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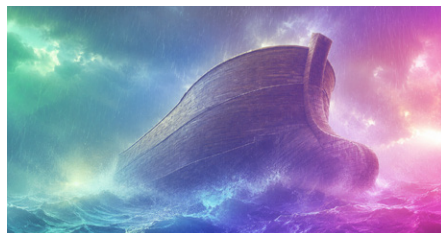
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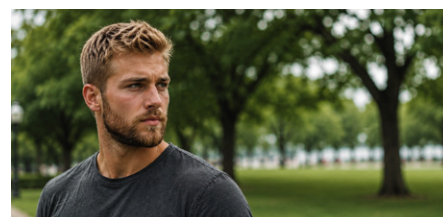
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God's Glory in Creation

**"The heavens declare the glory of God;
and the firmament sheweth his handiwork"**

—PSALM 19:1

LOOKING OUT ON A CLEAR NIGHT at the moon and the stars is a spectacle of amazing beauty and majesty. We cry out, "O Lord, how great Thou art!" As Psalm 19:2 says, "Day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night sheweth knowledge." Viewing the vast creation, the many galaxies, each having their own orbit, no mere man could have conceived or thought of such a thing.

Yet, all this, and our knowledge of creation, cannot save us. Jesus Christ, the only name given under heaven by which we must be saved, is not known by this knowledge. For God's people, this thought is a comfort, knowing that God in Jesus

Christ is their salvation. The creation of heaven and earth, and all that it contains is upheld by the word of His power! When we come to realize this, we become as nothing before this great God.

God's glory is an over-powering wonder. God's people are looking to the one place where His glory is revealed most clearly: the hill of Calvary. "Surely his salvation is nigh them that fear him; that glory may dwell in our land. Mercy and truth are met together; righteousness and peace have kissed each other" (Ps. 85:9–10). There our Savior opened the door to the heavenly Paradise. God's beautiful creation has been ruined by sin, but His blood has washed all our

sins away if we are His people. He is in heaven seated on His throne in all His majesty and glory as the King of kings, the interceding Lamb of God. Hallelujah, what a Savior.

Where does your heart and mind go when viewing the vast creation? ■



Mr. Cornelius VanKampen

known as Case, has been married to Susan for sixty blessed years. They attend and are members of Heritage Reformed Congregation in Grand Rapids, MI.

Thanks to Jeff Steenholdt, retiring graphic designer

Written by retired editor, Dan **VanDyke**

AFTER SERVING AS THE DESIGNER OF *The Outlook* for the past twenty years, Jeff Steenholdt is now stepping away from this role.

Jeff owned a small graphics design business in Kalamazoo, Michigan. He always had a passion to use his talents to the glory of God. Being a member of the local Protestant Reformed church for many years, he worked for the PRC's denominational publication, the *Standard Bearer*. He also did work for the books published by Reformed Free Publication Association, which published PRC books and materials. Jeff and his wife, Barb, left the PRC church to join Covenant URC in Kalamazoo. This was during the time that Rev. Wybren Oord was the pastor of Covenant and he was also the editor of

The Outlook. Rev. Oord found that Jeff would use his talents for Reformed Fellowship. Rev. Oord introduced Jeff to the Reformed Fellowship board who then hired him. Much of Jeff's life was so committed to *The Outlook* and the Reformed Fellowship publications that he declined other opportunities of service in the church.

He often worked well after midnight to finish Reformed Fellowship work around the work of his clients.

During the time of the Covid outbreak, when businesses were closed and periodicals could not be published, Jeff used his connections to get *The Outlook* printed and mailed on schedule all through the shutdown.

We thank Jeff for his many years of contributions to Reformed Fellowship and *The Outlook*. We pray that the Lord will continue to bless him and his wife, Barb. ■

From the (Interim) Editor...

WE HAVE EXPERIENCED some changes in recent months at *The Outlook*, and wanted to add an editorial to this issue of the magazine to share what is new at Reformed Fellowship, Inc., and describe what you'll find in these pages.

First, as was noted in the January/February 2026 issue, Dan Van Dyke retired from his position as editor. I agreed to step into the role of interim editor while we conducted a search for a new editor. Dan gave me wonderful guidance as I learned the ropes of putting together an issue of *The Outlook* (the May/June 2026 issue was my first), and I am grateful now to play a similar role for our incoming editor, Dr. Michael Kearney.

Also concerning matters of personnel, you have just read about Jeff Steenholdt's retirement as graphic designer. Dan's tribute was a fitting way to honor Jeff's immense contribution to the magazine over the years, but we are also excited to share that Rev. Daniel Gomes Silveira has agreed to assume this role. Daniel is pastor of Heritage Reformed Presbyterian Church in Salvador, Bahia, Brazil and is a 2015 graduate of Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary. This issue marks the official transition to Daniel's tenure, and we are delighted to have his help in carrying forward the legacy of our handsome publication!

Second, we are very excited about this issue's theme: summer. So many things often come with this time of year—travel, vacation, the beach, a break from school, and more. But like other rhythms in life, summer gives us an opportunity to reflect on how we might use this season to grow in

our appreciation of God's gifts and our enjoyment of His creation.

Elisabeth Bloechl's article offers a parent's perspective on how summer provides great opportunities for both service and rest within our families. Many parents struggle with how to approach the months until school resumes, but Bloechl helps us to see the exciting possibilities of this extended period with our kids at home.

Rev. Dr. Ryan Swale alerts us to an excellent new Psalms devotional and suggests ways for us to use the summer months to deepen our knowledge of the gospel. As church education programs often pause during the summer, Swale points us toward a "summer in the Psalms," where we can continue to reflect deeply on God's Word.

Rev. Dr. Dan Ragusa shares his translation of Geerhardus Vos's poem, "Summer," along with biblical-theological reflections from and about Vos's work. While many know Vos as the eminent and erudite professor of biblical theology from Old Princeton, Ragusa introduces us to Vos's creative and reflective side, helping us to shape our own thoughts about this season unto God's glory and our delight in His ways.

Finally, my contribution seeks to help us raise our expectations for youth sports as an opportunity to bring glory to God while enjoying

the blessings of competitive play. Baseball fans know that the summer months are the heart of the MLB season and as I write, my own children are in the middle of their Little League baseball and softball seasons. Yet beyond the simple warnings of "don't cheat" and the familiar platitudes of "just have fun," the Christian worldview provides a rich creation-and-redemption lens through which to view sports, revealing facets of competition and excellence that can benefit both young athletes and their families.

We pray that these themed articles will help you appreciate this season of the year in fresh and meaningful ways!

In addition to our theme articles, several others traverse a range of topics: marriage, Noah's flood, systematic theology, church membership, providence, and the Heidelberg Catechism. All but one of these is part of a series, continuing our learning opportunities across issues of *The Outlook*. We trust you'll find them edifying, interesting, challenging, and encouraging, and we pray that they will help you fix your attention more clearly upon Christ and His Word.

In Christ,

REV. DR. R. ANDREW COMPTON
Interim Editor, The Outlook ■





Mrs. Elisabeth **Bloechl**

Summertime with Kids

SUMMER IS COMING. For some, the thought is a happy one filled out with imaginings of lounging in the sun and puttering in the garden while the kids run free. For others, the thought instantly engenders dread: “What will I do with my kids all summer?” I propose that both responses miss the rich opportunities summer with our children affords. Drawing on educators and the Bible, I hope to help us look forward to summers with our kids not with dread or apathy, but with eager anticipation and purpose.

Reorientation

It is important to establish a framework for how we view summer and our kids. Many of us, especially those living in the upper Midwest, tend to think of summer as an extended vacation. Without realizing it, we often expect our days to involve lots of time to pursue our hobbies or house projects while spending the evenings sipping a cool

drink on the porch. So when our kids get in the way of our plans, we can become angry and impatient.

Others are happy to involve our kids in our summer plans, we just don’t know where to begin. We have gotten so used to the routines of the school year that summer’s lack of structure and predictability overwhelms us.

It would benefit all of us, no matter our attitude and expectations, to step back and look at what the Bible teaches about raising children. Deuteronomy 6 charges parents to diligently teach their children God’s commands. Proverbs encourages parents to train, correct, and reprove their children (19:18, 22:5, 29:17). These teachings are echoed in the New Testament (see Eph. 6:4, Col. 3:21). God does not put a time stamp on these commands; we are to teach, discipline, and train our children day after day, in winter and in summer. We don’t get a summer vacation from parenting. This is important for us to grasp because it reorients our expectations for summer. We are still on the clock. With that mindset, when our painting project is interrupted by a sibling squabble, we are not as likely to respond by throwing the paintbrush at the offending party.

We would do well to pause and ask ourselves if we have developed an unbiblical attitude about our kids and summer, producing a bitter spirit toward our dependent and needy kids. If we have, we need to repent. We must ask God to give us gratitude for the job He has given us to raise our children and a heart to pray for them. God's faithful and diligent disciplining and teaching us (Heb. 12:4–12, John 14:26) will give us ample reason to repent, but there is more to the story.

The more we grasp this fatherly care of His, the more we will find motivation to care for our charges with similar diligence and joy—not out of guilt, duty, or to earn God's favor, but because we are so thankful for how God has fathered us. God, who had every right to leave us in the care of our rightful father, the devil, instead sent His own beloved Son to ransom us. He adopted us as His own children, giving us all the rights and privileges of His own Son. And He sent the Holy Spirit as a constant help, companion, and guide. When we see our parenting through this gospel lens, the prospect of a summer with the kids is no longer a burden, but a joy. Our good Father has given us these little ones whom we get to love and parent like He has loved us and parented us. What a privilege!

Three Legged-Stool

Charlotte Mason, a well-known educator, talked about how education relies on three instruments: “atmosphere of environment, the discipline of habit and the presentation of living ideas.”¹ Another educator, Carol Seid, shared an expanded version of Mason's proposal from some home educators. They proposed that a fully-orbed education requires three elements: academics, work, and service. An education that is missing any one of the legs of this three-legged stool will not stand up.² Most kids spend an

ample amount of time throughout the school year focusing on academics. However, they likely have little time left for service or work. Here is where summer is a gift.

Work

When I was a kid, summers in my home consisted of a great deal of outdoor play. However, woven in between all that play was hard work. We would always kick off the summer by deep cleaning our house. We scrubbed from ceiling to floor and every piece of furniture and knickknack in between. My father was a painting contractor. His kids were his crew. From our many hours of painting alongside him, we learned a valuable skill we all have put to use. (Through his tutelage, I was able to start my own business that helped feed us through the lean seminary years!) When we got home from painting, we would exchange paint for shovel and set to work in our substantial vegetable gardens—planting, weeding, watering, harvesting. We learned the salty taste of dirt mixed with sweat and the sweet taste of our own canned carrots in the middle of winter.

Not only did these manual labor jobs teach us how to work hard with our bodies, they afforded our minds a much-needed respite from the rigors of academic work. Attending an academically rigorous college, I began to look forward with anticipation to summers painting with my dad. I needed the break. But priceless are the hours of conversations I shared with my wise parents as I worked alongside them. Conversations on ladders and while peeling tomatoes. Conversation I might not have had without the space and time and relational capital.

Maybe you don't have a garden or own a business. Maybe your kids are too young to be of much help even if you did. I would encourage you

to take some time to consider what opportunities for work—work you can do alongside your children—the summer might bring. Maybe it's as simple as picking up sticks around the yard together or teaching your kids how to mow the lawn. Maybe teach your kids one of your favorite hobbies and try to sell the product. Maybe wash the car together. Brainstorm. Be creative. Use your gifts. Training our kids to work is not always enjoyable or easy, but the fruit is worth the effort. As a bonus, teaching our kids to work is also a way of teaching them to serve.

Serve

Let's say you finish picking up sticks in your own yard and decide to pick up sticks for your handicapped neighbor. You are serving. Or, let's say your son becomes quite adept at mowing lawn and so it is easy for him to mow Grandma's lawn. He is serving. There are countless examples of this natural combination of work and service, but there are also many ways to combine service and fun.

I regularly take my young kids to the local old folks' home to sing, recite poetry, and play games with them. It is a small thing, but the residents love it—and so do my kids. It also leads to natural conversations on the why and how of service. We often discuss the fact that we are going to serve and love these people who are lonely and stuck inside. We talk about how to consider others as we play games and how to show deference for elders. Winning the game with your elderly teammate is an added bonus.

What things do you enjoy? What is fun for your kids? Do you like cooking together? Involve the kids in preparing a meal for a sick church member or neighbor. Maybe they can write a cheerful note to go along with it. Do you enjoy playing music together as a family? Why not play at your local assisted living center? Are

you a sports family? Are there any ways your kids can serve: assistant coaching, making sure everyone has water, bringing snacks? Do you like to take road trips? What about keeping a picture journal for a grandparent? Or take turns entertaining the family on the long car ride with original stories.

Like work, the possibilities for service are endless. And, as a perk, nearly everything you do related to work or service will have an element of education. Working with my dad, we got an education in how to run a small business and economics. My kids are memorizing poems and learning how to deliver them with plenty of volume. Traveling to other places broadens the mind and gives flesh and flowers to places only read of in stories. I could go on. But most importantly, the elements of work and service help your children learn how to model Christ.

Christ, the Working Servant (Who Rested)

Christ, the all-knowing God, humbled Himself to do the work of a carpenter. He knew the feel of aching muscles and drooping eyes

after a day of working in the shop. He worked hard teaching the disciples and crowds of followers. He came to serve others—even to lay down His life in service to them (Matt. 20:28). That is the kind of person we want our children to be: people who are seeking to work hard and serve others, and who do it out of deep gratitude for Christ's work and service for them. We know there is no formula that will guarantee that our children will become the hard-working, selfless, lovers of learning that we hope. The Holy Spirit has to work in the hearts of our kids to make the things we are modelling take root. It is not our job to worry about the outcome.

Yet Jesus did not only work and serve. Jesus also rested. He often went away to pray with the Father (Luke 5:16). He slept deeply during a storm (Mark 4:38). He stopped at a well to rest, letting the disciples go on to get the meal (John 4:6). He taught this rest as well. He declared that His yoke was easy and burden light (Matt. 11:30). He showed that the Sabbath was made to rest in the Lord, and help others do so (Matt. 12:7–8).

In our fast-paced American culture, we may be tempted to read the above and pack the summer with work and service. Then we enter the school year spent and crabby. God invites us to rest. To rest in Him first and foremost. To spend time with Him in prayer and His Word (with our kids and on our own). To continue observing the quiet and restful rhythms of sabbath rest throughout the summer. To take chunks of time to slow down. To take long strolls with the kids, nap in the sun, or read a book on the beach. So, as we are planning out our summer with our kids, let's remember to plan in margin for rest. God gives it as a good gift—a reminder that in all we do, we must rest in and on Him.

Sometimes we forget that we don't get off the hook for parenting just because it is summer. Thankfully, because of God's good fathering of us, we are enabled and given the motivation to continue parenting our kids. Summer is an excellent time to model hard work and service while having fun and taking time to rest. Summer is coming; let's embrace it with joy. ■

“When we see our parenting through this gospel lens, the prospect of a summer with the kids is no longer a burden, but a joy. Our good Father has given us these little ones whom we get to love and parent like He has loved us and parented us.”

1. Charlotte Mason, *A Philosophy of Education*, vol. 6 of *Charlotte Mason's Original Homeschooling Series* (Simply Charlotte Mason, LLC, 2017), 94.
2. “Fostering a Grace-Filled Educational Balance Through Work, Study, and Service,” March 18, 2016, in *Homeschool Made Simple*, Carole Joy Seid, podcast, 30:00, MP3 audio, <https://homeschoolmadesimple.net/fostering-a-grace-filled-educational-balance-through-work-study-and-service-episode-308/>

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Summer in the Psalms?

Rev. Dr. Ryan **Swale**

MANY OF OUR churches take a lengthy break during the summer months from things like Sunday School, catechism classes, and Cadets. However, as parents, we should never think of ourselves “on break” from teaching our children about the great things that God has done. Elisabeth Bloechl’s article in this issue demonstrated how God’s command to train our children applies to *all* months, and she applied this very helpfully in the areas of work and service. Now, in this article, I want to think about our instruction of our children in the Word and about spiritual formation more broadly.

Given the considerable portion of time in which many of these other initiatives are on pause, what if parents (rather than viewing summer as a pause in spiritual formation) were to think strategically about how to best steward these months in order to study something new with their children to actually *deepen* their spiritual formation?

During the summer, many churches also take a break from their regular preaching schedule in order to do something a little bit different. For example, it’s not at

all uncommon to have a summer sermon series through a selection of Psalms. Perhaps this practice could help guide how you think about family discipleship this time of year. What if you and your family were likewise to spend a summer in the Psalms?

For millennia, the Book of Psalms has been at the heart of both the public and private devotional life of God’s people. However, they don’t tend to feature quite as prominently in our church’s (or our school’s) catechetical programs. What if you and your family were to take the summer to fill that gap and help your children grow in their love for the songbook and prayerbook of the church?

Indeed, summer often affords a pace that the rest of the year does not: evening schedules are often less crowded; many families take some time to travel and get away together; children are freed from many of the ordinary pressures of homework and the like. Thus, summer actually provides a perfect opportunity for the kind of lingering in the Word that the Psalms invite us into. Perhaps it can be a time to establish new habits that might stick with you and your family throughout the year.

One recent resource that might be of help in teaching your children about the Psalms is Iain Duguid’s family devotional called *The Lord Saves Me: 40 Christ-Centered Family Devotions from the Psalms*.¹ Each entry features a kid-friendly translation of the Psalm, and then about two pages showing how that Psalm highlights some

aspect of Christ's Person and work, before giving a very helpful and substantial prayer based on that Psalm. We have been going through it as a family and have found it absolutely delightful—not only for our children, but as parents, too, in reinforcing how to read the Psalms as Christians. Consistently, it avoids reading the Psalms moralistically or placing ourselves at the center of them but instead reads them with a view to Christ. For developing this skill alone, parents and children would benefit from this resource, as we certainly have.

So, as we continue reading through Duguid's Psalms entries, we invite others to consider taking such a journey through the Psalms with us this summer. Not only would such a journey connect you with the devotional life and practice of the church for the last few millennia, but it would also give you an opportunity to teach your children to pray.

The Psalms have been called the prayerbook of the Bible (see, for example, Dietrich Bonhoeffer's wonderful little book by that title), as they teach us how to bring all of our joys and sorrows, our petitions and thanksgivings, even our anger and our guilt, before God. Our children (not to mention we ourselves) often struggle to know just how to do this. But the Lord gives us the Psalms as one of the means by which His Spirit intercedes for us in prayer (Rom. 8:26). He takes us by the hand and places the Spirit-inspired prayers of the Bible on our lips that we might pray them back to Him.

Spending a summer with your children in the Psalms, and using a family devotional like Duguid's, would be a wonderful way to be helped in growing as a family in praying the whole range of prayers that God invites us to pray. Sometimes our dinner-time prayers can fall into the rut of just saying the same old thing each time, but

the Psalms help us to model for our children how to pray the diversity of petitions that God calls us to pray. What's more, they are wonderfully suited for children as they engage not only their minds but also their affections and imaginations (with their rich world of imagery). They take the promises of which our children read elsewhere in God's Word and teach us to plead them before God in every stage and season of life.

Not only do the Psalms teach them to pray to God, but they also provide a unique opportunity to hide the Word of God in their (and our) hearts through song. As we have been going through a Psalm each morning, and a Psalm each evening, we have been making a point to then sing that Psalm with our children from the *Trinity Psalter Hymnal* (our church's hymnbook). Some of these songs have been more familiar, and some less; but they are helping our children to grow more and more familiar with the songbook of our church.

Perhaps singing as family is not something that you are accustomed to doing. If that is the case, what better time to add this practice to your family worship routine than during the summer months, when many of these other initiatives are on break and you have a bit more time to linger together at the table? Psalm 118:15 speaks of "glad songs of salvation" being heard in the tents of the righteous, and many throughout the history of the church have taken this as a proof-text for the singing of Psalms in family worship. We could say that the Psalter itself commends the singing of its contents together in our homes.

Finally, it also commends the practice of family discipleship, in general. For example, in Psalm 78:1–8, Asaph leads God's people in committing themselves not to hide from their children the glorious things that God has done, but rather to tell these

things to their children so that the coming generation might know them and set their hope on God—not forgetting His works, but keeping His commands. Reading, singing, and praying the Psalms with our children is one way that we can do that. It isn't the only way, of course, but picking up a family devotional like Duguid's, or simply picking up the Book of Psalms itself, would be a wonderful way to spend the summer with your family—delighting in the Savior of whom they sing, and learning to pray to Him.

Rather than seeing summer as a break from catechesis and spiritual formation, try receiving it as an opportunity for deepening such formation. Learn to sing the Psalms together as a family; commit some of them to memory; discover the blessing of praying them with your children. And, as you linger in the Psalms, let the summer months become not a pause in spiritual formation for your family, but—with the help of the Psalter—a deepening of it. ■

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from our bookstore!

Rev. Dr. Ryan Swale

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Summer Reading in God's Beautiful Book:

Reflections on Geerhardus Vos's Poem "Summer"

Rev. Dr. Daniel **Ragusa**



Summer¹

BY GEERHARDUS VOS
TRANSLATED BY DANIEL RAGUSA

Though countless signs around me brim
that he the land doth greet,
how shall I ever find him
or where his footsteps meet?
What news, O gentle lulling wind,
is he, or soon to be,
at home with his beloved
to spend the night in glee?

He knows the subtle art of guise,
few can mark his showing;
on cool and shaded limbs he lies,
in the soft mist of spring.
He slips from all our searching eyes,
though robbed in bright array,
in autumn's blaze of burning leaves,
too soon he steals away.

Yet who can grasp the wonder,
how at his festal tide,
he clasps the earth thereunder
and spreads it far and wide!
In valleys fragrance rising,
the seas in golden light,
with streams intoxicating,
a merry heart's delight!

Try not to draw near to him
in passion of a bride;
his flame forbids all nearing,
his tender arms denied.
But when the winds from off the sea,
turn cool across the shore,
the soul may dream in safety
of summer's pleasure store.

Nature Poetry for the Glory of God

THE FATHER OF REFORMED BIBLICAL theology was also a lifelong poet. Geerhardus Vos (1862–1949) published eight volumes of poetry, brimming with roughly two hundred poems. The aim in his poetry was the same as in his systematic and biblical theology: “the preeminence of God’s glory in the consideration of all that has been created.”²

Vos’s poetry assumed a distinctly religious and covenantal character, above all through his engagement with the prophet Isaiah, whom he calls the “salvation-poet, salvation-herald.”³ Vos writes of Isaiah: “There is always the unmistakable note of sovereign power bespeaking the prophet who is at the same time a poet by the grace of God. Isaiah’s influence on the formal development of sacred poetry has proved as great and lasting as that exercised in his contribution to the body of revealed truth.”⁴ In God’s heavenly throne room, Isaiah’s eyes are awakened by the song of the seraphim to see the whole earth full of God’s glory (Isa. 6:3). He becomes, as Vos writes, “responsive to every type of beauty and grandeur the world presents to his view.”⁵

All nature and history—kings and trees, mountains and moons and men—is intended to reveal and magnify the excellencies of God, from whom all things derive their purpose and meaning. In Vos’s poem “Jesaja,” he extols the breathtaking breadth of Isaiah’s worldview:

O man of visions, what magnificent images
Have walked the fields of your imagining!
With what bright brush, in lavish color dipped,
What living word-pictures have you interpreted!

The earthquake, great, that makes of giants dwarfs;
The child who walks with paradise’s lion;
The glorious sea-land of Zion, mountain-throned;
The proud, who grope in darkness after fire—
Moloch’s flame!⁶

It is fitting that Isaiah’s vast prophetic vision culminates in new heavens and a new earth (Isa. 65:17; 66:22).

In humble step with Isaiah, Vos’s nature poetry offers a rich window into his supremely God-centered mind and heart, helping us “to adore the wisdom of God in nature, His ways and His works.”⁷ With wide-eyed wonder we worship the Maker of heaven and earth.

Experiencing the Seasons

Vos’s poem “Summer” is found in the collection “Annulis Anni” (The Rings of the Year) drawn from his book of nature poetry, *Spiegel der natuur* (Mirror of Nature). Vos pens a poem for each season and the various parts of the day.

Why do we need such poems? As timebound creatures, we inevitably experience the seasons and each day within a universe upheld by the word of the Son of God’s power (Heb. 1:3). The seasons come not by chance but by God’s fatherly hand (Heidelberg Catechism Q&A 27). We may observe each season’s distinct character. Spring blooms like a newborn; summer delights like a long, slow, satisfying sip; autumn blazes with glory like a soldier’s final stand; winter stills the earth with an icy hush, like the grave—yet even here it prepares the way for spring to sing again. The seasons may stir within us joy, longing, hope, or peace. As they mark out the year, each fading as the next grows bolder, they may also grant us perspective amid the otherwise dizzying flow of time. Amid the world’s chaos, the seasons remain steady, their coming calmly expected.

This is good for us to experience and enjoy, and we ought to give thanks to God for it. But is there more for us to see in the story the seasons tell? Do they have something more to say to our souls? Is there something spiritual reflected in them?

Sunday and the Seasons

Vos’s opening poem in “Annulis Anni” is titled “Sunday.” It sits atop the earthly cycles of seasons and days like a heavenly crown. It reads:

This is a Sunday which can well be called a sun day;
I have bathed both body and soul in a sea of light,
have washed off my everyday doing and knowing,
have of heavenly wine tasted and wedding food eaten,
and blessedly sat listening by the way,
along which the singing holy procession goes.⁸

Here Vos forges a religious (God-centered and worshipful) and eternal lens through which to read God’s natural revelation inscribed in the universe as His “beautiful book” (Belgic Confession 2), including His preservation and governance of its seasons and days (Gen. 8:22).

Sunday resists the notion that we are caught up within an endless cycle of time or a “circle of life,” devoid of meaning or purpose. Vos says, “It teaches its lesson through the rhythmical succession of six days of labour and one ensuing day of rest in each successive week.

Man is reminded in this way that life is not an aimless existence, that a goal lies beyond.”⁹ In this way, it lifts our existence within the cycles of seasons and days beyond the monotony and meaningless of life “under the sun,” and reorients it toward God’s good and eternal purposes for us in the risen Christ.

Sunday, the Lord’s Day, teaches us to see the seasons not merely under the light of the sun—burning 93 million miles away—but under the light of heaven: the supernatural light refracted, as it were, through the sea of glass like crystal from before the throne of God (Rev. 4:6). This heavenly light sanctifies the rhythms of time, including each season, for the glory and enjoyment of God (true religion), and offers a foretaste of the higher prize of eternal blessedness in the joyful presence of God. True religion and eternity walk hand in hand, for God made us in His image to “live with [him] in eternal happiness, for his praise and glory” (Heidelberg Catechism Q&A 6).

“Summer”

Vos’s poem “Summer” is comprised of four stanzas. The first consists entirely of questions. Its inquisitiveness invites us to join the poet in his search for a mysterious person whose presence remains elusive, though signs of him appear everywhere. Wherever the poet looks, he exclaims, “He was here!” but never, “Here is he!”

The second stanza reveals that the one sought is a master of disguise. He veils himself in the emblems of spring (soft mist) and autumn (burning leaves), so that “few can mark his showing,” and “he slips from all our searching eyes.” How much more so in summer’s blinding light?

The third stanza turns to summer itself, pausing at its peak intensity, when the one sought seems to clasp the earth with wonder upon wonder,

too rich to be fully received in the moment of experience. Valleys stream with fragrance, seas shimmer with golden light, and streams flow like wine that rejoices the heart. And yet the poet, mindful of his limits, asks in awe: “Yet who can grasp the wonder?” Can a child’s bucket contain the sea? Can his wagon hold a mountain? How much less the Maker of mountains and seas? The peak of summer thus reflects, as in a mirror, something of an infinite, immeasurable, and uncontainable pleasure that finite minds and hearts cannot grasp—yet a pleasure for which they long, and for which they were made.

The fourth stanza cautions that the one sought must not be approached in the full intensity of his summer glory. Like looking at the sun, our eyes are pushed away; like reaching toward a flame, our hand recoils. “Who can grasp the wonder?”

Yet the poem does not end in despair. Hope blows in on a cool fall breeze making summer’s intensity to wane. In its waning, the “soul” is now able to approach “summer’s

pleasure store,” though only in a “dream”—not by possessing, but by remembering what has been enjoyed. This does not yield nostalgia so much as longing, a forward-directed desire. It awakens his soul anew to searching, bringing us back to the opening question: “How shall I ever find him?” (stanza 1).

Looking in the Mirror of Summer

The natural world, as portrayed in the poem, is not a cold, mechanical place for mere scientific investigation, but a living place of personal revelation and encounter. It reveals the one sought. Each sign encountered only deepens the poet’s longing for him. So, he aches, asking, “How shall I ever find him?” (stanza 1). The one sought is not under his control, but must make himself known if he is to be found. Yet even if he were to reveal himself, could the poet take in the full majesty of his presence when even his mere traces already overwhelm him with inexpressible beauty?

We naturally wonder who the poet is seeking. It is likely God Himself,

“The peak of summer thus reflects, as in a mirror, something of an infinite, immeasurable, and uncontainable pleasure that finite minds and hearts cannot grasp—yet a pleasure for which they long, and for which they were made.”

revealed in creation and providence. Yet to name Him too quickly is to dull the poem's rhetorical edge. We are better to ask: why is this mysterious person longed for but unnamed in the poem?

God reveals Himself in all that He has made for His glory and our enjoyment. The universe is everywhere charged with His personal presence as His general revelation: "For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made" (Rom. 1:20). Unbelief suppresses this natural revelation, but faith adores "the wisdom of God in nature, His ways and His works," as Vos writes.¹⁰

In the mirror of summer, Vos sees reflected something of the unsearchable greatness of God (Ps. 145:3), of Him who is clothed with splendor and majesty (Ps. 104:1), whose glory not even the heavens can contain (Ps. 8:1), and who outshines the sun (Rev. 21:23). There is mystery in all that God has made—mystery for us, who cannot exhaust His greatness, though not for God who comprehends Himself and every square inch of the universe in its incalculable parts and wonderous harmony. And while God has made us in His image for fellowship, so that we may truly know Him, love Him,

and live with Him, we will never be able to take in the infinite fullness of His glory. If the seraphim must cover their faces before His throne (Isa. 6:2), how much more must we?

This calls us to be gospel-minded and heavenly-minded in all of life as we read God's wonderful works in His beautiful book of nature and history. The seasons could come and go on repeat for a lifetime, and yet we think nothing of them—nothing of what they might reflect about God, the gospel, and our ultimate destiny in Christ. We could experience the intense pleasure stores of summer, for which we long but can never fully take in, without ever seeing it as a mirror reflecting our glorious destiny in the risen Christ: entrance into the presence of God, where there is *fullness* of joy, and even nearer to His right hand, where there are pleasures *forevermore* (Ps. 16:11, emphasis added; see 2 Pet. 1:11; Rev. 21–22).

What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man imagined, what God has prepared for those who love him (1 Cor. 2:9).

In union with Christ, God is our portion and our inheritance, our true and eternal "pleasure store" (Ps. 73:25–26; Rom. 8:17). Have you seen, in the height of summer, the inestimable beauty and

immeasurable love of God that is all your delight—a love stronger than death, fiercer than the grave, from which nothing can ever separate you (Song 8:6; Rom. 8:39)? You were made—and remade in Christ—for this. ■

1. Geerhardus Vos, "Aestas," in *Spiegel der Natuur en Lyrica Anglica* (Princeton, NJ: Geerhardus Vos, 1927), 42–43. This translation is my own; I have tried to maintain the rhyme scheme and meter of the original Dutch. This article is an adaptation of an article originally published at: <https://reformedforum.org>.
2. Geerhardus Vos, "Some Doctrinal Features of the Early Prophecies of Isaiah," in *The Shorter Writings of Geerhardus Vos: Redemptive History and Biblical Interpretation*, ed. Richard B. Gaffin, Jr. (Philipsburg, PA: P&R, 1980), 241–42.
3. Geerhardus Vos, "Jesaja," in *Spiegel der Genade* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1922), 33: "Heilichter, heilheraut...."
4. Vos, "Some Doctrinal Features," 272.
5. Vos, "Some Doctrinal Features," 282.
6. Vos, "Jesaja," 32.
7. Geerhardus Vos, *Natural Theology*, trans. Albert Gootjes (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2022), 5.
8. Geerhardus Vos, "Dies Solis," in *Spiegel der Natuur en Lyrica Anglica*, 39. This translation is my own.
9. Geerhardus Vos, *Biblical Theology: Old and New Testaments* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2003), 140.
10. Vos, *Natural Theology*, 5.

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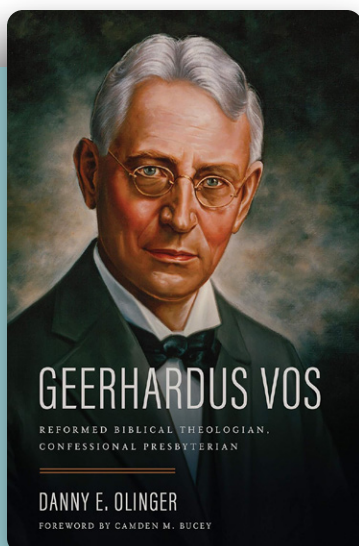
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Playing for God's Glory: A Christian Worldview of Sports for Athletes, Parents, and Fans

Dr. R. Andrew **Compton**



SUMMERTIME IS HERE! The grass is green again. The trees have sprouted their leaves. The flowers are in bloom. The flowerbeds are black with new mulch. Joggers are out and neighbors are chatting on the corners. There's so much to enjoy at this time of year!

For me, one of the highlights of this season is the thrill of pulling into the crowded parking lot at the local ballfields for my kids' practice after months of seeing it sit empty. A summer awaits, full of the sounds of cheering, the crunch of nachos, the "ping" of the bats, the thrill of watching a kid make contact for the first time after weeks of walks and strikeouts.

Yet there's another side to this idyllic picture that I thoroughly dislike. Mixed in with the shouts of "Great hit!" and "Way to go!" are other shouts: "What's your problem? Are you trying to make us lose?" Or "Crush those guys! Make 'em leave the field crying!" And also the sounds of sobs, temper-tantrums,

and sass coming from the kids themselves (and some parents)!

"Yes indeed," you might be thinking, "it is frustrating to see how non-Christians watch and play sports." But the problem is that I've seen many professing Christians—who claim that they do all things (sports included) for the glory of God (1 Cor. 10:31)—sound surprisingly unlike Christ when a referee misses a call, a kid misses a shot, or a coach misses an opportunity.

In this article, I want to provide us with a framework for thinking about sports (especially youth sports) in a God-glorifying way and offer some suggestions for creating gospel-saturated conversation with our kids about sports.

Thinking Christianly About Sports

In the book *Living at the Crossroads: An Introduction to Christian Worldview*, authors Michael W. Goheen and Craig G. Bartholomew trace the biblical storyline of creation, fall, redemption, and new creation/glorification. They then draw on the theological insights of Abraham Kuyper as they apply the biblical storyline to our ordinary lives.¹ The final chapter is especially helpful as it relates the Christian faith concretely to six areas of life: business, politics, art, scholarship, education, and—the focus of this article—sports and competition.

When it comes to sports and the Christian life, many of us gravitate to typical moral imperatives such as "Don't cheat." "Don't be unsportsmanlike." "Don't skip church for practice." "Don't make sports an idol."

But surprisingly, I've met very few people who can articulate how sports can be a *positive* expression of our Christian beliefs about creation and redemption. Apart from some platitudes about "cultivating character," "doing our best," and "having fun" (ironically, platitudes that nearly every non-Christian believes as well!), many Christian parents lack the vocabulary to describe a Christian worldview of sports.

For Christians willing to deepen their thinking, Goheen and Bartholomew provide a set of categories that enable young athletes, parents, and fans to enjoy every moment of a game (even when they're getting whopped!) and experience the delight of competition as pleasing to God and glorifying to Him. They begin by warning against a narrow, "world-negating" view of the gospel and the Christian life, a view which sees only worship and devotions as distinctively "Christian," and other areas (like sports) as

governed only by some bare standards (e.g., “don’t cheat,” etc.).

A Christian worldview instead says that sports “are gifts of God in creation, to be enjoyed with thanksgiving. It delighted God to give them; he created the potential in the creation for humanity to discover, develop, and enjoy them.”² Sports are rooted in creation in two main ways. First, as divine image bearers, God created us with diverse functions and gifts and made us both social and imaginative creatures. “In sports as in the arts, we are able creatively to construct imaginary worlds with their own goals, rules, and obstacles, and to enter them for a time.” Second, humanity was tasked with exploring, developing, and delighting in the amazing potential of creation: “And God blessed them. And God said to them, ‘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 moves on the earth’” (Gen. 1:28). Though Eden wasn’t furnished with courts and ballfields, “God gave humanity the formative power to explore, discover, and develop the potential of creation in diverse ways.” God gave the *ingredients* for inventing games that would lead to building playing spaces like these.

Why Competition Isn’t the Enemy

At this point, Goheen and Bartholomew imagine an objector who argues: “Competition is morally wrong because it pits one player or team against another in rivalry which often results in hate.” How do they respond? They show that this objection misunderstands God’s creational intent for competition. Rather than a “war” between “enemies” as characterizes enmity after the fall, competition from a creation and redemption/gospel

perspective is about the satisfaction derived from “overcoming unnecessary obstacles.” Their explanation is profound:

Obstacles provide hindrances which prevent the player from using the most efficient way of accomplishing the goal. The joy in the game is in creating tactics to overcome the obstacles and accomplish the goal. In sports, teams or individuals agree cooperatively to oppose one another within the stated goals, rules, and obstacles of the game. In other words, cooperation, not rivalry, is at the heart of competition.

Thus competition “enhances the joy and emotional intensity” of the experience. An opponent is not primarily a *rival*, but a *fellow image bearer* who helps to draw out excellent performance and “produce satisfying physical exertion” by “providing stiff competition” unto the glory of God and the delight of the other competitors and spectators.

How Sin Distorts Sports

Of course, sin has polluted this whole endeavor. Goheen and Bartholomew cite the famous Green Bay Packers coach, Vince Lombardi, as saying: “To play [football] you must have fire in you, and there is nothing that stokes that fire like hate.” And “Winning isn’t everything; it’s the only thing.” While some Christian writers have highlighted the combat and strife elements of sport without capitulating to such crassness, they still reduce sport to a means of training for war (a post-fall situation) to the neglect of sport as a creational and doxological endeavor.³

Christians so easily fall into sub-Christian, if not outright anti-Christian, ways of playing and watching sports.⁴ Yet the gospel reorients our thinking away from

self toward our Lord who is working change in our hearts and lives as the Holy Spirit applies the finished work of Christ to us. And the gospel doesn’t only speak of the salvation of our souls; it allows us to testify to the longed-for renewal of creation that God is accomplishing in Christ—indeed, the *transformation* and *glorification* of all that was created good in Genesis 1. As we are conformed to Christ, the Spirit enables us more and more to live lives “with the grain” of creation and testify to a world in sin about the delights of new and better ways of living in God’s world.

Giving Our Kids a Better Sports Vocabulary

Taking the time to think about and talk through the details in which a Christian worldview affects sports can extinguish these godless fires. Goheen and Bartholomew explain: “[A] big part of understanding God’s creational design for sports and competition is to understand how sin has corrupted and polluted them.”

We cannot expect our kids to just naturally untangle elements of the curse that have infected our approach to sports from properly Christian and creational ways of playing and thinking about them. Kids will naturally settle for worldly goals on the field or court, content themselves with the barest of moral categories (e.g., “I didn’t cheat”), and stoke self-centeredness in their play. Like everything in the Christian life, it takes the Holy Spirit’s work of renewal, ordinarily superintending the means of our own work, intentionality, and accountability in discipling our children to view sports Christianly.

I would love it if every athlete, coach, and spectator memorized this maxim:

In sports, image bearers compete with one another to spur one another on to excellent performance in overcoming obstacles for the glory of God and the enjoyment of each competitor and spectator.

I believe this captures the biblical-theological portrait articulated by Goheen and Bartholomew. If everyone involved with youth athletics were to think this way, how might that affect playing and watching games? How might it affect our strategy on the field or court? How might it affect our attitude after losing (or winning) by a big margin? How might it affect our response to an upset in the final seconds, final set, or final at-bat?

Putting This into Practice

As parents, we need to model this maxim for our kids. Whenever we watch a game on TV or talk about sports, our speech needs to be saturated with this maxim. I've found comments and questions like the following to generate some thoughtful responses from my kids:

When driving to practice or games:

- “Don’t be surprised when you make mistakes. Just remember you’re always learning and improving, and that God is glorified in your efforts.”
- “It’s going to be tempting to get cocky when you make a good play (or angry when you miss one). Take time during the game to offer short prayers for focus on God’s glory and everyone’s enjoyment.”
- “Look for opportunities to encourage your teammates *and the kids on the other team* when they make a good play.”
- “Enjoy how cool this is! Being able to play this game is a real gift from our Lord!”

When looking through the fence or sitting on the sideline:

- “That was a great swing! Don’t worry about the strikeout—you’ll get it next time!”
- “What a play! Way to go, girls!”

(Note: These are important things to say to kids on both teams!)

When walking back to the car or driving home after the game:

- “What was the coolest play you saw by one of your teammates?”
- “What was the coolest play you saw by a kid on the other team?”
- “Did you congratulate kids on the other team when they made great plays?”
- “What was your favorite play that you made?”
- “Which play do you wish you had done better?”
- “Did you stay focused on God’s glory and everyone’s enjoyment throughout the game?”
- “How did that focus affect how you felt when you (or that kid on the other team) missed that shot?”

If more and more athletes played sports with spiritually and intellectually formed perspectives, I suspect we would witness fewer bench-clearing brawls on TV and celebrate more Shohei-Ohtani-like moments of diffusing tension and frustration in games. (This refers to the June 19, 2025, Dodgers–Padres game, when Shohei Ohtani drew widespread attention for his peacemaking response after being hit by a pitch many believed was intentional.⁵) I suspect, too, that by asking questions like these, our parental tendencies to use youth sports for improper ends (e.g., trying to fit in with a community that idolizes sports, trying to live vicariously through our kids, etc.) will be curbed.

But beyond merely staving off poor behavior, questions like these will help to promote a deep love and appreciation for God’s gift of play and the enjoyment of life with one another.

In an activity that can bring out our worst without an intentional commitment to thinking, speaking, and acting in distinctively Christian ways, let us set our kids up for success by giving them a better grammar for talking about their sport, a grammar that flows from a renewal of our mind about the nature of sports themselves.⁶ ■

1. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), xiv.
2. All quotes in this section are found on pages 153–56 of Goheen and Bartholomew, *Living at the Crossroads*.
3. Douglas Wilson’s approach neglects this creational direction, and his emphasis on combat preparation/military training leaves little room for girls’ sports. See “Empire, Sports, and War,” in *The Glory of Kings: A Festschrift in Honor of James B. Jordan*, eds. P. Leithart and J. Barach (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2011), 289–300.
4. For an illustrative vignette, see Sharon K. Stoll, “Moral Reasoning: What It Is and How It Is Best Accomplished In the Classroom and Gymnasium,” in *Physical Education, Sports, and Wellness: Looking to God as we Look to Ourselves*, eds. J. Byl and T. Visker (Sioux Center, IA: Dordt College Press, 1999), 249–56.
5. Search Youtube for the video: “Shohei Ohtani plays peacemaker at the end of another wild game between the Padres and Dodgers” (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G3CJwbMqjJ0>).
6. For further reading beyond works cited already: Ted Kluck, *The Reason for Sports: A Christian Manifesto* (Chicago: Moody, 2009); Abraham Kuyper, “Play,” in *The Kingship of Christ in Its Operation*, vol. 3 of *Pro Rege: Living Under Christ’s Kingship*, trans. A. Gootjes (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2019), 103–11. See also relevant chapters in Paul Heintzman et al, eds., *Christianity and Leisure: Issues in a Pluralistic World*, rev. ed. (Sioux Center, IA: Dordt College Press, 2006); Paul Heintzman and Glen Van Andel, eds., *Christianity and Leisure*, vol. 2: *Issues for the Twenty-First Century*, rev. ed. (Sioux Center, IA: Dordt College Press, 2017).

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GOD'S PROMISED CLEANSING:

A Meditation on Genesis 6:9–22



Rev. Peter **Holtvliwer**

Meditation text: Genesis 6:9–22
Suggested reading: 1 Peter 3:8–22

OUR PASSAGE IS THE START of a new family tree in Genesis, “the generations of Noah” (Gen. 6:9). And when we hear the name “Noah,” we tend to think of the ark and the flood, right? But do we also think of righteousness and wickedness?

Wicked World

That actually comes first in the story and is the reason for the ark and the flood. We read, “Noah was a righteous man, blameless in his generation. Noah walked with God” (v. 9). To be righteous does not mean that you have no sin. The Lord earlier stated that every human is born with a heart bent on evil (v. 5). Instead, to be righteous means that you trust in His promise of salvation and align your lifestyle with God’s commandments. It means that you trust and obey God even while you fight the weaknesses and sinful desires of the flesh. Noah was that kind of man. And as we saw previously, Noah was this kind of man by the grace of God guiding his heart (v. 8). More specifically, as Peter alludes, it was the Spirit of Jesus working in Noah (1 Pet. 3:19–20).

However, all around Noah and his family was the spirit of wickedness—and what a powerful spirit that is! “Now the earth was corrupt in God’s sight, and the earth was filled with violence. And God saw the earth, and behold, it was corrupt, for all flesh had corrupted their way on the earth” (v. 11). Moses emphasizes how bad it was by repetition: *everything* is corrupt, corrupt, corrupt! Not only are the thoughts of every human heart evil continually, but evil deeds were flowing out of those evil hearts and filling the earth with violence. The Nephilim of Cain’s line, joined by the “mighty men” produced by the unholy mixing of Sethites and Cainites (v. 4), were showing themselves to be ferocious warriors who thought nothing of shedding blood to get what they wanted.

Sinful man had ruined God’s good earth (v. 12) and now God was going to ruin man. “I have determined to make an end of all flesh, for the earth is filled with violence through them. Behold, I will destroy them with the earth” (v. 13). Do we realize that God’s punishment is very much connected to our sin? Later, when the Israelites in the desert craved meat and spoke against God’s ability to provide the food they desired, what did God do? He sent them meat in droves of birds. But as they in their sinful craving gorged themselves on that meat, God sent a plague upon them (Num. 11:33). And when men and women gave up natural relations with the opposite sex for perverse relations with the same sex, God gave them over to their lusts so that they were inflicted with the “due penalty for their error” (Rom. 1:16–27). If we do not repent of our sinful cravings, the things we crave may well be given us—but we will find out too late they lead to our destruction!

Creation's Unity

The Lord sets out to punish man but not only are humans affected, He announces that He will destroy the earth (v. 13) and animals: “all flesh in which is the breath of life under heaven... shall die” (v. 17). We might wonder: is it fair that when God sets out to punish man, the earth and the animals suffer as well? Shouldn't man alone suffer for his sin? Animals are not moral creatures, nor did the earth itself sin.

But man is not a loner, detached from creation. Recall that the Lord made man from the dust of the earth (Gen. 2:7). God literally fashioned us out of the earth, breathed into us the breath of life, and appointed us as royal stewards over all the earth and its creatures. All of God's creation hangs together as one unit (see Rom. 8:20–23). So when the earth's caretaker corrupts himself with sin, sin can't help but spread from him down into all that is beneath him. That's why the earth itself had to be washed clean.

We can look at the flood as a terrible punishment with immense suffering resulting in the innumerable deaths of people and animals alike—and it was. It was a divine act of judgment that was world-wide and creation-deep, just like the future judgment will be when the Lord Jesus returns. Peter compares the flood with the fires of judgment at the end which will also bring punishment and suffering on people and creatures and creation alike (2 Pet. 3:5–13). Water and fire can both do a lot of damage and even kill. But they can also cleanse!

Triumph of Mercy

That's the hope in the promise of God to Noah: “But I will establish my covenant with you” (6:18). *Yes, I will destroy this earth and all creatures in it with a mighty flood of water—in order to wash sin away and start over*

with you! The flood is not judgment without mercy; when the waters recede, the earth will still be there, but then it will stand cleansed from the multitude of corrupt creatures that had filled it with violence. One godly man and his family, accompanied by all the animals God created for them to care for, will make a new beginning on an earth washed clean!

The surprising thing here is not that God wipes out all creatures but that He plans to save some. Death was our just consequence when Adam took from the forbidden tree, but God in grace gave the promise of life (Gen. 3:15). The Lord continued to bless man with the ability to raise children, work for food, build cities, and develop culture; but did man live in thankfulness to Him? The line of the faithful grew smaller and smaller while the line of the wicked grew larger and more vile. Man had so thoroughly turned his back on God that it was a wonder God did not blot out all living things once and for all!

Yet mercy triumphs over judgment. The Lord quickly adds to the announcement of destruction these gracious words, “Make yourself an ark of gopher wood” (v. 14). *Noah, build yourself a boat because I'm going to preserve your life, the lives of your family, and the lives of the animals I created! Yes, I will wipe out much, but I have promised salvation and I am faithful to my Word. You will be my instrument in saving a remnant and, with you, through the ark, I will start again!*

Salvation's Vehicle

This ark was quite something. It was certainly impressive as a feat of engineering that could survive the forces of the flood and bring a host of animals and a family of eight safely through. And while we might have many questions about how it was built and set up or how the animals were housed and fed, the only thing Scripture speaks about

is the ark's dimensions: 300 cubits long by 50 cubits wide by 30 cubits high. That gives the impression of a long rectangular boat, almost like a barge, three stories high. The Bible doesn't give the dimensions of structures too often. We can read of cities and palaces being built but nothing of their dimensions. The only other time that Moses writes about a structure's dimensions is when he describes the tabernacle—the outer courtyard was to be 100 cubits long by 50 cubits wide (Exod. 27:9–13). You could fit exactly three tabernacles on each deck of the ark.

I think we are meant to see a connection between these two structures and would it not be this: that both are specially commanded by God as vehicles for man's salvation? Both were enclosed structures with only one door in and one door out. The ark kept man protected in the midst of the storm and flood of God's wrath, while worshippers in the tabernacle were also kept from the wrath of God which fell instead upon the sacrificial lamb. The tabernacle was the only place on earth where man could draw near to God in holy worship, and the ark was the only place on earth where man could draw near to God in holy worship, for outside was only death.

Can we not see in the ark a picture of our Savior Jesus Christ? Providing the ark was not man's idea but God's wisdom, just like providing the Messiah was. The ark was the only means to keep living; Christ is the only means to live eternally. The ark was lifted above the waters pouring out the judgment of God over sinners below. It was pummeled with rain from above and waters from beneath while winds battered. Likewise, Jesus Christ was lifted up on the cross on which He was pounded on all sides by His Father's wrath and battered in body and soul

by God's judgments against our sin; and yet, like the ark, He kept safe all who take refuge in Him.

Enter the Better Ark

Jesus Christ is our better ark, for He did so much more than Noah's boat could ever do. He took upon Himself the full punishment for our sin so that we will never have to perish in God's righteous fury. Peter briefly alludes to this: "while the ark was being prepared, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were brought safely through water. Baptism, which corresponds to this, now saves you" (1 Pet. 3:20–21). The flood points forward to baptism and baptism symbolizes our washing in Christ. Baptism is like a mini-flood, a symbol of how Christ's blood washes away our sin and leaves us sparkling clean!

The flood of Noah's time washed the earth of sinners, but not of sin. Sadly, Noah and his sons continued in sin and the earth has since filled again with a rebellious human race and violent animals. But the cleansing that Jesus brings starts in the heart. His blood assures us of peace and His Spirit works to restrain sin within us with the sure promise that one day soon, upon the Lord's return, sin will be entirely eliminated from God's earth made new.

All this is for people who come to Jesus Christ in true faith. When the flood of God's judgment comes, you have to be *in* the ark to be saved. Confess your sins and put your trust in Jesus and you will be *in* Christ—alive and well, sailing for the new earth! ■

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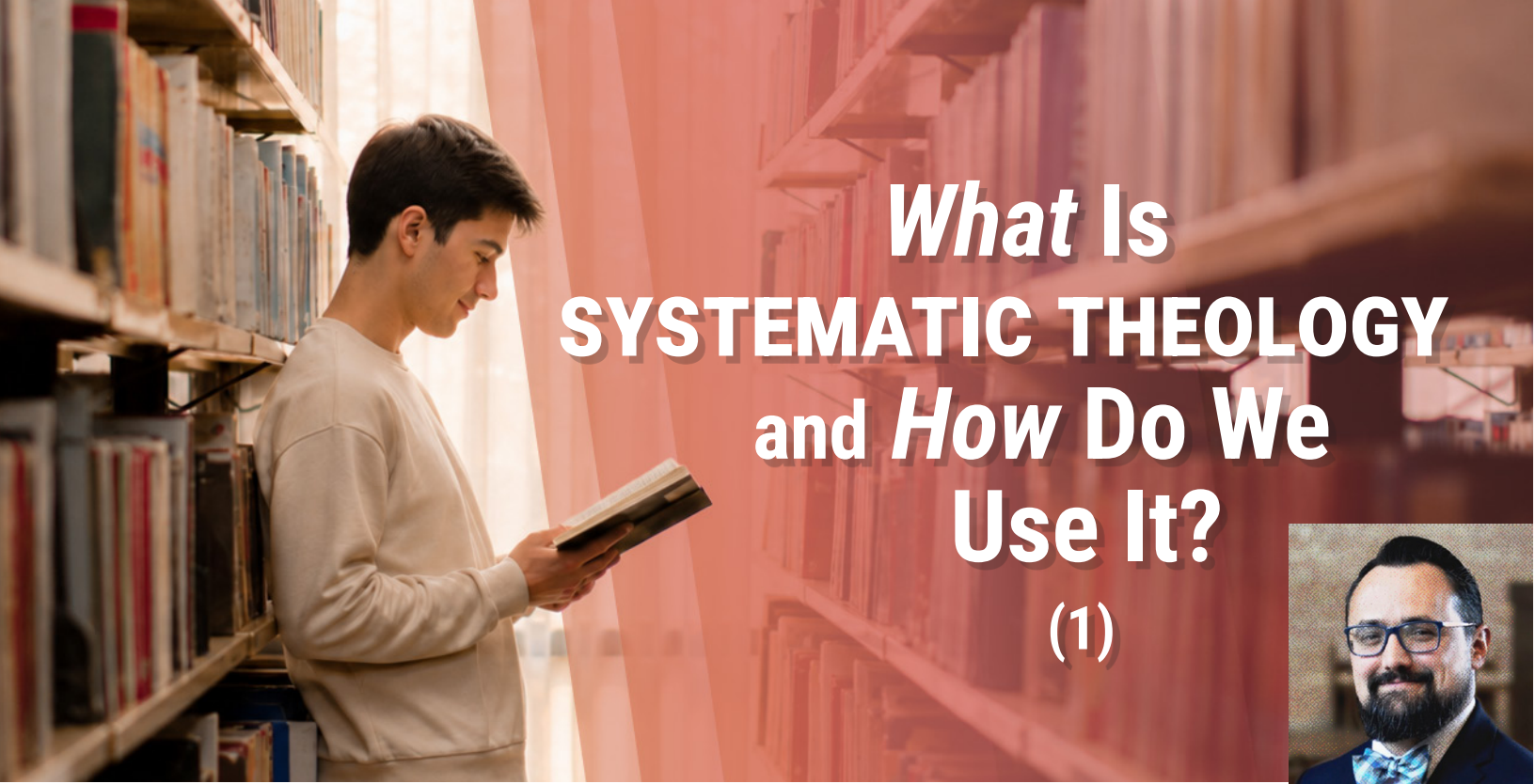


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What Is SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY and How Do We Use It? (1)



Rev. Dr. Daniel **Shrock**

BEFORE WE ANSWER THE QUESTIONS of what Systematic Theology is and what exactly we do with this kind of theology, we need to ask a more basic question. Systematic Theology is a particular subspecies of theology. To understand it, we need to understand the broader species of which it is a part. So what is theology?

The word comes from two Greek words which taken together mean “speech about God.” This broader definition helps us to see how correct R.C. Sproul was when he claimed that “everyone is a theologian.”¹ Whenever and wherever we open our mouths to speak of God, then and there we engage in theology.

Still, we can take things one step back. Theology is not just any kind of speech, but *reasoned* speech (or, to use one of its Greek roots, *logos*). Thus theology also includes all the ways in which the human mind *think* about God even if those thoughts are never expressed in speech. The fool who says “in his heart” that there is no God (Ps. 14:1; 53:1) is still saying

something about God even if such words never leave his lips.

True and False Theology

This positions us then to see that not all theology is true theology. Humans can speak and think false things about God. Even Satan speaks of God (Gen. 3:1; Matt. 4:5–6) and demons believe things about Him (James 2:19). Theology can be not just false in a benign way, but truly diabolical. What then draws the boundary between true and false theology?

Paul says that at a basic level everyone knows God because God Himself has ensured that they do. He does not leave it up to us to reason our way

to Him. He makes Himself known to us (Rom. 1:19–21). The problem is that we can pervert the knowledge that we have in the way we go about thinking through and applying that knowledge. The Bible assures us that the human mind will always do this so long as it has not been renewed by Christ (Rom. 1:21; 8:7; 1 Cor. 1:20–25; Eph. 4:18; Col. 1:21).

To be a true theologian requires the Holy Spirit to illumine your mind and change your heart (1 Cor. 2:12–13; Eph. 1:18; Acts 26:18). To be a true theologian is to have the third Person of the Godhead as your teacher. Of course, to experience this is to experience having Christ as your teacher as well. He is the one who gives the Spirit (John 3:34) and reveals the Father (Matt. 11:27). Christ does not cease to be our Prophet in His ascension but continues to reveal to us “by His word and Spirit, the will of God for our salvation” (WSC Q&A 24).

Theology as Pilgrimage and Wisdom

We also need to ask, “What *kind* of knowledge is theology?” Several Reformed theologians have aptly classified it as a kind of wisdom. Franciscus Junius explains, “[S]ince it makes judgments about first principles of the sciences in the understanding and about the conclusions from these, as well as embracing by its power all things that are necessary for the perfection of every good, and taking use of them all most wisely.”² As a kind of wisdom, theology not only seeks to know the truth about God for truth’s sake, but also to order all of life according to that truth. Thus, it is not only a theoretical sort of knowledge, but also a practical one. We will return to this later as we consider why it is every Christian should care about theology and more specifically systematic theology.

Another question that will help us understand our task as theologians better is this: when do we do theology? I do not have in mind merely the moments and occasions in life in which we think about God in His relation to us and our world. I mean instead to ask, When do we do theology in the course of history? That may seem like a consideration that is far afield from any practical consideration of how to think about theology, but it is not. History is not a random series of events. It is ordered by God’s providence according to His eternal decree. It has a structure and purpose to it which comes from these realities. And it conditions what we do as true theologians who are united to Christ and taught by His Spirit.

There is a very old way of thinking about the task of theology as the enterprise of a pilgrim. Augustine puts it this way: “That is why, since we are meant to enjoy that truth which is unchangeably alive, and

since it is in its light that God the Trinity, author and maker of the universe, provides for all the things he has made, our minds have to be purified, to enable them to perceive that light, and to cling to it once perceived. We should think of this purification process as being a kind of walk, a kind of voyage toward our home country.”³

We do not yet speak and think about God as those who see Him face to face in glory (1 Cor. 13:12). Instead, we do so as exiles and pilgrims (Heb. 13:14). Our theology is undertaken as those who live at that point in history in which Christ has already come and revealed the mystery that was long kept hidden (Rom. 16:25; Eph. 3:4–5; Col. 1:26–27; 1 Pet. 1:10–12), but has not yet returned so that we might know Him by sight (1 John 3:2; Rev. 22:3–5). We do not possess a theology of vision, but a theology of pilgrimage.

The Time Between the Times

Hence, we engage the work of theology as those who live in the time between the times—that is, as those who live in the experience of what Christ has *already* done for us and applied to us, yet *still await* how He will perfect that work when we see Him in heaven and more consummately when He comes again. We need to know where we are in the plotline of God’s work. Doing so will keep us humble, and without humility we will not know God (Ps. 25:9; James 4:6).

A consequence of the redemptive-historical context of our theology is that, although we can always be assured that if we are in Christ our theology is fundamentally true, it will nevertheless remain imperfect in this life. Therefore, it should not be stagnant but maturing. Illumination is not a static reality; we ought to be “increasing in the knowledge of God” (Col. 1:10). We can never rest in smug satisfaction but must always

realize there is yet more to learn, both individually and corporately.

All the branches of theology will help us to do this. But systematic theology will make a unique contribution to how we grow in what it means for us to know God. So, then, what is Systematic Theology?

How Systematic Theology Relates to Other Studies

Theology is an organic whole, but like any organism it has specific components which make up that whole. The study of the relationships between these parts is sometimes called “Theological Encyclopedia.” This does not mean an attempt to arrange theological topics in alphabetical order in a catalog, but rather to think about the complete circle of theological disciplines and how they relate to one another.

Exegetical Theology has primacy of place in this arrangement since theology must be, as Geerhardus Vos puts it, “a process in which God speaks and man listens.”⁴ Exegesis is the discipline of drawing out from the individual texts of Scripture what God has to say in them. But God has not given us the Bible as doctrinal codebook; it is composed of many genres of literature and delivered over a long history (Heb. 1:1–2). If we are to exegete any passage of Scripture appropriately, we also need to do so in a way that is aware of how it is situated in that history of revelation. The discipline of Biblical Theology does this. It traces out the history of God’s redemptive revelation.

Systematic Theology is in close contact with Exegetical Theology and Biblical Theology and depends upon them; otherwise, it will go astray from what God has actually said about Himself. And it is distinct from and yet dependent upon Historical Theology. Historical Theology investigates the long

history of the Church's experience as well as its varied and cumulative attempt to engage in the task of theology. Systematic Theology must be conversant with and dependent on Historical Theology because no Christian is called to read the Bible in isolation. Our calling as individual theologians is "to comprehend *with all the saints* what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge..." (Eph. 3:18–19). Herman Bavinck incisively warns, "Whoever isolates himself from the church, i.e., from Christianity as a whole, from the history of dogma in its entirety, loses the truth of the Christian faith. That person becomes a branch that is torn from the tree and shrivels, an organ that is separated from the body and therefore doomed to die."⁵

Systematic Theology ignores the history of Christian theology at its own peril. It must pay close attention to it, especially the history of theological consensus that is represented in creeds and confessions. We must stand on the shoulders of those who went before and not be so arrogant as to think we can start from scratch and do a better job of reconstructing the whole house of Systematic Theology all by ourselves.

In light of these distinctions, Systematic Theology does not seek to answer what any individual text or book of Scripture teaches (Exegetical and Biblical Theology), nor necessarily what various Christians throughout history have thought the Bible teaches (Historical Theology). It seeks to answer the question of what the Bible *does* teach as a whole. There is an organic and coherent unity to the "the whole counsel of God" (Acts 20:27) as it is given us in Scripture. Systematic Theology aims to set forth that unity in a way that is organized not by the history

of revelation, but in the systematic relations which are internal to it.

Scripture is not only its first principle for this task; it is its *only* first principle. This is what is meant by the Reformation slogan *sola Scriptura*. This Reformational stance does not mean that the Bible is to be read in isolation from the church and its history of theological reflection; but it does mean that the Bible is the only *ultimate norm* and only *ultimate source* for systematic theology. While our experience, our reason, and the tradition of the church must be factors in how we do Systematic Theology, none of them can be a source for what we know about God in a way that supplements Scripture.

The synthesizing work of Systematic Theology, however, doesn't merely quote Scripture as bare proof texts. It traces out the relationships of what they all say together and seeks to understand how all the truths of theology exist together in a coherent whole as *the truth*. B.B. Warfield observes, "If we know so much as two facts concerning God, the human mind is incapable of holding these facts apart; it must contemplate them in relation to one another. Systematization is only a part of the irrepressible effort of the intelligence

to comprehend the facts presented to it, an effort which the intelligence can escape only by ceasing to be intelligence."⁶

For example, what the Bible has to say about the immutability of God will impact how we conceive of the relationship between Christ's divine and human natures. What the Bible has to say about the consequences of sin will affect how we think of sin's remedies in justification, sanctification, and adoption. What Scripture says about union with Christ in His suffering will shape how we think about the church's relation to history and its conclusion. Doctrines do not exist in isolation but mutually inform one another, and tracing those relationships is the job of Systematic Theology.

To do this systematizing work, it also seeks to understand what are called "the good and necessary consequences" of Scripture. There is an old Dutch saying which is not quite as punchy when it is translated into English: *Elke ketter heeft zijn letter*. It means, "Every heretic has their text." Much of the heresy that has haunted the Church has come about by reading individual texts of Scripture in isolation from the rest of Scripture and even negating

"The systematic theologian ought not merely to try to know *about* God, but further to know God Himself.... When it is what it ought to be, Systematic Theology has a transformative impact upon our existence. It must, therefore, be a discipline which leads to and enhances both practice and worship."

other things Scripture says. “Good and necessary consequence” helps to safeguard against this.

Ryan McGraw provides a fine definition: “[T]he term ‘good and necessary consequence’ refers to doctrines and precepts that are truly contained in and intended by the divine Author of Scripture, yet are not found or stated on the surface of the text and must be legitimately inferred from one or more passages of Scripture. As the phrase indicates, such inferences must be ‘good,’ or legitimately drawn from the text of Scripture. In addition, they must be ‘necessary,’ as opposed to imposed or arbitrary.”⁷

Jesus Himself provides us with an example to follow. He proved the resurrection from a text which does not *directly* speak about it (Matt. 22:31–33; Exod. 3:6).

The Goal of Systematic Theology

Systematic Theology endeavors to understand the rich fullness of what God has revealed to us not just in the exact words of Scripture but in what those words entail and how they all relate to each other in a unified organism of divine self-

disclosure. It does this by moving through an orderly arrangement of topics which have a certain logic to their sequence. It asks questions like: What is theology and how do we do it? How do we know God? What are God’s attributes? How is He triune? What is man? What is sin? Who is Christ? How are we saved? What is the church? What is the ultimate end of all things?

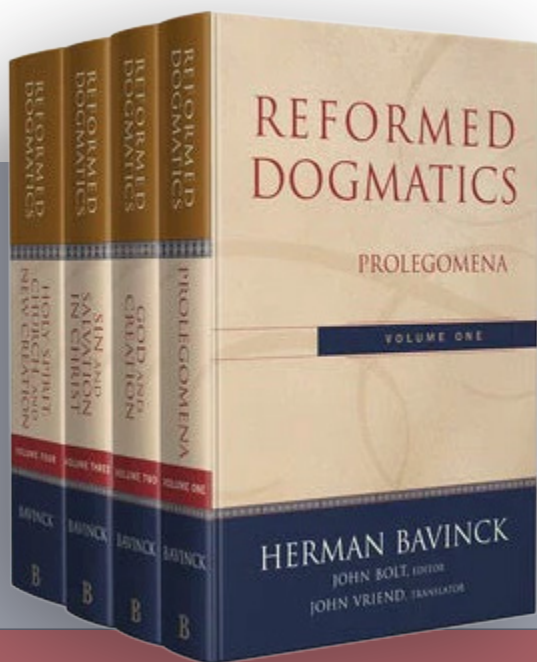
But it does not ask these questions out of idle curiosity. The systematic theologian ought not merely to try to know *about* God, but further to know God Himself (Gal. 4:8–9). This is the sum and substance of eternal life (John 17:1–3). The discipline of Systematic Theology walks upon sacred ground and must live in relational vitality with the God whom it seeks to understand. The systematic theologian must endeavor to love Him with all his heart, and soul, *and mind* (Matt. 22:37). He submits both his intellect and his will to God’s Word in faith. He does this as one who has been made a partaker of Christ and thus longs to see His face. He knows this theology to be true wisdom which orders all of life to that singular goal. When it is what it ought to be, Systematic Theology has a transformative

impact upon our existence. It must, therefore, be a discipline which leads to and enhances both practice and worship. ■

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Keeping God First in Marriage: A Biblical Warning for Women

Mrs. Annemarieke **Ryskamp**



TITUS 2:3 STATES: “[Older women] are to teach what is good, and so train the young women to love their husbands and children....” This article offers biblical encouragement for women from a personal and practical standpoint.

Two major assaults on Christian marriages are ongoing. One is described in the Bible: the curse given to Eve in Genesis 3:16. The other is the result of this curse: the ruler of this world is working hard to deceive us, to spoil God’s ways, and lead us away from our Savior.

The good news is that Jesus can nullify parts of the curse in us and also that He overcame the world. This means that the closer we stay to God’s ideas of marriage, the more we will experience His intended blessings. And the more we keep Him the center of our marriages, the more we can avoid pitfalls.

Part One: God’s Design— and the Distortion of It

GENESIS 3:16: *To the woman God said: I will surely multiply your pain in childbearing; in pain you shall bring forth children. Your desire shall be for your husband, but he shall rule over you.*¹

In eating the fruit of the forbidden tree, Eve’s great mistake was her desire to be like God and to place her will above His revelation. Her relationship to her husband was devastated by her desire for independence. What would have

been freedom under sinless headship of her husband would now become tainted with her resentment and his desire to domineer. Many of us live according to these sin-cursed ways because we do not realize that we were redeemed from them by the suffering and death of Jesus.

But there are still the desires that are baked into us as women, and there is also the devil who is always telling us the same lie: we should not listen to God. That is what causes many girls to make mistakes that have consequences for the rest of their lives.

It regularly starts with the desire to get married for the wrong reasons. For example, just wanting a beautiful wedding day with the beautiful dress and flowers and attention. Or wanting to escape a bad situation at home. Or having unrealistic dreams about being married. Or wanting badly to become a mother and have children. In some cases, women are in such a hurry for all these things that they’re willing to take a non-Christian as their spouse. Yet all these mistakes make for a bad start of a covenantal marriage that is supposed to last a lifetime. In God’s grace, none of it needs to lead to divorce; if one or both spouses pursue Him, God is able to heal anything in a marriage relationship that honors Him. Yet it plants weeds that will be difficult to eradicate in marriage.

My personal mistake was that I was too much of a dreamer. I thought marriage consisted of being with my best friend, a perfect man who would be interested in everything that concerned me and would be there for me at all times. God waited until I had grown up (which was at age 30) before He thought it wise to send a man into my life. Fortunately, as we were both believers, God sustained our marriage until death did us part.

2 CORINTHIANS 6:14-16:

Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers. For what partnership has righteousness with lawlessness? Or what fellowship has light with darkness? What accord has Christ with Belial? Or what portion does a believer share with an unbeliever? What agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God.

Why is this so important? Because God's purpose with marriage is bringing and showing the good news of Jesus our Savior to the world. The family is the cornerstone of society and that's exactly why the world, in step with the devil, puts in so much effort to destroy it.

When there are children to raise, it is important that both parents are believers so they are being raised in the fear of the Lord. Children receive the Christian worldview from their parents. While ordinarily sons are to look at their father's faith, Timothy's mother and grandmother were praised by Paul for their sincere faith and raising Timothy in the Scriptures from infancy (2 Tim. 1:5).

Of course, every marriage is different and every man and woman have a fallen nature, so therefore God has made provisions for mistakes that are made and that are impossible to work out. In Matthew 19:8 and Mark 10:5, Jesus says that divorce was permitted under certain circumstances "because of your hardness of heart." Paul elaborates on separation and singleness in 1 Corinthians 7 and ends up wishing that everybody would just be unmarried like him, which is a great encouragement for single people.

When you marry another believer, the two of you will always have the great, supernatural Counselor, whom you can consult on every occasion and in every decision that you have

to make. God is the only one who can really change a heart and you can trust Him with your heart, too.

EPHESIANS 4:32: *Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.*

One way I think I can help other women love their husbands as commanded in Titus 2 is to share my own mistakes in hopes that they might avoid them. Here is an example that happened a lot. Something would come up that I found difficult to deal with. So I would ask my husband for support or advice (after all, we're a team, right?). He would forget about it or be off to work and I'd be on my own (or so I thought) and everything worked out okay after all. But I would be very disappointed in my husband. When I tried to tell him, he would say: "You are always so *angry!*" And *that* would make me angry. After repeating this scenario many times, I became resentful, though I claimed I was just "losing my love" for him. After 25 years of things like this, resentment had settled in the dark basement of my soul as bitterness. I prefer not to go down into the basement of my soul, and I can pretend it doesn't exist, but of course it's still there—even after ten years of widowhood it comes to the surface in dreams or other unexpected occasions.

What went wrong? Several things. I frequently went to my husband first whenever I had a problem whereas I should have gone to God first and prayed! Not doing that deprived me of God's ordinary way of providing help—or even supernatural help. It's still one of the biggest mistakes that even Christian women make.

Every time it ended well, I should have given God the credit instead of myself, but my focus was usually on my husband instead of God. I'd say to myself: "*I made it in spite of my husband.*" When this happened,

I missed yet another chance of all the fruits of the Spirit by letting resentment live in my heart. Resentment builds up and can easily turn into bitterness. Hebrews 12:15 warns: "See to it that no one fails to obtain the grace of God; that no 'root of bitterness' springs up and causes trouble, and by it many become defiled." Note that he calls it a *root* because it goes down into the dark and defiles. It is so much better to keep your soul whole and not have a dark part in it. God wants us to be whole, so let His light shine in your soul, in every nook and cranny.

Was our marriage doomed because of this? Not at all! We were both sincere believers and had a lot of growing to do, both in our faith and in relation to each other. We had the same end goal for our marriage, which was raising our sons in the fear of the Lord. Even when we disagreed on issues, having the same worldview and goal solved so many of our problems. And over the years we both learned some lessons.

We all are fallen and make mistakes. But when we have God first in every aspect of our lives, including in the intimate relationship of marriage, we can avoid many pitfalls and produce more fruit of the Spirit (love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control [Gal. 5:22-23]).

GENESIS 1:28: *And God blessed them. And God said to them, "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 moves on the earth."*

This mandate is reiterated to Noah and his family in Genesis 9:1 and becomes more difficult because of the fear that all living things now have for humans.

From the context of the mandate to be fruitful and multiply, we can see that this is not about having as many children as possible. In order to be able to do the other things and to raise our children correctly in the fear of the Lord, we need to be realistic and realize we are people living after the Fall, with our flesh still being fragile and living in the world where sadness is rampant.

Wanting children and to be a mother should never be the main motivation to get married. You don't know God's plan and you don't know if children are part of it. Pray hard and be honest with yourself and to God, and you will have no regrets later.

Jesus said to His disciples: "I chose you, and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide, so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you" (John 15:16). We who are His disciples are also to be fruitful and multiply spiritually, as well as physically. Then, in the age to come, "the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord" (Isa. 11:9), and the barren woman will have more children than the married one, says the Lord (Isa. 54:1).

Part Two: The World's Lies About Women and Marriage

We all live in the world and are daily confronted with the lies and attacks that are made on Christians and the sacred institution of marriage. These are some of the world's favorite ideas that they want to push on you.

- You're objectified because you're just a cog in the evolution, just a mass of cells or an evolved animal. Of course you can "marry" anyone or anything you like.
- You can only love if you love yourself first
- You should do only what feels good in marriage

- You may pick your own gender and marry any other gender
- Men, as in males, are worthless in general and certainly as leaders in the family
- Women should never submit to their husband
- Morality is so out of fashion; just do what feels good to you
- Traditions are to be abolished: being a housewife or a stay-at-home mom is so extreme!

Note how all of these are twisting and perverting good mandates given by God. As the world is working on a "civilization" where God is excluded, I want to tell the following factual incident as a sample of how fast things can change if we are not alert.

In February 2026, the present CIA director retracted a number of biased intelligence products which included an October 6, 2021 Intelligence Assessment titled, "Women Advancing White Racially and Ethnically Motivated Violent Extremist Radicalization and Recruitment."

The summary warned that women are "emerging as key players" in the white extremist movement, taking on diverse roles to advance (among other things) "traditional motherhood." The report red-flagged organizations that "lauded motherhood and homemaking as women's most important responsibility." They even came up with a sinister new acronym, REMVE. It stands for: "Racial or Ethnically Motivated Violent Extremism." Note the words "violent" and the "extremism."

The actual violent conduct flagged in the report was as follows: lauding motherhood, homemaking, making cooking videos, discussing organic food, producing online content about traditional family roles, and "subtle narratives" about Western civilization. By slapping the label

"violent" on a report that only identified conduct of speech and beliefs, the CIA transformed thought crimes into a key that opened the door to domestic surveillance of stay-at-home moms and homeschoolers.

Thankfully this report is retracted in the US, but something similar was just implemented in Canada. This is how God sees it as described in Isaiah 5:20–21, and what should motivate us as Christian women to stand our ground: "Woe to those who call evil good and good evil, who put darkness for light and light for darkness, who put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter! Woe to those who are wise in their own eyes, and shrewd in their own sight!"

The world is very serious in its efforts to dismantle God's design for marriage. "Don't be deceived," as Jesus warned many times. There's still time for the women in the church, the (grand)mothers and teachers, to teach the younger women God's intentions with the marriage that He created. Good books are available as well as many articles online and messages on YouTube. But your favorite go-to Counselor should always be God and His Book, the Bible. This article is meant to encourage you to take God's words very seriously, to stand in the ongoing spiritual warfare, and to trust our Savior who died for us and redeemed us and is able to restore and bless us beyond our imagination. ■

1. In 2016, the ESV revised the phrase "for your husband" (from 2001) to "contrary to your husband." The 2025 edition restored the earlier translation, "for your husband," a translation also found in other translations, including the CSB, NASB, NIV, and NKJV.

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CHURCH

Membership

BENEFITS OF BELONGING (2)



Rev. Dr. Shane **Lems**

“WHAT’S IN IT FOR ME?” Although people might not ask this question out loud, it does convey the individualistic attitude of most Americans. We want things done our way and for our benefit. We also want to live our lives in our own way. As I mentioned in my first article on church membership, this individualistic mindset clashes with the Bible’s teachings. Scripture calls Christians to avoid selfishness and instead love, serve, help, and pray for others. We need to resist the pull of individualism and commit to being part of God’s family, the Church. The Christian life is meant to be lived in fellowship with other Christians.

In my previous article, I demonstrated that though there is not one Bible verse that explicitly says “become a member of a local church,” the Bible does teach this truth. You can see hints of this in the Old Testament, where God’s people belonged to His covenant community. You can see church membership in the New Testament stories in Acts, where people heard the gospel and became part of the

church. You can also learn about membership in the New Testament through the care of widows in the church. Some of Paul’s letters are written to specific churches—not just random people, but Christians who were actively participating in the life of the local church. Finally, you can see clear hints of church membership in leadership texts, which tell elders to care for Christians and Christians to submit to their elders.¹

Benefits of Church Membership

Church membership is not some dry, irrelevant teaching. It offers a sense of belonging and community, providing comfort and security. Christians who are active and involved in the life of the church and the fellowship of the saints enjoy the benefits of being in the family of God. There are many blessings

and benefits of belonging to a local church. In this article, I'll list three benefits of belonging. Lord willing, in the third article, I will list three more. I would encourage you to think it over and even add to the list.

Before listing these blessings of belonging, let me share a helpful insight I recently read in one of Soren Kierkegaard's writings: "Grow in the soil where you really belong."² Wherever God puts you, that's where you belong. Grow there. Applied to the topic of membership, it means to serve, pray for, love, and live the Christian life together in the church family where God has planted you.

Accountability

I don't have a specific order for the benefits of belonging, but I'll start with A for accountability. One benefit you receive from being part of Christ's church is accountability. You're accountable to other people, and they're accountable to you.

Various biblical texts mention accountability in the Christian community. Galatians 6:1 is a good example: "Brothers and sisters, if someone is caught in a sin, you who live by the Spirit should restore that person gently" (NIV). We don't have space to unpack this rich text in detail, but Paul's words imply that Christians are accountable to one another. If I get stuck in sin, my Christian brothers and sisters should work towards restoring me to obedience. As a child in God's family, my fellow brothers and sisters care for me and hold me accountable for my actions in a loving way.

Another text to consider is James 5:19-20, which is similar to Galatians 6:1. James says that if a Christian starts to wander from the truth, the brother or sister who brings him back has rescued him from death. There's implied accountability: if someone in the church family is straying from the truths of the faith,

others will try to restore him and bring him back. And if you do that, James says, you're saving his soul from death.

Christians in a local church are not random, disconnected individuals. Instead, we're brothers and sisters called to care for and serve each other in love. We are in many ways responsible for each other. This goes against the grain of American individualism, where people think, "No, I'm not responsible for anybody but myself. To each his own!" But let's do away with that kind of thinking and follow the biblical pattern of community and accountability. We actually *are* responsible for and to one another. Because Christians love one another in Christ, we care about other Christians who might be stumbling, straying, or not following Christ's commands. This isn't a call for us to be the church morality police; it's a call to love and serve.

And this is a blessing, isn't it? Let's say you start struggling in the faith. You go through a difficult period in your Christian life. It would be a great blessing for you if some of your Christian friends would come to pray with you, help you, and encourage you. On the other hand, if you start struggling with some sin and nobody comes and helps you or cares, that would convey a lack of love from the Christian community. But it also would be harmful for you, because you would be wrestling with sin without other Christians to help.

If you see another Christian struggling in the faith, please don't ignore the person or wonder what's wrong with him. And certainly don't gossip! Instead, say to yourself: "That brother or sister is struggling in the faith, and he or she is part of this Christian family. I have an obligation to help them and lovingly and gently hold them accountable." That's the biblical way. It is our duty to keep

each other accountable. I know that's hard to think about, but it *is* your business if a member of your own church family falls into sin. And you who are mature in the faith should go to that person and lovingly try to restore them. If you don't know that person or if that's too difficult, you should pray for them and perhaps privately talk to an elder or other mature Christian about your concern.

I recently read a story about an emergency room nurse who was caring for a man in the ER. The man had tried to commit suicide by taking an entire bottle of pain pills. The ER nurse was caring for him by helping him eliminate the toxins from his body. After some time, the patient started to recover and was moved to a different room in the hospital. The ER nurse later approached the senior attending physician to ask whether she could visit the patient a few times that day. The senior physician said, "Sure, but why would you do that?" The nurse replied, "Because I don't want him to fall through the cracks." (I'm thankful for good nurses like that!)

This is a good mindset for us as Christians in a local church: "I don't want that person to fall through the cracks." We should hold each other accountable and be there for one another. We won't let a Christian struggle with sin and fall through the cracks. Done rightly, accountability is one of the blessings of being part of a local church.

A Place to Serve

Another benefit of belonging to a local church family is that it gives you a specific place to serve and use your spiritual gifts. God has given each of you gifts from His rich storehouse (1 Pet. 4:10). Peter says we should use our gifts to serve one another. God has not given you gifts for selfish purposes or for you to serve yourself, but for you to serve

others. Being part of a local church family gives you a specific context to use your gifts in service to others. As the Heidelberg Catechism says, “Each member should consider it his duty to use his gifts readily and cheerfully for the service and enrichment of the other members” (HC Q/A 55).

Of course, we can use our gifts to serve our unbelieving neighbors. We can show them what Christianity is by serving them. And of course, you should serve other Christians that you come into contact with. But again, I’m thinking of the phrase “grow in the soil where you really belong.” You can’t serve everyone everywhere all the time.

Think about it this way. God, in His wise providence, has put you in a certain church family, and that is the context in which you can use your gifts to serve. This is a blessing because you have a specific people to serve. If you weren’t a member of a church and you floated from church to church, you might think, “Okay, I have to use my gifts to serve, but now who do I serve? Where do I start?” That’s overwhelming! And if we’re honest, most of us would probably end up only serving people who are like us and avoiding others who aren’t like us.

But when you consider your church family, you can think: “This is the place I can use my gifts to serve God’s people. I can grow in this soil, use my gifts, and bear fruit here along with other Christians.” This concept is freeing for me as a pastor. I like to help people, but I can’t do it all. I don’t have time, energy, or the mental bandwidth to serve every person around me who needs help. But God has placed me in a specific church to serve a specific church family, which really helps me focus my gifts and my energies to serve in the family. It’s a blessing for me to focus my gifts on serving in my

local church. The same can be said of other Christians. God has put you in a specific church family; embrace that family and serve it!

Christian Examples

One more blessing of belonging has to do with Christian example. What I mean is that when you’re an active member of a Christian church, you are surrounded by examples of Christian living. If you’re not a member of a church, you may have a handful of Christians in your life who show you a good Christian example. But if you’re a member of a church family, you will have many examples of what it means to follow Christ in faith. You’ll interact with men and women who have been following Jesus for fifty years. And you’ll witness the faith of that single mom who clung to Christ through the dark days when her ex-husband abused her. You’ll see young people on fire with faith. You can talk to Christians who have faced this or that trial while being preserved by God’s grace. All these Christians will be great examples of the faith for you. I have been encouraged in my faith countless times by Christian examples of others in my church family. What a blessing!

This reminds me of what Paul said to young Timothy. He told Timothy to set an example in love, faith, speech, and purity (1 Tim. 4:12). This should be a goal for all of us: be good examples for one another so that they learn about Christian living from your example.

Being part of a church family is also a major blessing for kids. They are part of God’s covenant people along with the adults. When I baptize a child during a worship service, following the OPC’s *Book of Church Order*, I give the congregation a charge to set an example in faith and piety for the child and to pray for him or her. Children in a church family are

blessed to be surrounded by good examples in the Christian faith. I cannot overstate the importance and significance of this. I thank God for the good Christians in my church family, past and present, who have been good Christian examples for my kids.

Conclusion

Some Christians might be quick to complain about their church. The cultural spirit of criticism is not absent from the modern Christian mind! Even the best church in the entire world falls very short of perfection. In this present age, there will never be anything close to a perfect church. At the same time, if you stop, pray, and think about it from a biblical perspective, the church is a community through which God greatly blesses His people. It might not make headlines or go viral online, but when Christians practice accountability, serve one another with their gifts, and model the Christian life for others, God is glorified and His people are edified.

In our final article, we will look at three more benefits of belonging. ■

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1. For more information on these points, see part one of this essay: “The Biblical Elements of Church Membership.”
 2. From a journal entry, “Copenhagen, June 1, 1835,” from *The Essential Kierkegaard*, eds. Hong and Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980).

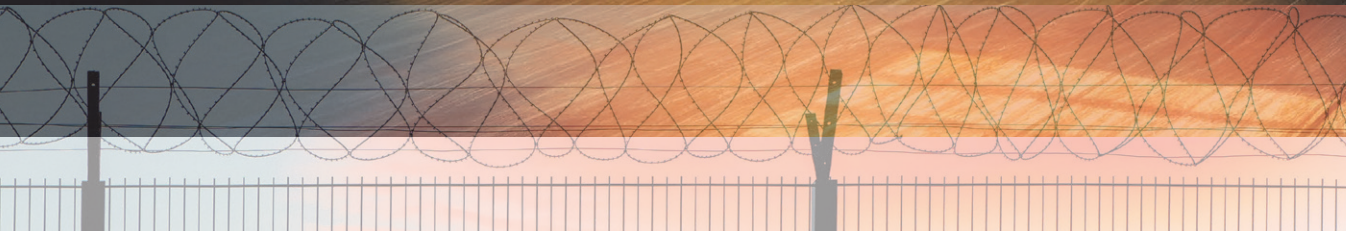
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Divine

PROVIDENCE

(5)



Mr. Daniel **Olaska**

Providence Article 5 of 6 Colossians, Hebrews, and God's Providential Preservation

THE FIRST FOUR INSTALLMENTS in this series on the doctrine of divine providence have largely focused on the aspect of providence regarding God's *governance* of His creation. In this article, I am going to focus specifically on the aspect of divine providence regarding God *preserving* His creation. Fewer passages of Scripture deal directly with God's preservation than His governance, but two are particularly helpful. I will focus on the following two anchor verses:

- “And He [Christ] is before all things, and *in Him all things hold together*” (Col. 1:17, emphasis mine)

- “He [Christ] is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of His nature, and *He upholds the universe by the word of His power*. After making purification for sins, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high” (Heb. 1:3, emphasis mine)

These two magnificent verses make explicit what is implicit throughout Scripture and are especially helpful in highlighting the Son of God's role in divine providence.

God Does Not Abandon His Creation

In some ways, the idea of providential preservation is less offensive to human pride than governance. This is perhaps part of the reason why less space is dedicated to it in the Word of God.

We do not rebel at this idea as much and therefore need less correction. That is not to say we do not need to hear this truth any less than we need to hear of God's governance in providence—quite the contrary. Knowing God's preservation of creation at every moment bolsters our trust in Him immensely.

Periodically, I've contrasted the Biblical viewpoint with that of the deist. In addition to the fact that it is true, the Biblical viewpoint is far superior to that of the deist in many ways, particularly about this topic. God is not a hands-off, creator-only god; He is not an absentee god. God is the Creator, Sustainer, and Governor of His creation, the universe; and He is intimately involved in every aspect of history. God is not a clockmaker who simply wound up the universe and left it to

run absent any further involvement. Our anchor verses show that even the continued existence of the universe from moment to moment is utterly dependent upon the Lord.

God may have rested from creation on the seventh day, but at no moment in the history of the universe has He ever rested from upholding and preserving, and governing. In the fifth chapter of the Gospel of John, Jesus says, “My Father is working until now, and I am working” (John 5:17). Both upholding and governing are included in “working” here; this is consistent throughout all history and never ceases even for a moment. Preservation is just as critical as creation and governance, and in our two anchor verses, all three are present in the immediate context.

Christ Upholds All Things

The Heidelberg Catechism uses the term “upholds,” as does Hebrews. Colossians uses “hold together.” Preservation is a useful technical term, but I like the almost poetic term “upholds” more, as it implies the intimate nature of preservation. Take, for example, a parent upholding a baby, who fully embraces the baby while holding him or her up. Such a baby is utterly dependent on their mother or father upholding them. If the parent were to momentarily cease upholding that baby, injury or disaster would occur. This is an imperfect analogy, but it gets to the intimate nature of how an all-loving God upholds all creation at all times. God cares far more than even the most devoted mother could possibly imagine; His attention is closer than we could conceive.

Modern physics states that the nuclei of atoms are held together by the strong nuclear force. What physics omits is how or why the strong nuclear force exists, and how it works. Its work can be described, but why should a cluster of positively charged protons and neutrally

charged neutrons stick together so well rather than repel one another as Coulomb’s Law dictates they ought? That we can’t grasp other than to know that it is true. It has been proven that Coulomb’s Law applies to sub-atomic nuclei. Indeed, the electrostatic force and magnetism are well understood; even little children are able to grasp the concept of opposite charges, or poles, attracting. Yet, the strong nuclear force works in the opposite way!

John MacArthur eloquently summarizes the Lord’s sustaining work:

He [Jesus] maintains the delicate balance necessary to life’s existence. He quite literally holds all things together. He is the power behind every consistency in the Universe. He is gravity and centrifugal and centripetal force. He is the One who keeps all the entities in space in their motion. He is the energy of the Universe.¹

Scientists use the term Anthropic Principle to describe the fact that the more we discover about the nature and working of the universe, the more we find it appears to have been perfectly fine-tuned for humans. In fact, the odds that each individual factor be exactly what they happen to be are less than one in the number of elementary particles (protons, electrons, and neutrons) in the universe! Those who deny God’s existence may say: “Well, of course things are exactly this way. If they were even slightly different, we wouldn’t be here to observe them!” To which I respond: “Exactly.” Far from the Anthropic Principle disproving God, I find it one of the stronger proofs of His existence.

Creation Bears Witness to God’s Providence

All creation proclaims the work of God. “The heavens declare the glory

of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork. Day to day pours out speech, and night to night reveals knowledge” (Ps. 19:1–2). God’s handiwork in creation and providence is particularly highlighted in the beauty of the night sky. While men may try to suppress this knowledge, all know it. “For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. For His invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse” (Rom. 1:19–20). The continued existence of all creation attests to the existence, power, and sovereignty of God in a manner all mankind can see and understand.

God’s preservation in providence also attests to God’s love, grace, and patience! God’s faithfulness is clear to all minute by minute, hour by hour, day by day, year by year, century by century. He has never slipped, He has never rested, He has never forgotten. Is the floor solid beneath your feet? Praise God for His faithful upholding! Do the atoms, molecules, and greater structures that make up your body hold together? Praise God for His upholding! God’s providence is far more than some intellectual curiosity. In my final article in this series I will look at just how practical this wonderful doctrine is and how precious it is for the believer in Christ. ■

1. John MacArthur, *Colossians and Philemon*, The MacArthur New Testament Commentary (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 1992), 49.

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Lord's Day 41: You Can Be Freed from Sexual Immorality

Rev. William Boekestein



108Q. What is God's will for us in the seventh commandment?

A. That God condemns all unchastity, and that we should therefore detest it wholeheartedly and live decent and chaste lives, within or outside of the holy state of marriage.

108Q. Does God, in this commandment, forbid only such scandalous sins as adultery?

A. We are temples of the Holy Spirit, body and soul, and God wants both to be kept clean and holy. That is why God forbids all unchaste actions, looks, talk, thoughts, or desires, and whatever may incite someone to them.

AT A GLANCE, the seventh commandment seems right to almost everyone; literal adultery (extramarital sex) is generally frowned upon. But the law goes far deeper. It condemns “all unchastity.” God’s law governs everything about our sexuality. Understood that way, many people have no use for the seventh commandment. Unregulated sexual freedom is increasingly viewed as a human right.

But the seventh commandment is truly good for us. God knows better than we do how sex can build up or destroy. He aims to guard us from the fallout of sexual sin and to promote safe, fruitful, enjoyable, God-honoring sexual relations.

How Does God View Sex?

The Bible applauds appropriate sex between a man and a woman who are married to each other. Biblical sex is not something to be ashamed of; the Song of Solomon overtly celebrates it! Scripture sets a pattern for God’s people to talk positively

about sex from our pulpits and in private conversations.

God wired His people to “be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth” (Gen. 1:28). Before the Fall, Adam and Eve enjoyed each other intimately with no shame (Gen. 2:24–25), but sin tragically perverted and corrupted marital love.¹ It could not cancel the goodness of proper intimacy, however. After God confronted and comforted the first sinners, we read this: “Adam knew Eve his wife, and she conceived” (Gen. 4:1). Adam and Eve’s love-making and Eve’s conception signal to readers

the hopefulness of God’s redeeming work. The rest of the Bible says that sex within marriage is a gift of our gracious God meant to promote companionship, prevent sexual sin, and populate the church and world with godly people.

But there is a darker side to sex. Sexual sin displeases God and degrades humans. God wills our sanctification—our becoming more and more perfect in knowledge, righteousness, and holiness. So He insists that we “abstain from sexual immorality” (1 Thess. 4:3). Sexual deviancy always deforms and detracts; it never satisfies. The sexual sin of believers is especially offensive. We sin against the body which God has bought with Jesus’s blood and in which God’s Spirit dwells (1 Cor. 6:18–20). Throughout the Bible, God warns against sexual immorality precisely because, being good, He truly wants the best for us.

And we must want the best for each other. The law's second table tells us how we must love our neighbor. Unlawful sexual encounters with others—even when consensual—are always harmful and therefore unloving (Rom. 13:10). Sexual immorality is especially unloving to women; in a world where “might makes right,” women are always the biggest losers. It is often unrecognized that God's code of sexual conduct—addressed first to men (Deut. 21:4)—protects women.

Because of the power of sex for good or evil, God's regulation of sexuality is ambitious and exacting, extending far beyond literal adultery. Biblically-sanctioned sex is always between a man and a woman married to each other; all sexual acts outside of marriage are sinful. And sexuality encompasses much more than the sex act: “all unchaste actions, looks, talk, thoughts, or desires” are sin (cf. Eph. 5:3, 4). Like all sin, sexual sin begins in the heart. This is why we must keep our hearts with all vigilance; from them flow the springs of life (Prov. 4:23). We are responsible for our thoughts and how we feed them. We should learn to control ourselves in all areas; those generally undisciplined are hopelessly ill-prepared to “control [their] own bod[ies] in holiness and honor” (1 Thess. 4:4).

How Can I Steward My Sexuality?

Believers agree with the seventh commandment. But how do we practice it?

Hate sexual sin.

The dying-away of the old self requires “more and more to hate” sin (Q&A 89). God's will for us in the seventh commandment is that we “detest [unchastity] wholeheartedly.” A casual sexual attitude invites the devil to entice and devour you. We should hate sexual sin even more

than the devil hates us. Love for God demands hatred for sexual immorality.

Forsake pornography.

Pornography is one of the most common and destructive sexual sins. Using it is adultery. Commit to never viewing anything that would incite you to “unchaste actions...thoughts, or desires.” Take decisive defensive steps and, if you are trapped, get help.

Look out for your neighbor.

God forbids “whatever may incite someone to” unchastity. No one may blame another for his lust. Period. And no Christian should willingly lead another into sexual sin by how they dress or what they say. We must be careful not to awaken love before its time (Song 2:7, 8:4). We must also not awaken sexual interest in anyone to whom we are not married.

Make an escape plan.

Every temptation has a way out (1 Cor. 10:13). But we aren't taking that truth seriously until we plan our escape. So “watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation” (Matt. 26:41). And don't pray alone. Because sin flourishes in secret, become accountable to a trusted spiritual friend. Of course, accountability is no excuse for foolishness. We must avoid enticing situations and flee temptations immediately (Matt. 6:13).

Pursue marriage.

Marriage is not for everyone (1 Cor. 7:7–8). And it doesn't magically cure sin; single people uninterested in living “decent and chaste lives” won't be helped by marriage. But those truly struggling to control their passions should work toward marriage (1 Cor. 7:2, 9). In 1 Corinthians 7, marriage answers Paul's exhortation in chapter 6 to flee sexual immorality. Ulrich Zwingli was right: “There is nothing between chastity and marriage.”²

Be sexually active in marriage.

“Decent and chaste” living within “the holy state of marriage” requires sexual activity (1 Cor. 7:3–5). Every spouse must “render conjugal duty, which is owing to each other. For, as the apostle argues [1 Cor. 7:4], in the married state neither person has power over his own body, but has delivered it into the power of the other.”³ Biblical marital sex can deepen married love and weaken adulterous inclinations.

Become more and more united to Christ (Q&A 76).

Our sexuality reveals our need for deep companionship, and our sexual brokenness proves our need for a Savior. Union with Christ is a marriage (Eph. 5:22–33). Jesus's perfect faithfulness sanctifies us, satisfying our hearts' desires. He rescues us from loneliness and selfishness. He gives us every reason to show our gratitude by loving and obeying Him. Let's believe and put into practice this commentary on the seventh commandment: “Let marriage be held in honor among all, and let the marriage bed be undefiled, for God will judge the sexually immoral and adulterous” (Heb. 13:4). ■

1. Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Ethics: The Duties of the Christian Life*, vol. 2 (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2021), 456.
2. *The Latin Works and Correspondence of Huldeich Zwingli Together with Selections from his German Works*, ed. Samuel Macauley Jackson, vol. 1 (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1912), 160.
3. Matthew Henry, *Commentary on the Whole Bible* (Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H. Revell, n.d.), 537.1.

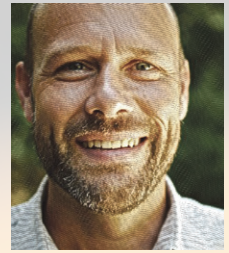
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Lord's Day 42: You Can Be Freed from Greed

Rev. William Boekestein



110Q. *What does God forbid in the eighth commandment?*

A. He forbids not only outright theft and robbery, which governing authorities punish, but in God's sight theft also includes all evil tricks and schemes designed to get our neighbor's goods for ourselves, whether by force or means that appear legitimate, such as inaccurate measurements of weight, size, or volume; fraudulent merchandising; counterfeit money; excessive interest; or any other means forbidden by God. In addition God forbids all greed and pointless squandering of his gifts.

111Q. *What does God require of you in this commandment?*

A. That I do whatever I can and may for my neighbor's good, that I treat others as I would like them to treat me, and that I work faithfully so that I may help the needy in their hardship.

AS WITH SOME OF THE OTHER COMMANDMENTS, we might imagine the eighth commandment addressing only others. Christians don't steal, right? But the eighth commandment does not only prohibit "outright theft and robbery, which governing authorities punish." Some immorality is not illegal. God condemns sinful intent regardless of its extent.

The eighth commandment regulates how we do our jobs and use our possessions as part of how we glorify God by loving our neighbors.

The Logic of the Eighth Commandment

The following four principles help interpret the eighth commandment.

Ownership is a sacred trust.

The eighth commandment is tied to the creation mandate (Gen. 1:26–29). "To subdue the earth is our human

calling. This is the basis of property ownership. In this commandment, the apportioning of the earth among humanity is sanctioned by God."¹ God distributed property to each of the tribes and families of Israel (Josh. 13–21). For this reason, Naboth valiantly defended his land against the king's advances (1 Kings 21). Peter assured Ananias that both his property and the profits from its sale were in his control (Acts 5:3). New Testament believers "had all things in common" (Acts 2:44) only in the sense that they shared "their

possessions and belongings" among the needy (Acts 2:45). Ownership and profits are not the same as greed. Wealth acquisition is not shameful so long as our wealth does not hinder us from faithfully following Christ, which can happen (Matt. 19:16–29).

Theft violates the sacred trust of ownership.

To steal is to reduce the prosperity of a person created in God's image. "What every man possesses has not come to him by mere chance, but by the distribution of the supreme Lord of all. For this reason, we cannot by evil devices deprive anyone of his possessions without fraudulently setting aside God's dispensation."² What God has given to another we must not take away unjustly, even when such theft is not a civil crime.

It's because of God's goodness that He despises injustice.

God requires that we manage our possessions wisely.

God commands us to maintain His resources for His glory. God owns everything. What we possess, we hold as caretakers. We are responsible, as far as in us lies, to support ourselves and those who depend upon us through honest means. Whether rich or poor, we must also share with others part of what God has given us (Eph. 4:28). To do so requires a wisely-managed estate. Regardless of the size of our trust, each of us will give account for our stewardship (Matt. 25:14–31); this includes how we have acquired, saved, spent, given, and invested.

How we handle resources reveals our hearts.

You can tell a lot about what a person values by how he handles money; for where your treasure is, there your heart will be also (Matt. 6:21). You can also tell something about his god. God wants His people to represent His character, even in financial matters (Rom. 2:24). God is amazingly generous. The thief and the greedy person better resemble Satan than Jesus. We should not “be deceived: neither...thieves, nor the greedy...nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God” (1 Cor. 6:9–10).

How do we put these principles into practice?

Resolutions toward Biblical Stewardship

Rest in Jesus.

The eighth commandment drives greedy thieves like us to Jesus. We steal from each other and from God. We squander His resources and withhold His tithes. And we don't have the power to stop stealing. Jesus is the anti-thief. He says, “Though I have stolen nothing, I still must restore it” (Ps. 69:4). Jesus's active

obedience more than satisfies our debt of righteousness to God. He also willingly suffered the penalty demanded by our thievery. In His incarnation, He became poor so that we through His poverty might become rich (2 Cor. 8:9). Union with Christ also changes our affections so that we set our hopes not on “the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly provides us with everything to enjoy” (1 Tim. 6:17).

Resist greed.

Greed happens when the love of money clouds over better judgment. “Those who desire to be rich fall into temptation, into a snare, into many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils”—by loving money “some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs” (1 Tim. 6:9–10). Have you ever made a decision that felt financially prudent, but was morally foolish? Have you ever demanded to have immediately what God in His providence had not given? We must resist greed, believing that wealth can ever bring contentment.

Refuse unjust gain.

Obviously, we should never acquire goods by “outright theft and robbery.” But we should also never use trickery to our financial advantage; don't say the car “runs great” if you know it doesn't. Scripture also warns against charging “excessive interest” (Deut. 23:19–20, Exod. 22:25). Whether or not that applies to you directly, we must be careful not to take advantage of another's neediness.

Resolve to “work faithfully.”

Working faithfully is not the same as busyness. We can be frantic with activity and accomplish very little. Scripture describes such people as busybodies (2 Thess. 3:11). Constantly ask yourself, “What is the best thing I can be doing right now?”

But don't sell yourself as a slave to work. Remember, Israel received the eighth commandment after having been freed from slavery. Even during busy seasons, God commanded His people to rest (Exod. 34:21). Those who will not rest choose to be slaves.

Rule your belongings well.

God forbids the “pointless squandering of his gifts.” Because of God's ultimate ownership, we may not abuse or waste our possessions.

But we must also avoid the opposite error of hoarding. God contrasts stealing with generosity. “The righteous is generous and gives” (Ps. 37:21). One of the most basic demonstrations of generosity is the tithe, through which the godly provide for the gospel ministry and care for the poor. Scripture says that non-tithers rob from God (Mal. 3:8). New covenant believers give cheerfully (2 Cor. 9:6–8), believing God's promise to pour down blessings from heaven's open windows “until there is no more need” (Mal. 3:10).

“Render to all what is due them” (Rom. 13:7 NKJ).

The eighth commandment is the negative way of saying the same thing as the golden rule: “As you wish that others would do to you, do so to them” (Luke 6:31). This isn't the way of thieves, but it is the way of Jesus and all who have been born again in Him.

Loving your neighbor as yourself is more than a feeling. It comes right down to matters as practical as managing your personal finances consistently with the gospel. ■

1. Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Ethics*, 2.458.
2. John Calvin, *Institutes*, 2.8.45.

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