkened, our will by nature turned away from God, our heart alienated from the life which is from God, our body full of unclean lusts and desires, our conscience full of unrest, doubt, fear, and mistrust of God, our life surrounded by misery and death. Sadly Moses relates the birth of Seth, Adam's son, and does not say: Adam begat a son in God's image, but "in his own likeness." Sadly Solomon exclaims: "God hath made man upright, but they have sought out many inventions." (Eccl. 7:29). Sadly Paul testifies: "There is no difference, for all have sinned and come short of the glory of God," that is, short of the former glory which we ought to have in God. (Rom. 3:23,24). In vain proud man now boasts of being created in God's image. This image is lost. Through Satan's wiles man fell into sin, and through sin he destroyed and ruined God's glorious work. Oh, how deep man has fallen! How much he lost! How poor he is who once was rich! How miserable he is who once was so glorious!

Is there anyone so hard and unfeeling that he does not now begin to long for our former blessed state when pondering the above, and who would not sigh with David: "My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God. When shall I come and appear before God, and awake with thy likeness?" (Psalm 42:2; 17:15). And blessed are we! God Himself has assumed the likeness of sinful flesh in order to renew us again in the lost image of God. God has not altered His eternal will of love allowing us to partake of His blessedness, but is ready for the sake of Christ, His dear son, to re-establish in us His ruined work by His Holy Spirit - here in inception and there in perfection. Our text for today speaks of this renewal of man in the image of God.

*Scripture text: Ephesians 4:22-28. That ye put off concerning the former conversation the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts; And be renewed in the spirit of your mind; And that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness. Wherefore putting away lying, speak every man truth with his neighbour: for we are members one of another. Be ye angry, and sin not: let not the sun go down upon your wrath; Neither give place to the devil. Let him that stole steal no more; but rather let him labour, working with his hands the thing which is good, that he may have to give to him that needeth.*

This text, dear hearers, contains one of the chief proof passages of the doctrine of God's image which man once bore in himself but lost through sin. For the apostle here exhorts Christians to be renewed in true righteousness and holiness, just as man was first created by God. Oh that this glorious text would truly edify each of us today! May it enlighten each by its light, and draw and move us by its power!

Under its guidance we now study

## **THE DAILY RENEWAL OF THE CHRISTIAN IN THE IMAGE OF GOD,**

1. The True Inner Nature of This Renewal, and
2. How it is Revealed Outwardly in our Lives.

*Renew us, O eternal Light,  
And let our heart and soul be bright,  
Illumined with the light of grace  
That issues from Thy holy face.*

*Destroy in me the lust of sin  
From all impureness make me clean.  
Oh, grant me power and strength, my God,  
To strive against my flesh and blood. Amen  
(TLH,398, 1.2.)*

### **[1. The True Inner Nature of the Daily Renewal of the Christian in the Image of God]**

"Be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and put ye on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness," the apostle tells the Ephesian Christians in our text. We see from this that the doctrine of renewal is a doctrine of the Word of God just as much as the doctrine of faith and the forgiveness of sins. This doctrine is also an indispensable link in the chain of God's order of salvation which we must not tear apart or destroy. Renewal, too, is a step each of us must take if we want to walk the narrow way to heaven.

However, the renewal of the Christian is in no way the means by which he is to earn salvation. The only means of all grace and salvation is and remains faith in Jesus Christ. Christ, not our renewal, is the comfort which must be our foundation in trial and death, and faith alone is the hand by which the Christian seizes, appropriates, owns, and keeps the grace and salvation acquired by Christ for all men.

Hence renewal is not the first step in true Christianity. By it we are not to become Christians, but only after we have become Christians we can be told, as were the Ephesians in our text: "Be renewed in the spirit of your mind." Preaching of renewal, therefore, is really only addressed to true Christians. Its foundation is the new birth, in which man through faith receives life from God. In vain, therefore, an individual who has never been born again and radically changed is

told: "Be renewed." Such an individual has no power to do this. It would be as if one stood at the casket of a dead man and told him: "Arise and walk!" As little as the dead man can obey our words, so little is he able to practice the work of renewal who still lacks the Spirit and faith.

If you want to become a Christian, this is my brief advice: Read, hear, and consider first God's Law, the holy Ten Commandments, and learn from it your sins, your falling away from God, your lost condition, and be afraid of God's wrath against your sin announced by the Law to all its transgressors. But then also hear the merciful voice of the Gospel of Christ, which promises and offers grace to all sinners without exception, and accept this promise in firm faith. Be quite sure: if you do this, God absolves you in his judgment and declares: This sinner shall be accepted for the sake of my dear Son in whom I am well pleased. If you feel your distress, do not be frightened away from Christ by the greatness and multitude of your sins, or the depth of your corruption. Do not ask: Oh, dare I also believe? For you see, you not only dare but you shall believe, as surely as God is true and as surely as you may not make Him a liar.

Oh, blessed is he who thus has come to faith in Christ! He has become a Christian. He has been freed from the crushing burden of his sins, their dominion over him has been broken, and his heart has been made new and changed by the Holy Spirit.

But, dear listeners, once man has obeyed God's call, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ," he also hears the following divine call: "Put off concerning the former conversation the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, and be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness." When we are justified, Satan is indeed cast down from the throne of our heart by faith. But he has not been killed. As Luther says, he watches and tries day and night to see where he can gain a little space to insert a claw and gradually force his way back in completely. And he does not cease until he has sunk us anew into the former damnable way of unbelief, contempt of God, and disobedience. Therefore daily renewal is needed.

Yes, sin is forgiven in justification, but it still retains its roots in our heart. If the Christian therefore does not renew himself daily, his heart must soon become wild again, like a tree which is not pruned, or like a garden which is not weeded. True, in justification and regeneration we are born as God's children, and thus the beginning according to God's image is brought about in us. But at first we are still weak infants, who must receive their daily nourishment and strengthening in renewal if they are not to die and perish again.

In justification we are like the one who fell among murderers. Christ indeed took pity on us and bound up our deep wounds of sin with the balm of His gracious gospel. But now, in daily renewal, we must remain under the treatment of His Holy Spirit until we are fully healed when He returns and calls us to Himself by a blessed death out of the hospital of this world. Justification and the new birth are the spiritual creation. The daily renewal of the Christian is the work of spiritual preservation. However, just as the created world would long ago have perished but for God's preservation and government, a Christian cannot remain regenerated but for daily renewal. It is indeed well if faith has once been implanted in the heart, but then it requires daily watering, as Paul says. In this way the Lord grants also the final increase for final apprehension and enjoyment of eternal life.

Hence, what is daily renewal? It is the continuation of the work of grace begun by the Holy Spirit in our soul in justification by faith. It is the heartfelt diligence of the faithful Christian to put off the old man increasingly every day, that is, increasingly cast off all error, and to weaken, restrain, and kill sin in himself more and more. It is the daily earnest concern of a child of God to put on increasingly the new man, that is, to grow in all doctrine and knowledge and spiritual wisdom and experience, and to become more and more conformed to the image of Jesus Christ in thoughts, words, attitudes, and works.

Yes, in this life the daily renewal of the Christian is only very weak, for even born-again Christians must struggle with great corruption remaining in themselves. But they do struggle against it and do not let it control them. Faithless people and hypocritical hearts also say that they are striving to become better and more devoted to God every day, but in fact they let sin control them. The daily renewal of true Christians is not any such miserable, hypocritical pretense! When they awaken in the morning, their first and heartfelt care carried to God in prayer is: Oh, that I would be completely faithful today! This care accompanies them to their work, this care is with them in company and when they are alone. When evening comes, they look back on the past day, with broken heart ask God to pardon all their missteps, and sigh and ask for grace and forgiveness through Christ until they can rest in comfort. There may be enough hypocrites who comfort themselves with their former experiences of God's grace, although now they practice devotion to God with dead hearts, as though it were a business. But in true Christians Jesus Christ, the Sun of righteousness, has not only risen in their hearts, but never goes down. Instead, It daily shines in their souls with Its heavenly bright and warming rays. Not only do true Christians have daily new experiences of their sinfulness, but also daily ever new experiences of the kindness of God, and the power of His grace. Daily they repent anew, believe anew, love anew, and fight and overcome anew.

Examine yourselves, beloved listeners. You see, he who wants to pass for a Christian must not only be able to tell of his one-time conversion, but also of the daily continuance of God's work of grace in his heart. Do you try daily to put off the old man, and to put on the new man? Let me ask you: To which sins can you point which you fought during this past week, and which you overcame in the power of your faith? What virtue, what praise can you show which you have sought after during this past week, and which you have won through the help of the Spirit and of grace?

Whoever among us did not fight at all but walked lukewarm, secure and without care, did not stand in renewal. In him the old man continued to rule, who corrupts himself in error through lusts. Would that such a one returned by true repentance to his baptism which is a washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Ghost. Let him remember that he who does not want to be renewed in the image of God here on earth will not awaken to God's image beyond, either. But perhaps there are many among us who did fight but very weakly, who were overcome more often than they overcame. Oh, beloved souls, who must confess this of yourselves, do not let this cause you to despair. But remember, the Word of God says, "If a man also strive for masteries, yet is he not crowned except he strive lawfully." (2Tim. 2:5). Therefore let yourselves be kindled to new and greater zeal by the word of the Lord which tells you today: "Put on the new man which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness."

*Zion, rise, Zion, rise,  
Zion, wake, arise and shine!  
Let thy lamp be brightly burning  
Never let thy love decline,  
Forward still with hopeful yearning.  
Zion, yonder waits the heavenly prize;  
Zion, rise! Zion, rise!*

*Run thy race, run thy race  
Zion, swiftly run thy race!  
Let no languor ever find thee  
Idle in the market place.  
Look not to the things behind thee.  
Zion, daily strengthened by His grace,  
Run thy race, run thy race!*

## **[2. How the Daily Renewal of the Christian in the Image of God is Revealed Outwardly in our Lives]**

But, dear listeners, the apostle not only informs us of the true essence of a Christian's daily renewal, but also how it must reveal itself outwardly in our lives.

The apostle exhorts us, first, "Wherefore putting away lying, speak every man truth with his neighbor; for ye are members one of another." Not without reason does the apostle place this exhortation first. He intends to show that the first evidence to be seen in a renewed Christian is love of truth, and a horror of all lying and all false hypocritical ways. Satan is the father of lies; therefore he who still loves lies and takes refuge in lies still lives under the dominion of Satan in the realm of darkness and divine wrath. God is eternal truth and faithfulness. We read that He destroys liars and abhors the hypocrites. Therefore he who knowingly lies and promises what he never meant to keep is not a child of the true and faithful God. Jesus Christ testifies before Pilate that He is a king of Truth. Therefore he who does not love the truth above everything else is no subject of the kingdom of the Savior. The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of truth who guides into all truth. (John 16:13). Therefore he who does not walk in the truth, but in falsehood of the heart, is not drawn by the Spirit of God, but by his own spirit and the spirit of lies. Excuses and extenuations are of no avail. The apostle says clearly, "Wherefore putting away lying, speak every man truth with his neighbor; for we are members one of another."

Oh, how many in our time must therefore exclude themselves from God's kingdom, since nowadays nothing is more despised than the truth, and nothing is more frequent than lies, deceit, and falsehood! You who profess to be Christians in this lying world, do not give the world the terrible offense of noticing even in you lies, falsehood, faithlessness, flattery, slander, love of fame, boastfulness, and hypocrisy. He who wants to be a Christian must at all times so speak as his heart and conscience witness. One must be able to trust the word of a Christian more securely than a thousand oaths of a worldling who does not fear God. With a Christian, yes must be yes, no must be no. A Christian must not be friendly and courteous to one's face and hostile behind one's back. A Christian must not be friendly and loving in attitude and countenance but full of

bitterness and hatred in his heart. Even when speaking about his enemies a Christian must not add anything untrue. A Christian must strive to speak and behave and do all from the bottom of his heart, so that he can say with David, "Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting." (Psalm 139:23, 24)

The apostle continues in our text, "Be ye angry, and sin not; let not the sun go down upon your wrath; neither give place to the devil." With these words the apostle foretells the Christians that in this world they would find cause and incitement enough to anger, hatred, and irreconcilability. He also indicates at the same time that because of the weakness of their flesh even true Christians often feel the sinful emotions of wrath. However he also points out that he who wants to be and remain a Christian, and to keep God's forgiveness, must guard himself carefully against remaining angry. Luther therefore says when explaining this passage: "In sum, we find here an unusual statement, that he who does not want to control his anger, and can retain his anger longer than a day or overnight, is not a Christian. What then shall become of those who retain anger and hatred continually, one, two, three, seven, ten years? This is no longer human anger but the devil's anger from hell." So far Luther. Let each of us take this carefully to heart! Sin is not a trifling matter; one single sin is enough to close the door of grace to us. Is it then not terrible to love a sin so much that one would rather lose his soul and salvation than fight against it and part with it?

Nor let anyone be deceived here by false appearances. Perhaps many are not angry with their neighbors outwardly in word, look, attitude, and works. But they are angry in their hearts. Think, you who are irreconcilable in heart, that even if you do not let your anger burst out but hide it in your heart before men - God sees your heart and will judge according to your heart. Therefore let go of your secret anger, lest it burden your soul like a curse. If you, Christian, are incited to anger, beseech God to set your heart at peace lest you return invective with invective, and that you might bless those who curse you. But should you be overcome by your anger through the weakness of the flesh, hasten to be loosed of it quickly, and when you are about to lie down to rest, remember the apostle's word, "Let not the sun go down upon your wrath." The pious patriarch of Constantinople named John once had a heated argument with a nobleman named Nicetas, so that the latter finally angrily left the patriarch. Evening came, John sent a deacon to Nicetas with only this message: "My lord, the sun is about to go down." Nicetas understood the patriarch's meaning, hurried to him, and ashamedly gave him his hand to be reconciled. Let us go and do likewise!

In conclusion the apostle adds: "Let him that stole steal no more; but rather let him labor, working with his hands the thing which is good, that he may have to give to him that needeth." Of a truth, beloved friends, this is a hard saying for our time. This verse leaves few Christians in Christendom. It tells us: First, he who openly takes another's property is obviously no Christian and has no part in the kingdom of God. Second, he who keeps stolen property is no Christian, for his own thievery continues as long as he wants to keep another's property among his own. Third, he who does not work and hence is not faithful in his earthly calling is in God's sight nothing but a thief who eats another's bread and is outside the realm of grace. Fourth, he who tries to acquire property, not by the honest labor of his hands, not in the sweat of his face, but by guile or by daring speculations, is in God's sight a willful transgressor of the Seventh Commandment and

hence under His curse. And finally fifth, he who gathers money in order to become rich, and not in order to be able to give to the needy, is in God's sight a covetous man, that is, an idolater who has no inheritance in the kingdom of Jesus Christ and God.

Therefore let everyone be warned! If we want to be Christians, then we must also be committed to daily renewal. We must also lay aside the old man according to the former conversation, who is corrupt through deceitful lusts, and put on the new man which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness.

May God grant this to all faithful Christians among us for the sake of Jesus Christ and by the power and working of His Holy Spirit. Amen.