

# The Founders Journal



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Issue 56

Spring 2004

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All to the Glory of God

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# The Founders Journal



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*The Founders Journal* is a quarterly publication which takes as its theological framework the first recognized confession of faith which Southern Baptists produced, *The Abstract of Principles*.

**Subscription Price (one year): \$15.00 (\$20.00 outside the USA)**

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# All to the Glory of God

*Thomas K. Ascol*

What comes to your mind when you think of the glory of God? His great works? His excellencies and perfections? His revelation of Himself in Jesus Christ? Certainly, God's glory is displayed in these ways. But that is not all that the Bible means when it speaks of the glory of God.

The Old Testament word for "glory" comes from the Hebrew word for weight, or heaviness. The idea behind it suggests substance and importance. For example, when Joseph finally revealed himself to his brothers in Egypt, he instructed them, "So you shall tell my father of all my glory in Egypt, and of all that you have seen; and you shall hurry and bring my father down here." In other words, he wanted his greatness, his privileged position and exalted status and power, to be reported to Jacob.

In the New Testament, the word "glory" conveys the same idea. A man's glory is his good reputation. It is that about him which is praiseworthy. Jesus uses the word this way in Matthew 6:2, "Therefore, when you do a charitable deed, do not sound a trumpet before you as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory from men. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward." These people made a production of their giving so that the greatness of their generosity would be observed by many people.

So when the Bible speaks of the glory of God it is referring to His worth and honor and greatness. Or, when this word is used of God, we could say that His majesty or supremacy is in view.

All of creation has as its goal and purpose the glory of God. He created everything for His own glory. Everything that exists has its existence from God and for God. Romans 11:36 says, "For of Him and through Him and to Him are all things, to whom be glory forever. Amen."

John Calvin was correct when he said that creation is the theater of God's glory.<sup>1</sup> Because this is true, we exist for the glory of God. And just as the inanimate creation has been called to glorify God, so have we. The inanimate creation and the lower animate creatures bring glory to God simply by being what God created them to be. As Psalm 19:1 teaches, by virtue of their mere existence the heavens declare the glory of God.

But how do we who are His image-bearers glorify Him? Do we fulfill our responsibility to glorify God simply by staying alive? No. People are called to glorify God actively and intentionally.

What is involved in this? What does it mean for us to glorify God? In what

activities can we engage to glorify God? Bring this question up to your Sunday school class next week. “What kinds of things can we do to glorify God?”

## Glorify God in All Things

You will probably will get answers like, “worship,” “witness,” “acts of kindness and mercy,” etc. While these are certainly true, they are too narrow. God calls us to glorify Him in all that we do. “Therefore, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God” (1 Corinthians 10:31). The Apostle Paul calls us to consider our responsibility to glorify God in all that we do—not just in the “spiritual” activities of life.

There are two main focal points in this verse: our doing and God’s glory. The latter is to be the goal of the former. All of our doing is to be with a view to God’s glory. As creatures designed by God and for God we are obligated to bring glory to Him

This is taught many times by direct commands. For example, Psalm 22:23 says, “You that fear the Lord, praise Him! All you descendents of Jacob, glorify Him and fear Him all you offspring of Israel.” The same call is made in Psalm 29:1–2, “Give unto the Lord, O you mighty ones, Give unto the Lord glory and strength. Give unto the Lord the glory due to His name; Worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness.”

The Bible also instructs us on how and when we are to give glory to God. We are to glorify Him—in our inner lives and in our bodies—“For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God’s” (1 Corinthians 6:20); with our praise—“Whoever offers praise glorifies Me;” (Psalm 50:23); through our works and daily life—“Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven” (Matthew 5:16); in our suffering—“Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in this matter” (1 Peter 4:16); even in our death, as we learn from John’s commentary about Jesus’ prediction of Peter’s death—“This He spoke, signifying by what death he would glorify God (John 21:19).

Christians are to glorify God in everything we do. That is to be our purpose and our goal. Well, what does it mean, exactly? What is the Bible really talking about when it says, “glorify God?”

## Two Ways to Glorify

There are two ways to glorify or to give glory to something or someone. The first is by making that thing or person glorious; to impart or confer glory so as to make it (or her or him) glorious in ways that it otherwise would not be.

God has done this in the way that He has created mankind. “What is man that You are mindful of him, And the son of man that You visit him? For You have made him a little lower than the angels, And You have crowned him with glory

and honor” (Psalm 8:4-5). God’s people can make His praise glorious—“Make a joyful shout to God, all the earth! Sing out the honor of His name; Make His praise glorious. Say to God, ‘How awesome are Your works! Through the greatness of Your power Your enemies shall submit themselves to You’” (Psalm 66:1-3). We can improve our worship to make it more glorious than before.

But we cannot make God more glorious than He already is and always has been. So when the Bible calls us to give glory to God it is not suggesting that we can in any way add glory to Him. He is already infinitely glorious within Himself and nothing we can do can increase His inherent worth and supremacy. He is God—the God of creation ... and the God of providence...and the God of redemption...(who gave us Jesus Christ!). He is inherently all-glorious! No creature can ever do anything to add to His glory.

But there is a second way to give glory or glorify someone or something. That is by acknowledging, declaring and valuing the glory that is there. It is magnifying glory that is already possessed. This is what the heavens do. They “declare the glory of the Lord” (Psalm 19:1). This is what we are called to do when the Scripture admonishes us to glorify God. It is what Paul has in mind in 1 Corinthians 10:31 when he instructs us to do everything to the glory of God. The responsibility that we are given is to declare, to make known, to reflect, to display the glory of God that He already and at all times possesses.

This is what the Scripture means when it speaks of “magnifying the Lord.” Oh, magnify the LORD with me, And let us exalt His name together (Psalm 34:3). I will praise the name of God with a song, And will magnify Him with thanksgiving (Psalm 69:30). Mary sang, “My soul magnifies the Lord” (Luke 1:46). She was glorifying God—declaring His greatness and power and ascribing honor to Him.

John Piper has helped me think clearly about this by distinguishing between the magnification of a microscope versus the magnification of a telescope. He explains:

God’s goal at every stage of creation and salvation is to magnify His glory. You can magnify with a microscope or with a telescope. A microscope magnifies by making tiny things look bigger than they are. A telescope magnifies by making gigantic things (like stars), which look tiny, appear more as they really are. God created the universe to magnify His glory the way a telescope magnifies stars. Everything He does in our salvation is designed to magnify the glory of His grace like this.<sup>2</sup>

God is infinitely great and glorious, but often His glory is not properly seen and declared. Of all of His creatures, we who have been made in His image are most responsible to make His glory known. And of all of His image bearers, we who have experienced His saving grace in Jesus Christ have the greatest opportunity and obligation to bring Him glory.

## Sin Is a Rejection of God's Glory

All of this is what makes sin so hateful and heinous, as Paul describes in Romans 1. He says in verse 21, “Although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened.” They knew the glorious God but rejected that knowledge, choosing to follow empty thoughts and foolish desires. Rather than glorifying Him as God—by aligning their thinking and affections and living with the truth and reality of all that He is—they became fools, choosing to believe lies rather than the truth and exchanging the worship of God for the worship of creation (v. 25).

People choose to sin because in those moments they believe lies rather than truth. They do not believe that in His presence is fullness of joy and at His right hand are pleasures forevermore (Psalm 16:11). They do not believe that the law of the Lord is perfect, restoring the soul, or that His statutes are right, rejoicing the heart, or that His judgments are true and righteous altogether and are therefore more valuable than much fine gold and sweeter than honey. Nor do they believe that in keeping God's commandments there is great reward (Psalm 19:7–11). Otherwise, they would not choose to sin.

Instead, at the moment of giving into temptation a person is convinced that the way of disobedience to God is best. “You will not surely die,” the devil said to Eve, and he has been using the same lying tactics ever since. “God's ways are not good for you. You are the exception. Your situation is unique. If you expect to have any pleasure, any relief, any joy, then you must take this course of action.” In those moments of conscious sin, a person believes lies, rejects truth and fails to glorify God as God.

This is what makes the first question and answer of the Shorter Catechism so profoundly wise: “Man's chief end is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever.” Our ultimate purpose is to bring glory to God and joy to ourselves in Him forever. According to 1 Corinthians 10:31 we are to do that in all things.

## Delighting in God's Glory

So, how do we actively engage ourselves in glorifying God? We do it by showing the worth and value of the Lord by the way that we live. Our talk, our relationships, our choices and our desires must all be shaped by a genuine delight in God above all things.

For this to happen we must see and appreciate the infinite worth of all that God is for us and does for us. The Christian life is not a charade. It is not a call to pretend to be pious by saying and doing the right things. It is a call to see and believe the truth and to order our lives accordingly.

A newly engaged woman does not have to pretend to be excited about her fiancé. Her conversation and choice of how to spend her time will be influenced

by her delight in him. Sometimes she may go overboard in her expressions of admiration of him, but it is not fake, or something that she does simply because it is her duty or is expected. She is speaking out of the overflow of a heart that has been joyfully captured by a man she desires to spend the rest of her life with.

In a similar way a Christian will glorify God to the extent that he is overwhelmed by the greatness and glory of God. And where is the greatness of God's glory most clearly revealed? In the person and work of Jesus Christ.

The Apostle John put it like this: "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth" (John 1:14). The Apostle Paul saw it the same way. "For it is the God who commanded light to shine out of darkness who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" (2 Corinthians 4:6).

Paul was mesmerized by the glory of God that was revealed in Jesus Christ. All the things that he once boasted in, that he had judged to be of great worth, he came to regard as worthless in comparison to Jesus Christ. "But what things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ. But indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith" (Philippians 3:7-9).

Paul saw something in Jesus Christ, something that made him willing to give up everything in order to know Him. He saw that Jesus is more valuable than money or education or health or ease or fame or fortune or reputation. And because he saw this, he did not think himself shortchanged in any way by gaining Christ and losing everything else.

The mid-twentieth century martyr, Jim Elliot, was thinking the same thing when he wrote, "He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep in order to gain what he cannot lose."<sup>3</sup>

In our self-centered, entertainment driven, modern American culture we desperately need to recover this vision of the greatness and glory of God in Jesus Christ. As we do, and as we contemplate what it means to know God through Christ, we will inevitably begin pursuing His glory by making it our aim to demonstrate His great worth in every area of our lives.

This is what makes Eric Liddel's story so compelling. In the 1924 Olympics, he was willing to give up an opportunity for a gold medal—something that he had trained diligently for and desired for years—because He valued God's honor more than his own reputation. When he refused to compete on the Lord's Day because it would violate the fourth commandment, his team members and many of his friends thought he was crazy. But he was firmly committed to living for the glory of God and demonstrated the greatness of God by his refusal to break His law, even at great cost. An Olympic gold medal was not worth violating the will of His great and glorious God.

## Glorifying God in Mundane Things

But it is not just in big things that we are to seek God's glory. Even in mundane, day-to-day things we are consciously to show how glorious He is. That is the reason Paul puts it like he does in 1 Corinthians 10:31. He writes, "whether you eat or drink..." What is more mundane than eating? We eat as a matter of course. It is a daily routine.

The point is this: we are to glorify God not only by going to church, or reading the Bible, or praying and praising His Name—all of these things are good and can glorify Him. But God calls us to glorify Him in simple things, like drinking a glass of water; eating a sandwich; taking a nap!

How? By eating and drinking and napping not only to satisfy our hunger and thirst and weariness, but with other thoughts and goals in mind. We should enjoy the benefits of life with thanksgiving to God recognizing that they are His provisions to us. We are to remember that God is more important than food and drink and sleep. We should desire to use our strength and life (which food and drink and rest supply) for His honor.

We learn from 1 Corinthians 10:31 that it is possible to eat and drink to God's glory. In fact, it says that lots of other things can be done to God's glory as well. "Whatever you do, do all to the glory of God." Schoolwork, business, driving your car, sports—all these and more are included.

For the last eight years I have coached a Home School girls' basketball team. Among the many lessons that this experience has taught me is that if a Christian is going to play basketball, then he or she must do it for the glory of God. There really is no option.

After my first two years on the coach's bench, I began to figure this out. Granted, when you are not winning many games, the incentive to think of reasons to keep playing is much higher than would otherwise be the case! Regardless, as I began to apply 1 Corinthians 10:31 to girls' varsity basketball, I challenged the girls to play "basketball to the glory of God." That became our team motto.

In pursuit of this goal I have encouraged our team and their parents to remember that basketball is not the most important thing in life but that God is. As they practice and play they should thank God for the opportunity to participate and desire to use whatever experiences and opportunities basketball provides to demonstrate the worth and supremacy of God.

In this way basketball can serve as a microcosm of life. The hard work, successes, failures, injustices, disappointments, accomplishments and joys all provide opportunity to prove and magnify the superiority of Jesus Christ to sports.

Two years ago our team attended a rally sponsored by our Christian School league to kickoff the state tournament. The young fundamentalist minister who preached made the comment, "You can't serve God by playing basketball; God isn't interested in your basketball!" The girls turned to me with looks of disbelief and horror. They understood far better than the preacher that you must be able

to play basketball to the glory of God. Otherwise, you better not play. Do you see how radically God-centered our lives are supposed to be? God is to be in all our thoughts. Every moment of our lives we live *coram Deo*, before the face of God—the God who is infinitely glorious and more valuable than life itself.

This vision of life, this worldview, sets us free to enjoy fully the wonderful gifts that God provides us without becoming idolaters, a sin to which we are prone. How does a believer fall into this sin? By placing greater value on the gift than we do the Giver.

How often has the creature stolen the heart from its lawful Sovereign! That heart that was once so simply and so supremely the Lord's, those affections that clung to Him with such purity and power of grasp, have now been transferred to another and an inferior object; the piece of clay that God had given but to deepen the obligation, and heighten the soul's love to Himself, has been molded into an idol, before which the heart pours its daily incense. The flower that He has caused to spring forth but to endear His own beauty, and make His own name more fragrant, has supplanted the "Rose of Sharon" in the bosom. Is it thus that we abuse our mercies? Is it thus that we convert our blessings into poisons, that we allow the things that were sent to endear the heart of our God, and to make the cross, through which they came, more precious, to allure our affections from their holy and blessed center? Fools that we are, to love the creature more than the Creator!<sup>4</sup>

Love your wife, but love her less than the God who gave her to you. Enjoy your wealth, but far less than the God who placed it in your hand. Delight yourself in your children, but not more than you delight in the Lord who entrusted them to your care. Work hard to develop huge, glorious thoughts of God—thoughts that are commensurate with the revelation of His glory in Jesus Christ. Work hard to see what is there. And be stunned by it. Be overwhelmed by the greatness and grace of the God who did not spare His own Son but has delivered Him up for you and has promised that with Him, He will also give to you everything you need. Then love and delight yourself in Him supremely.

## Conclusion

How do we show the value and worth of God in all that we do? I have two responses to that question in closing.

First, we demonstrate the greatness of God primarily not by doing but by receiving. Charles Spurgeon said, "We shall bring our Lord most glory if we get from Him much grace. If I have much faith, so that I can take God at His Word...I shall greatly honor my Lord and King."<sup>5</sup>

This is what God says in Psalm 50:15, "Call upon Me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you shall glorify Me." Do you see the Lord's point here? If

God is a glorious deliverer, then we glorify Him when we are joyfully delivered!

The Psalmist also expressed this in Psalm 116:12–13. After recounting several of the blessings that he has experienced from the hand of the Lord, he asks, “What shall I render to the LORD For all His benefits toward me?” And his first answer might surprise us if we are not thinking carefully about how a great Savior God is glorified: “I will take up the cup of salvation, And call upon the name of the LORD.” If God is glorified in saving, then we glorify Him by being saved.

Several years ago a number of French chefs were brought to Naples, Florida to help raise money for the local art league. Their sponsors arranged for them to prepare exquisite meals in expensive homes and then sold tickets for the meals to art patrons. Suppose you were given one of those tickets and out of joy and gratitude you wanted to show your deep appreciation by honoring the chef. How would you do it? What would be the best way to honor a professional chef who came all the way from France to prepare a meal for you? Would you show up for dinner with a casserole you had prepared—just a little something to show your appreciation? Hardly! Such a gesture would be an insult. A chef takes pride in his cooking. You honor him not by adding your dish to his, but by eating. He will be glorified as you enjoy and make much over the meal!

In the same way we glorify our gracious, giving, loving God by receiving, by being loved and by rejoicing in all that He has provided for us in Jesus Christ. Living by faith—trusting Christ in all that we do; believing what God’s Word says even when it may not feel true—that is what is necessary to show the infinite worth of God in the everyday activities of life.

A second way that we can show the value and worth of God in all that we do is by recognizing the relationship between our joy and God’s glory. Consider again the answer of the Westminster Shorter Catechism: “Man’s chief end is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever.” It is important to note that the Westminster Divines phrased the question in the singular: What is the chief “end”—only one end or purpose is ultimate for our existence. And so the answer should not be seen as two things but as one thing: “glorifying God and enjoying Him forever.”

Glorifying and enjoying God are two sides of the same coin. They are two ways of describing the same activity. John Piper has made this clear by tweaking the answer through substituting a preposition for the conjunction: man’s chief end is to glorify God *by* enjoying Him forever. This slight grammatical change simply highlights an important point that both the catechism and the Bible teach: God’s glory is bound up in His people’s welfare.

CS Lewis saw this, and it caused him to write: “It is a Christian duty, as you know, for everyone to be as happy as he can.”<sup>6</sup> Now that may sound very strange to many serious Christians today. After all, doesn’t Jesus tell us that we are to deny ourselves, take up our cross and follow Him? How can a believer pursue his own joy while taking seriously the call to self-denial?

Lewis insightfully addressed this question in a sermon entitled, “The Weight of Glory.”

The New Testament has lots to say about self-denial, but not about self-denial as an end in itself. We are told to deny ourselves and to take up our crosses in order that we may follow Christ; and nearly every description of what we shall ultimately find if we do so contains an appeal to desire.

If there lurks in most modern minds the notion that to desire our own good and earnestly to hope for the enjoyment of it is a bad thing, I submit that this notion has crept in from Kant and the Stoics and is no part of the Christian faith. Indeed, if we consider the unblushing promises of reward and the staggering nature of the rewards promised in the Gospels, it would seem that Our Lord finds our desires not too strong, but too weak. We are half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. We are far too easily pleased.<sup>7</sup>

Self-denial is never an end in itself. It is always for a greater good. Jesus calls His followers to deny themselves lesser pleasures so that we might pursue and experience the greatest pleasure of knowing and living with Him.

And it is as we do this—as we intensify our desires for pleasures in Jesus Christ and pursue those pleasures by fighting hard to believe all that God has promised to us in Him—that we magnify His worth and glory to ourselves, our loved ones, the watching world, and the unseen powers and principalities all around us.

To understand this and to approach life in Christ this way will bring three beneficial consequences to us. First, it diminishes the enticing power of sin in our lives. Second, it cuts the ground out from under self-pity and, third, it eliminates boasting.

The deceitfulness of sin must not be underestimated. It never delivers all that it promises. How can we find strength to glorify God by resisting the tempting pleasures of sin? By screwing up our wills simply to deny ourselves pleasure? No! We will find such strength by going hard after greater pleasures that are offered to us in Jesus Christ. Psalm 16:11 says, “You will show me the path of life; In Your presence is fullness of joy; At Your right hand are pleasures forevermore.” Psalm 36:8 says that God has a “river of pleasures” from which He draws deep, life-giving joy by which He provides refreshment for all His saints. Go hard after those pleasures! In doing so you will magnify the glory of God in your life.

If you develop a taste for T-bone steaks you will not be so easily enticed by fast food hamburgers. Why settle for the junk food of worldly pleasures when exquisite meals of God’s grace are available to you in Jesus Christ?

This way of thinking also destroys the basis of self-pity. Does the Olympic athlete feel sorry for himself because he has missed out on lazy mornings and extra helpings of food and desserts at meals? No! Did Paul look at all he gave up

and say, “poor me!” Hardly! Why not? Because in both cases all that they gave up—that they denied themselves—could not begin to compare to the prize on which they were focusing. No gold medalist ever thought himself worthy of pity because of the rigors of his training.

Pursuing your joy in God’s glory also stifles boasting. What is there to brag about if you deny yourself lesser joys for a greater joy? Who can boast about how much he has given up when he has gained so much in the exchange?

In Matthew 13:44 Jesus said, “Again, the kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and hid; and for joy over it he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field.” What an interesting spectacle this man must have been to his neighbors. He goes home from his discovery and sells all of his possessions. They may have felt sorry for him, thinking how sad that he has come upon circumstances that require him to sell off his possessions. But Jesus said that he did this “for joy.” He had just made the greatest exchange in his life. There is no room for self-pity or for pride. What he gains in the hidden treasure is so much greater than what he gives up in his possessions that he does not consider the exchange as his loss.

Jesus Christ is the believer’s great treasure. This truth is repeatedly taught to us throughout the Bible. If we have Him, we have everything. We must remember this, believe it, and order our lives according to it. As we do, then we will show forth His great glory by finding our greatest joy in Him.

This is what John Piper means when he says that God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in Him. Our satisfaction in Him displays His worthiness to a watching world. Having Him is more satisfying than health, wealth, painlessness or ease. Yet, such satisfaction in Christ does not come automatically. We must fight to obtain and maintain it. That fight is a fight of faith—a daily war to reject lies and to believe the truth; to receive what God has for us in Christ. Living by faith in the promises of God—that is how we will glorify God in all things! 🍀

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#### Notes:

<sup>1</sup> John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. and indexed by Ford Lewis Battles (Philadelphia, PA: The Westminster Press, 1967), 1:6:2 (72).

<sup>2</sup> Cited in John Piper, *The Dangerous Duty of Delight* (Sisters, Oregon: Multnomah, 2001), 17.

<sup>3</sup> Elizabeth Elliot, *Shadow of the Almighty* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1979), 15.

<sup>4</sup> Octavius Winslow, *Morning Thoughts: Daily Walking with God*, ed. by Joel R. Beeke (Grand Rapids, MI: Reformation Heritage Books, 2003), 170–71.

<sup>5</sup> Cited in John Piper, *Future Grace* (Sisters, Oregon: Multnomah, 1995), 9.

<sup>6</sup> Cited in John Piper, *The Dangerous Duty of Delight* (Sisters, Oregon: Multnomah, 2001), 14.

<sup>7</sup> Cited in John Piper, *Desiring God* (Sisters, Oregon: Multnomah, 1996), 17.

# The Spirituality of Work

*Stan Reeves*

Abraham Kuyper once said, “There is not an inch of any sphere of life over which Jesus Christ does not say, ‘Mine.’” The recovery of the centrality of God in our theology has implications that go far beyond the doctrine of salvation. The church desperately needs to recover a vision of the richness and significance of all facets of life if we are to glorify God in the fullness of the created order.

The arena of work is one sphere of life that cries for special attention. Most of us will spend the majority of our waking hours as adults doing work. If we also count the time invested in preparing for a career and the time each day preparing for work and traveling, and then add in the time spent working at things we don’t get paid for, then it is no stretch to say that most of us will probably work about half of our lives. Therefore, it is extremely important that we understand the Lordship of Christ over this *huge* area of our lives.

Christians neglect this area of the Lordship of Christ for a variety of reasons. Some have a secret fear that their life is insignificant to God because they’re not in full-time Christian service. They worry that working a “secular” job dooms them to be less pleasing to God. Others struggle with laziness in their work and dismiss the voice of conscience because they believe God isn’t concerned about their work life. Still others fight with the temptation to make an idol out of work, seeking to find something in work accomplishments that can only be found in knowing God. The remedy for all these problems is a proper understanding of the spirituality of work.

## Basic to Humanity

Genesis 1 is foundational to our understanding of what it means to be a human being. Therefore, it is a pivotal passage in determining God’s attitude toward work:

Then God said, “Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; and let them rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over the cattle and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.” God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. God blessed them; and God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it; and rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over every living thing that moves on the earth.” ...God saw all that He had made, and behold, it was very good.

And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day (Genesis 1:26–28, 31).

According to this passage, *work is basic to what it means to be a human made in God's image*. First, we are called to subdue the earth and rule over it. What does this look like? Genesis 2:15 tells us that for Adam ruling and subduing meant cultivating and keeping the garden. The task for each of us won't necessarily be exactly the same as Adam's assignment. The world is a big place. The task of subduing and ruling encompasses every legitimate occupation. A plumber is called to use pipes, gravity and principles of pressure to channel water and other things in ways that are useful to people. A factory manager is called to learn how his factory operates and coordinate others in applying their skills to subdue and rule. A teacher is called to pass along knowledge so that others can be equipped to subdue and rule. All occupations call us to subdue and rule in some fashion.

According to Genesis 1, we are to bring order from chaos. Because we are made in God's image, we are to imitate God in our limited way. We are to be creative! While we can't bring something out of nothing the way God can, we *can* bring order out of chaos.

Furthermore, work itself is not a curse (Genesis 1:31, compare 3:17–19). Subduing and ruling are part of what God was talking about when He said “and behold, it was very good.” Beware of speaking of your work as though it is a burden to be avoided. Work is a good thing! Some seem to think that work is nothing but what you do to get to the really good stuff—leisure, entertainment and relaxation. That attitude is completely unbiblical! Work *is* the good stuff.

Work is a calling—a vocation (from the Latin word for “call”). A job is more than just a way to put food on the table. God made us for this very purpose! Work is an offering to God. It is a glorious thing. It is our way of reflecting back the glory of our Creator, because He is the original Worker!

All work has great dignity. Whether someone scrubs toilets or serves as president of the United States, his work has dignity in God's sight. Adam had the best job the world has ever seen, and he was a farmer. We may not hear trumpets blaring or crowds roaring when we rake the yard or clean the kitchen, but our work brings pleasure to God. That fact alone invests our work with great dignity regardless of where it ranks in terms of social status or pay scale or personal enjoyment. As Paul says, “Whatever you do, do your work heartily, as for the Lord rather than for men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance. It is the Lord Christ whom you serve” (Colossians 3:23–24).

Work is a stewardship. As a result, we have no right to make a god out of work. We should do it because we delight in God! We worship God with our work; we don't worship work as our god. Because we are answerable to God for our work, we have no right to elevate work above our other assignments, such as resting and worshiping.

## Work After the Fall

Scripture is quite clear that work remains our calling even after the fall (Genesis 3:17–19). However, work is now cursed by difficulties, frustration and unintended consequences. You pull weeds and they're back tomorrow. You spend days preparing for a sales presentation and you still stumble over the critical points when talking to the customer. You repair your car and it takes three times as long as you thought, and you cut your finger in the process. This doesn't mean we should avoid work. Instead, it means we must work harder!

A crucial point must be made in light of the pietistic tendencies of modern evangelicalism. *Work does not take a second place to evangelism.* Efforts to lead people to Christ are a central part of a Christian's life, but work is still important to God even in a fallen world. Work is not merely a forum for evangelizing our co-workers. Many Christians seem to think that being a good Christian at work means putting a Bible verse on your desk or a little fish on your business card. Now these may very well be good things to do. However, being a good Christian at work means first and foremost laboring to be excellent in one's calling for the glory of God. In fact, if we can communicate by our attitude, by our actions and by our words that work is significant to God, we may very well win people to Christ that way. One of the most basic needs we have as human beings is to feel that our lives are significant. If we can communicate a biblical view of work to people, we can show them that in Christ all of life becomes significant. People are hungry for significance. We must show them that Christ gives significance to their every labor.

## Work and Eternity

How often have we heard that “the only things that will last forever are the Word of God and the souls of men”? Contrary to this oft-repeated view, the Scriptures teach that our *work will last forever*. The lasting nature of work appears in two ways.

First, worthy accomplishments in this age will endure for the age to come. Many Christians seem not to understand this. “There's no point in putting too much effort into good work, because it's all going to be burned up one day anyway, right?” This is simply false. When Scripture speaks of burning at the end of the age (2 Peter 3:10–12), we must see this as a refining, purifying fire, not a destroying fire (compare Romans 8:20–21). Consider the parable of the ten servants who were each given a mina to invest while the master was away. When the master returned, the minas were not thrown out. In fact, the one who hadn't invested his mina had his given to the one who gained ten minas. See also Revelation 21:24–26, where the glory and honor of the nations are said to be brought into the new heavens and new earth.

How can work remain in the new heavens and new earth? How can the teaching of the first-grade teacher remain or the fabric produced by the textile worker? The Bible doesn't tell us the details, but it does reveal that somehow God will make our work here and now a testimony to His glory for all eternity. Could there be any thought that could make you more committed to the work God has called you to do?

The second way that work will last forever is that there will be meaningful activity on the renewed earth. The culture often depicts heaven as nothing more than sitting on a cloud strumming on a harp. It's no wonder a lot of people don't think much about eternity if they think it's going to be like that! But the truth is that this final dwelling place will be suited to redeemed human nature. We won't be floating on clouds playing harps for all eternity! According to Revelation 22:3, "there will no longer be any curse." The curse on work will be lifted! Notice however that the *curse* is lifted—work is not! Work will then be exactly what God intended for it to be in His original, very good creation. Notice also in Revelation 22:5 that we will reign. This brings us back to the pattern laid out for humanity in the creation account—we will be subduing and ruling!

## Mental Labor

Many of us are called to fields of labor that are more mental than physical—students, pastors, professors, writers and others. Therefore, it is worthy of note that *God is just as concerned with mental effort as with physical effort*. In fact, the calling to exercise the mind is basic to what it means to be a human made in God's image. Adam's very first recorded act of ruling was fundamentally an act of mental labor. He named the animals (Genesis 2:19–20). This involved far more than just giving each animal an arbitrary label. The biblical idea of naming involves assigning an appropriate title that describes the essence of the one named. Adam had to study, compare and contrast the animals to assign appropriate names to each of them. This was hard mental labor!

Gene Edward Veith has said that education is one area where Christians are winning the culture war. Our culture has become so lazy and misguided about hard mental labor and so swallowed up by the worship of leisure and entertainment, that Christians are actually in the lead in this area. Hard mental work for parents, teachers and students in this generation may mean that Christians will be the people best equipped in the next generation to be the intellectual leaders of the day. Daniel and his friends succeeded in excelling their peers intellectually (Daniel 1:19–20) and providing important leadership in their day. God may be calling some to hard mental labor in our day to raise up some Daniels for the next generation.

The study of God's creation—including the study of God's image-bearer man in his being, relations and institutions—can and should be an act of joyful worship. God declared the creation to be "very good" and worthy of our deepest

intellectual effort to understand and appreciate. We study the creation because the creation tells us something of God. We study the creation so that we can come to know God Himself better. The niece of Michael Faraday, the discoverer of electromagnetic induction and inventor of the generator, remembered her uncle in this way:

I shall never look at the lightening flashes without recalling his delight in a beautiful storm. How he would stand at the window for hours watching the effects and enjoying the scene; while we knew his mind was full of lofty thoughts, sometimes of the great Creator, and sometimes of the laws by which He sees meet to govern the earth.

Psalm 19:1–2 tells us, “The heavens are telling of the glory of God; And their expanse is declaring the work of His hands. Day to day pours forth speech, And night to night reveals knowledge.” May our mental labor yield such reflections on God’s glory!

The exercise of the mind to study God’s creation is an application of the greatest commandment: “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself” (Luke 10:27). How do we love God with all our mind? By using every thought of our mind to know God, to delight in Him, and to honor Him with our obedient thoughts. What better way to do this than to devote our mental labor to bringing glory to God!

We live in a pragmatic culture. If it doesn’t make us richer, healthier, or more beautiful, we find little value in it. However, study has inherent value. We are dealing with a God who observes the thoughts of men and takes pleasure in thoughts to His glory as well as in outward actions. Therefore, we should not only eat and drink to His glory but think as well.

## Conclusion

The true story of Eric Liddell is told in the movie *Chariots of Fire*. He knew God was calling him to go to China as a missionary with his sister. In a key scene, he tells his sister that he plans to delay going to the mission field so that he can continue training for the Olympics. She is crestfallen and frustrated with him. He then tries to help her understand his decision: “Jenny, Jenny. I know God created me for His service, but He also made me fast! When I run, I feel God’s pleasure!” Not many of us will be able to feel God’s pleasure while training or racing to an Olympic gold medal. However, we can all work, and we can all have the experience of feeling God’s pleasure when we do.

Christ has said “Mine” to the sphere of work. Let us then submit our work and everything else to Christ’s Lordship. He is the way, the truth and the life, and nothing has lasting significance apart from Him. When our work is done to His glory, its significance is eternal. ☺

# The Aching Struggles Of Being a Christian Father

*Lee Tankersley*

*Wednesday, October 15, 2003*

It is a difficult thing to find yourself in a time of great struggle, suffering and heartache, without the ability to change anything. I think that is just basic to life. However, it is easy to hear and agree with that statement and not feel the weight of it, like one nodding in agreement that Jesus' time in the Garden of Gethsemane was difficult without coming close to feeling the gravity of the situation that drove Jesus to say, "My soul is very sorrowful, even to death" (Matthew 26:38). So what do you do in those moments when no one has to tell you to feel the weight of the situation because it is pressing on your heart with such mass that you cannot utter a sound, and the aching in your soul longs for that which it cannot accomplish? That is the question I am asking this morning.

The reason I am asking the question is because, in some sense, I am there. My normal morning routine is to get up, put some tea on to brew, get showered and ready, fix my tea, go out to my front porch, and read the Scripture and pray. Within that, part of my prayer everyday is for my son, Michael, that he will one day come to know the Lord. I love my son. At times I feel like I cannot hold him close enough and tight enough. My heart aches with love for him. Therefore, I do not have to convince myself to pray for his soul, that one day the Lord will call him to Himself, for that prayer bursts forth from the longing of my heart every day. However, the fulfillment of that desire is not within my power. I cannot save my son.

This reality of my inability and complete dependence on God for the salvation of my son I confess each morning. For some reason it seems that this reminder is something I need to speak. Thus, my prayer often begins with a realization before God that he has been immeasurably gracious to my wife, Lili, and me in saving us and for giving us a son. It is then followed by my stating of the reality that just because God has decided to be so gracious to us does not mandate that God show the same kind of saving grace to my son. There is simply no such guarantee in Scripture that the children of believers will be born again. Yet, then, I *plead* for God to save him. In fact, "pleading" may not be strong enough of a word, but my vocabulary is limited. My heart aches and longs,

and I feel that if I were to attempt to open my mouth to speak that I would be sick because the yearning in the depth of my soul is too great.

Now, this yearning is not something that happens every day. I wish it were. There are some days, though, when my heart is calloused toward eternal matters. But this morning the aching of my heart was there, and it was deep. And I began to ask myself, “What do you do when the gravity of a situation is pressing upon you so deeply, and you can do nothing to bring about your desired end or change your circumstances? What do I do to leave the front porch, get into the car, go to work and live to the glory to God the rest of the day?”

As I asked that question this morning, my mind instantly walked back to Christ in the garden, for we do not have a great High Priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses but One who has been tempted in every way that we are. Therefore, I believe I can conclude that He was tempted to long to have the control that only His Father had, for that was my temptation today. He might have been tempted in the garden to want the control that said, “Even if there is no other way, I will not drink this cup.” So what did He do?

Peter writes in 1 Peter 2:23, “When He was reviled, He did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but continued entrusting Himself to Him who judges justly.” Jesus lived His life continually deciding that He would entrust Himself to a just Father. He simply trusted His Father. In the same way, Peter calls his readers a couple of chapters later to do the same, writing, “Therefore let those who suffer according to God’s will entrust their souls to a faithful Creator while doing good” (4:19). Here, I think is my answer.

In the garden, Jesus desired and even prayed for a different end than drinking down His Father’s wrath on the cross, saying, “My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will” (Matthew 27:39). And again as His soul was aching, He prayed, “Father, glorify Your name” (John 12:27–28). He entrusted His soul to One whom He knew, One whom He loved, One whom He trusted, One whom He longed to see glorified before all men.

Today I feel that my soul is in a similar position. I ache; I hurt; my soul is sorrowful. I long for one outcome over which I have no ultimate control. So how do I go on and live this day to the glory of God? I think I must entrust my soul and (maybe even more so) the soul of my son, to my Father, whom I know, whom I love, whom I trust, whom I long to see glorified before all men.

Father, if it be possible, hear and answer the aching cry of my heart. I trust You. To You be glory forever and ever. Amen. ☪

# Art, Idolatry and The Glory of God

*Ken Puls*

The arts have received much attention in recent days. Amidst the stir caused by the release of Mel Gibson's film, *The Passion of the Christ*, many Christians are asking questions. Should we support or encourage participation in the arts? How involved should we be in the arts? How can we participate in and enjoy the arts as followers of Christ?

If we are to find answers to these questions, we must look to the Scriptures. The Word of God has much to say about art. Art is a gift of God. He ordained it. He commends it in His Word. It can serve good purposes when it is used and enjoyed in the light of His provision and commandments. But art can also go astray. It can overstep the bounds of God's Law. It can too easily become an occasion for sin—particularly the sin of idolatry—and rob God of His glory.

We see a clear example of the value and the dangers of art in the Old Testament accounts of the Ark of Testimony. In Exodus 25:10–22 God gave instructions to Moses for designing the Ark. Later in Exodus (37:1–9) we read how the Ark was created according to God's instructions.

Notice from these passages:

- God planned, designed and gave specific instructions for creating and artistically embellishing the Ark.
- The art work adorning the Ark is representational—it includes cherubim, “an image made in the likeness of a beings in heaven above.”
- This work of art had a specific purpose in Israel's worship of God in the Tabernacle. It held the mercy seat, serving as a meeting place for God and His people (25:22).
- It was fashioned according to God's Word by an artist, Bezalel, whom God had specifically gifted for the task and filled with His Spirit (35:30–35).
- God also gave this work of art content or meaning. It was not just a convenient storage cabinet or decorative piece of furniture for the Tabernacle. The Ark symbolized the presence of God with His people and the promise of His enduring mercy.

In 1 Chronicles 16 David brought the Ark of Testimony to Jerusalem with great celebration. He pitched a tent for it and “appointed some of the Levites

to minister before the Ark of the Lord, to bring petition, to give thanks and to praise the LORD God of Israel” (16:4). In thanksgiving to God the Levites sang a psalm composed by David (16:7–36). In this psalm David interpreted through music and poetry the meaning of the Ark of Testimony. He exhorted Israel with the refrain: “Oh, give thanks to the LORD, for He is good! For His mercy endures forever” (16:34). This refrain echoes throughout the Old Testament (2 Chronicles 20:21; Psalm 106:1; 107:1; 118: 1, 29; 136; Ezra 3:11; Jeremiah 33:11) as God’s people rejoice in the enduring mercy of God.

At the dedication of Solomon’s Temple (2 Chronicles 5:13; 7:3, 6) the Levites again sang David’s refrain when the Ark of Testimony was set in the Holy of Holies. Solomon reminded the people of Israel of the words of Moses (Deuteronomy 7:9) as he prayed, “LORD God of Israel, there is no God in heaven or on earth like You, who keep Your covenant and mercy with Your servants who walk before you with all their hearts” (2 Chronicles 6:14).

The Ark of Testimony was a powerful symbol of the power and presence of God with His people. David ended his psalm sung before the Ark, with the words: “And say, ‘Save us, O God of our salvation; gather us together and deliver us from the Gentiles, to give thanks to Your holy name, to triumph in Your praise.’ Blessed be the LORD God of Israel from everlasting to everlasting” (2 Chronicles 16:35–36). Israel was to remember that their salvation is only in God.

When the armies of Israel faced their enemy in Joshua 6, the Ark was carried into battle as a testimony that God was their strength and salvation. They could only prevail in His might and power. Israel marched around the city of Jericho with the Ark, as God had instructed them. Joshua said to the people: “Shout, for the Lord has given you the city!” (6:16). God caused the walls to come down and the city was taken.

Scripture, however, records another occasion where the Ark was carried into battle with a much different outcome. In 1 Samuel 4 Israel was at war with the Philistines and the elders of Israel said: “Let us bring the Ark of the Covenant of the Lord from Shiloh to us, that when it comes among us it may save us from the hand of our enemies” (4:3). In this situation Israel looked to the Ark itself for help. What God had designed and given them for their good, they turned into an idol. Notice that this was also the mindset of the Philistines. In 1 Samuel 4:7 when the Ark was brought into the camp and all Israel shouted, the Philistines were afraid and said: “God has come into the camp!” They were accustomed to gods that must be carried. The God of Israel, however, would not have His people follow an idol. He would not have them worship Him by means of a crafted image. In 4:11 the Philistines captured the Ark and carried it away with them as a trophy of their victory.

The account continues in 1 Samuel 5 in one of the more humorous passages in the Bible. The Philistines brought the Ark and placed it in the temple of Dagon, their false god. When they returned the next morning, the statue of Dagon had “fallen on its face to the earth before the Ark of the Lord” (5:3). This

was embarrassing to the Philistines, so they set the Dagon statue in its place again. When they returned the second time, not only was Dagon again fallen to the ground, his head and the palms of his hands were broken off. God also sent sickness and plague among the Philistines until they concluded that they could not keep the Ark.

In 1 Samuel 6 the Ark was returned to Israel. God had taught His people an important lesson—salvation is of the Lord. It is not the Ark that saves (the Ark was only a symbol); God and God alone accomplishes salvation. The next time the armies of Israel are in battle with the Philistines (1 Samuel 7:8) the children of Israel say to Samuel, “Do not cease to cry out to the Lord our God for us, that He may save us from the hand of the Philistines.” As Israel looked to God for help, He answered their cries by confounding the Philistines and giving them the victory.

So what does all of this have to do with art? Israel’s experiences with the Ark teach us an important lesson. Art and our abilities to create and enjoy art are good gifts from God, But art, even God ordained works of art, can be used for evil purposes and become an occasion for sin. We must be careful to guard our hearts even as we enjoy good and worthwhile art.

## Principles for Enjoying Art

How then can we enjoy and participate in art in ways that honor God and avoid the sin of idolatry? To answer this we will consider the following five principles. These principles have application in all of our activities and endeavors, but we will focus especially on participation in art.

### 1. We must participate in art in submission to God and His Word.

If we are to conduct ourselves in ways that are pleasing to God we must begin by knowing His Word and submitting ourselves to its authority. We must know what God reveals of Himself (His character, attributes, perfection and glory), of us (our sinfulness, depravity and need of salvation), of the Law (what God requires and rightly commands of us as His creatures), and the Gospel (the way He has provided for our salvation and growth in godliness). The Bible is our rule of faith and practice and if we are to live in a way pleasing to God, enjoying the gifts He graciously gives to us, we must first pursue knowing and being obedient to His Word.

The Word of God gives us clear commands and instructions that must guide our participation. In the second commandment God said:

“You shall not make for yourself a carved image—any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth; you shall not bow down to them nor serve them, for I the LORD your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity

of the fathers upon the children to the third and fourth generations of those who hate Me, but showing mercy to thousands, to those who love Me and keep My commandments” (Exodus 20:4–5).

What does God forbid in this commandment? Can we stop at verse 4, as some have done, and condemn the fashioning of all images? Obviously not, because God Himself had the cherubim carved at the ends of the mercy seat on the Ark (a likeness of something in heaven above). The force of the commandment is in verse 5. We are not to bow down to idols or serve them. God reveals that He cannot and will not be worshipped through carved images. He is Spirit and will not be represented by physical shapes. God will not allow His people to direct their love and trust for Him to some lifeless creation of men’s hands.

In Exodus 32 Israel violated God’s Law by breaking this commandment, fashioning a carved image of a golden calf to represent God in their worship. In 1 Samuel 4 they committed a similar sin, trusting in the presence of the Ark (which they could see with their eyes) rather than God Himself (whom they could only see by faith). They fell into sin because they were not content to follow and worship a God they could not see or touch. God is Spirit and those who worship Him must worship in Spirit and in Truth (John 4:24). Israel rejected the spiritual nature of God and sought through art to give Him a physical shape or image.

We must be careful to participate in art in ways that do not violate the clear commands and teaching of Scripture. We must not use the arts to fashion an object with our hands and then make that object the focus of our worship as if it stood in the place of God. Art can never stand in the place of God. We cannot make or carve an image and then say in our worship: “This represents our God.” God is jealous of our love and will not have us giving it to images of false gods or even to images that attempt to represent the true God. We are not to bow down and serve artistic creations. We are not to attribute to art what only God can do. Art must be subservient to God, His will, and His commands. As we participate in art we begin by asking, “Is my participation in submission to God and His Word?”

Where art turns its back on God and His Word, and attempts in the guise of culture to exalt and promote evil as if it were good, it should be abandoned. Where art is used as a means to distract people from God and turn people away from those things that are pleasing to God, it should be forsaken. We must embrace art only as it serves to help us embrace God.

## **2. We must participate in art with an aim to love.**

As we seek to walk in obedience to God’s Word, we must aim at love. Love is the essence and fulfillment of the Law. God commands us not to murder, not to steal, not to commit adultery, not to covet because it is His desire that we “love our neighbor as ourselves” (Romans 13:8–10). He tells us to flee from idolatry because He desires that we love Him with all our heart, mind, will and strength. The fruit and goal of our obedience to His Law is love.

As we participate in art, we must ask, “Is my participation increasing my love for God, His Word and His ways? Is it helping me better love and understand those around me?” Art can be a useful revealer of the heart. As we see the books people read, the movies they watch, the music they listen to, the paintings and other art they enjoy, we begin to get an idea of what they cherish and value. Art that is worthwhile will always give us needed insight that will spur us on to love God, first and foremost, and love our neighbors as ourselves.

In 1 Timothy 1:5 Paul reminded Timothy that obedience is rooted in love that springs “from a pure heart, from a good conscience and from a sincere faith.” We need a heart that has been made alive in Christ, cleansed and purified in His gospel, covered with His righteousness and in pursuit of His holiness. We need a conscience that is free from the guilt and pollution of sin, “without offense toward God and men” (Acts 24:16). And we need a sincere faith, free from hypocrisy, trusting fully and only upon Jesus Christ.

We must consider our conscience as we make decisions concerning art. If we are convicted that it would be sin for us to participate in certain works of art, then we should not participate. We should always seek to inform and subject our conscience to the Word of God, but we are not to violate our conscience. The conscience is always in need of being directed by the Word of God, but we ignore it only to our peril.

Any participation in art that leads us away from holiness and toward guilt and insincerity must be cast off. We should ask questions before participating in art. Is this a book I can read without feeling defiled? Would I feel comfortable sharing it with other church members or my pastor? Is this a movie I can watch with a clear conscience before God? Would I be embarrassed or ashamed if others knew I had watched it? Is this a painting or photograph I can view with a pure heart? Would it dishonor the name of Christ if others knew I had seen it?

We must not imbibe art that is inconsistent with our Christian walk and witness. We are called to “be imitators of God as dear children” and to “walk in love as Christ also has loved us and given Himself for us” (Ephesians 5:1–2). This includes our participation in art. If our choices of art distance us from God and cause us to hope He is not looking, or make worship seem out of place, or tear down rather than edify, then our art has become an encumbrance. We need to repent, “lay aside every weight and the sin which so easily ensnares us,” flee to Christ for mercy and make new choices.

### **3. We must participate in art with our focus on the heart more than the form.**

As we seek to obey God and walk in love, we must remember that God is most concerned with our hearts. Jesus taught this clearly in the Sermon on the Mount. Murder is not just physically killing someone, it is anger and hatred in the heart (Matthew 5:21–22). Idolatry is not simply making or carving an image for worship, it is refusing to worship God in Spirit and in truth in the heart.

Art is a good gift from God, intended for us to enjoy as we use it in ways that bring God glory. When art becomes the occasion for sin, we are often too quick to condemn the gift rather than the sin. We may condemn a painting, or a sculpture, or a song as evil; but can paint on a canvas, or a lump of clay, or musical sounds actually be sin?

Consider the incident of the golden calf in Exodus 32. This event obviously involved sin and shows us the potential for sin in art, but where is the sin? Is the subject matter sinful? No. A calf is something God created as good. Is the media sinful? No. Gold and other precious metals are also created by God as good. Is the making of a carved image (creating representational sculpture) sin? No. God commanded much representational sculpture be made, even in the Tabernacle and Temple where He was to be worshipped.

The object of art itself is not necessarily evil. Nor is the making of art evil. When art goes astray and becomes an occasion for sin, the problem is not so much with the subject matter or artistic form, as with our hearts. The sin is in us. We have a tendency, however, to disassociate sin with ourselves. It is much easier to locate the evil in the image. We can smash the image and be done with it. But that will not remove the sin. Sin is not a matter of objects or things; sin is a matter of the heart that becomes manifest in how we use or misuse objects and things. Art is not sin, but it can readily reflect and give expression to sin in our hearts.

When we try to discern if a particular work of art is appropriate or not appropriate within a Christian world-view, our judgment must focus on the intent and purpose of the artist. God looks upon the artist's heart, not exclusively at the artist's subject matter, and weighs the intentions of the heart in judging good or evil. What is the artist trying to reveal about the subject matter? What meaning is the artist trying to convey? Does the artist's meaning communicate godly values and truths? God looks upon our hearts as well as we participate in art. What are our intentions and motives and loves revealed in the art in which we choose to invest our time and energy?

For example, when we choose music to participate in, whether it is for our personal enjoyment or for congregational worship, our great concern is not the words, although we need music with God-honoring, biblically sound texts. Our great concern is not the music itself, although we need to choose the best music we have and craft it well so it is fit for the text it accompanies or the occasion it serves. Our greatest concern must be our hearts. What is the intent of our hearts as we sing or as we listen? We must keep watch over our hearts if we are to participate in art in ways that please and honor God.

#### **4. We must participate in art with thanksgiving and gratitude to God.**

After reading a book, viewing a painting, photograph or sculpture, or seeing a play or movie, or listening to music, we should be able to say, "Thank you, Lord, for allowing me to participate and enjoy this work of art." If we cannot participate with thanksgiving, the work of art is likely not worth our time or participation.

In Colossians 3:17 Paul tells us: “And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him.” We should be able to enjoy art bearing the name of Christ in thanksgiving.

## 5. We must participate in art that is worthwhile and glorifying to God.

Whenever we participate in art, we must do so to the glory of God. “Therefore, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God” (1 Corinthians 10:31). If art is distracting us from God, drawing our affections and expectations away from Him, we should abandon it. When art can stir our imagination and focus our attention and help our interpretation of significant things, to the glory of God then it is useful and we should feel free to embrace it.

Art that is glorifying to God may or may not be religious. In Psalm 24:1 David declares: “The earth is the Lord’s and all its fullness.” A painting of children at play or a family portrait can be just as pleasing and honoring to God as a painting of a church building. Art can show the beauty and wonder of God’s creation, display the joys and sorrows of human life, and reveal the fruits of human imagination. It can even shake us with the realities and horrors of sin. We can participate in a wide range of artistic expression provided we seek first the glory of God.

There is a great deal of art that is so obviously intended to promote evil and stir up sin, that it is most unwise and unprofitable for Christians to participate in it. We must declare with David, “I will set nothing wicked before my eyes; I hate the work of those who fall away; it shall not cling to me. A perverse heart shall depart from me; I will not know wickedness” (Psalm 101:3–4). In Psalm 119:37 the psalmist prayed, “Turn away my eyes from looking at worthless things, and revive me in Your way.” This should be our prayer every time we consider participating in the arts.

We all are limited. God has numbered our days. There are only so many books we can read, so many songs we can hear, so many movies we can watch. There are only so many hours and days we have to spend with our families and friends. We must pray for wisdom. Especially in this day and age where our choices and possibilities seem almost endless. Never has there been a time when Christians so greatly need care and discernment in deciding how to invest their time and resources.

In Philippians 4:8 Paul writes, “Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy—meditate on these things.” This is what we must look for in art, if it is to be worthwhile and glorifying to God. Art that measures up to these criteria will be art that conforms to God’s Word, that we can use lawfully and thankfully with God’s blessing. ☺

# Preaching to the Glory of God

*Allen Harrison*

There are many passages of Scripture that give counsel and encouragement to those who are involved in the preaching of the gospel. In 2 Corinthians 4 Paul unfolds a variety of truths that apply to this great work of gospel proclamation.

## **The Privilege (4:1)**

Paul writes, “since we have this ministry.” The ministry of the gospel is a gift. We believe in a divine call to preach. It is not a work that one takes up simply as a vocation, at least it should not be. The weightiness of the ministry calls for a sense of divine urgency in the one who responds to such a challenge. Paul continues, “as we have received mercy.” This ministry of the gospel is related to the mercy of God, as is everything else in the Christian experience. It is a gift by the mercy of a gracious God. In Ephesians 3:7–8 Paul speaks of the gospel “of which I became a minister according to the gift of the grace of God...to me, who am less than the least of all the saints, this grace was given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ.” If you could ask Paul later in his life, “Paul, do you ever feel a sense of amazement that you have been given this great privilege of preaching the gospel?” I believe he would have said, “Everyday of my life!” Brethren, let us consider this awesome matter of being involved in the preaching of the gospel as the greatest of all privileges apart from our own saving relationship to the Lord. Be forever grateful that the Lord called you to preach. Gratitude for the privilege will help you to “not lose heart,” or as we might say, “throw in the towel!” You may be tempted to do so, but a sense of gratitude for such a privilege will hold you steadfast.

## **The Principles (4:2)**

There are two primary principles in this verse to help guide us in our ministries. The first is the emphasis on integrity of character. We, like Paul, are to “renounce the hidden things of shame, not walking in craftiness nor handling the word of God deceitfully (not adulterating the Word of God).” As Paul defends his own ministry he reminds us that the character of the minister has much to do with the character of his ministry. Integrity of character and personal holiness will provide a pure motive in one’s ministry. He will not seek to manipulate others to gain for himself. The second principle mentioned is the emphasis upon

truth. Paul says, “by manifestation of the truth.” Integrity of character is rooted in a commitment to biblical truth. Truth is what we are commissioned to preach. A firm confidence in Scripture, along with a life of consistent obedience to that truth, is required for an effective ministry of the Word. Paul’s example should continually challenge us in our convictions and actions. Integrity of character and commitment to biblical truth are foundational principles for ministry.

### **The Problem (4:3–4)**

There is a serious, humanly insurmountable, problem in the ministry. The problem is the spiritual condition of those to whom we preach the gospel. They are described as “those who are perishing.” They are facing total spiritual ruin. They are also said to be unbelieving. They do not, and cannot, naturally believe the truth of the gospel, no matter how clearly it is proclaimed. The essential problem is their lack of spiritual understanding of God’s truth. Their minds are blinded to truth, therefore they do not believe, thus they are perishing. They neither perceive that to be their condition, nor are we able to naturally bring about a transforming change in them. You cannot explain the gospel to a lost individual so that he or she can naturally grasp the significance of the truth. Sin affects our intellect, our emotions and our will. It requires more than a persuasive preacher to deal with this problem. Are you convinced of your helplessness in effectively preaching the gospel? You are preaching to those who are spiritually dead, blind, lifeless, helpless, deaf to the gospel and completely insensitive to spiritual truth. Nevertheless, we are to continually preach to such hearers with great confidence in God’s solution to this problem. Let us now see what that solution involves.

### **The Preaching (4:5–6)**

“We herald...Christ Jesus the Lord.” Paul does not discuss a variety of ways to deal with the spiritual problem of the unbeliever. He does not propose different tactics to use in order to secure a spiritual response. He moves immediately from a clear look at the problem to the one primary task we are given to deal with it, preaching Jesus Christ as Lord. Regardless of the inability of our hearers to understand the gospel we continue to present it to them, for we keep in mind the truth of verse 6, “God...has shown in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.” What an encouragement to the preacher and all who seek to share the gospel. The God of creation is the God of salvation. He is powerful and unhindered in His work of creation. It is the same in salvation. He removes spiritual blindness, causes truth to be understood, inclines the heart to believe and makes Christ real as Savior and Lord to the one who previously had no concern for such matters.

Oh, what hope we can have as we preach the truth with the conviction that God

can bring the light of the gospel into dead and darkened hearts! When He does so, the glory belongs to Him, alone.

### **The Power (4:7)**

Again, Paul speaks of our weakness in contrast to the power of God. We, the “earthen vessels,” have this incredibly valuable treasure of the gospel. When God brings people to respond to His truth the honor is given to Him, not the clay pots! Frankly, there are evidently too many preachers who are not content with this arrangement. The ministry of the Word is an easy place to express self-exaltation. What could be more inappropriate than a man taking credit for “raising the dead”? Being used by the power of God to bring people to spiritual life and health is an awesome matter to consider. How seriously it should be taken. How humbly it should be handled. In preaching our focus is to be upon the truth of God, the power of God and the glory of God. Humor should be very carefully expressed in such a context. A young lady, in describing her pastor to me said, “Oh, he is such a great pastor. He just makes me laugh!” As others have said, you cannot be a prophet and a clown at the same time. You cannot be a comedian and a preacher of the grace of God at the same time. Handle humor carefully. Let us study hard to learn more the great value of the gospel treasure and seek the power of God to effectively use it through these weak human vessels in order that He may be glorified now and forever.

### **The Pressure (4:8–13)**

There is nothing more thrilling than to be the instrument God uses for the spiritual good of others. But the privilege of preaching is sometimes in the context of unique pressures. Paul outlines some of his own experiences in these verses. Every preacher is familiar with similar, if not identical, pressures in his life and ministry. It is not something to dwell upon, but it is a reality to be dealt with. Some pressures and problems come from our own weaknesses, sin and failure. Others come from different sources, known or unknown. The important thing is our reaction to the pressures. Paul says, “we are...not crushed...not in despair...not forsaken...not destroyed...that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body.” Again, the Lord is to be glorified in our pressures as well as our preaching. It is easy to write those words. May the Lord give us grace to do it.

### **The Prospects (4:14–18)**

Every believer needs to have the “long look.” We need to think much about what lies before us in the perhaps, not too distant future. As the preacher faces the issues of unbelief and lack of response to his witness, spiritual declension in the church and increasing corruption in society, he needs often to think deeply

about his, and every believer's, prospects for the future. According to these verses the prospects for the Christian are glorious! "He who raised up the Lord Jesus will also raise us up with Jesus, and will present us with you...therefore we do not lose heart...the inward man is being renewed day by day...we look at the things which are not seen...the things which are not seen are eternal." All of these great truths should strengthen us in the midst of the pressures of life and ministry. And there is much more. In Revelation 22:3 John reminds us, "His servants shall serve Him." Serving the Lord, in any way, is wonderful here. Think what it will be like to serve Him in glory. No sin to hinder. No time constraint. No conflicting schedules. Absolute freedom to serve the One who out of His mercy and grace has given us the privilege of serving Him here. Let us thank Him for that and press on as we await that glorious day. ☺

This article is adapted from a message preached at the Tri-County Baptist Association pastor's retreat in Branson, Missouri, March, 2003.

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## News

### New Catalog of Founders Press Titles

Download a new catalog of Founders Press titles at:

<http://wwwFOUNDERS.org/fpress/>

New and recently added titles include *Dear Timothy*, edited by Tom Ascol, *By His Grace and For His Glory*, by Tom Nettles, and a volume from *An Interpretation of the English Bible* (James, 1 and 2 Thessalonians, 1 and 2 Corinthians) by B. H. Carroll.

### Monthly Founders eNewsletter

If you are not yet receiving our monthly Founders eNewsletter, you can subscribe by sending a blank email message to:

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Or complete the online subscriber form at:

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## Founders Study Center

On May 1, 2004 the Founders Study Center celebrated its first full year of ministry. God has done “exceedingly abundantly above all we could ask or think.” During our first year 69 students have enrolled in the Study Center from 24 states and 3 additional countries. This spring we have four courses in progress: *Preaching and Preachers* (Martyn Lloyd-Jones), *Theology of the Reformers* (Timothy George), *Maintaining Your Spiritual Health* (Don Whitney) and *Maintaining a Healthy Church* (Mark Dever). More courses are being planned for the Fall 2004 semester.

Please continue to pray for the Study Center. Pray that God will continue to make it profitable in the lives and ministries of pastors and church leaders. Pray that He will give increase and bring more students. Pray that He will continue to grow and prosper the relationships between students and mentors. Pray that He will raise up faithful, experienced pastors to serve as mentors.

For more information on the Founders Study Center visit:  
[study.founders.org](http://study.founders.org)

## Southern Baptist Founders Conference

Don't miss the national conference July 13-16, 2004 at Samford University in Birmingham, Alabama. The theme this year is *The Fellowship of His Sufferings*. Speakers include Josef Tson, President of the Romanian Missionary Society, Dr. Michael A. G. Haykin, Principal of the Toronto Baptist Seminary and Bible College, Ken Jones, Senior Pastor of Greater Union Baptist Church in Compton, California, Roger Ellsworth, Pastor of Immanuel Baptist Church in Benton, Illinois and Roy Hargrave, Senior Pastor of Riverbend Community Church in Ormond Beach, Florida.

Register early and save! If you register before June 14, 2004 the fee is \$215; after June 14, 2004 this fee is \$265.

For more information see [www.founders.org/conferences/sbfc/](http://www.founders.org/conferences/sbfc/)

## Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary Groundbreaking

Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary (PRTS) held a groundbreaking ceremony for its new building project on March 18, 2004. The new site is located at 2965 Leonard NE, Grand Rapids, Michigan 49525. Please pray for the seminary's president, Dr. Joel Beeke, its faculty and students that God would continue to prosper their work for the good of His Kingdom.

Learn more about PRTS at:  
<http://www.hnrc.org/gr/Ministries/PRTS/prts.html>

# Book Reviews

Octavius Winslow, *Morning Thoughts*. Grand Rapids, MI: Reformation Heritage Books, 2003. 788 pages.

*Reviewed by Tom Ascol*

Reformation Heritage Books has added another doctrinal and devotional gem to their already stellar lineup of reprints. This book of daily readings was compiled by the author himself from excerpts of previous writings. A nineteenth century nonconformist minister, Winslow was a prolific author and highly regarded preacher. Spurgeon invited him to preach at the dedication of the Metropolitan Tabernacle in 1861.

Each reading includes an exposition or devotional meditation on a Scripture passage or phrase and though no particular order is followed, related themes do often connect one day's offering to the next.

Winslow commends to every believer early morning meditation on the things of God: "Before the secular commences, to begin with the spiritual. Before care insinuates, to preoccupy the mind with peace. Before temptation assails, to fortify the heart with prayer. Before sorrow beclouds, to radiate the soul with divine sunshine" (viii).

This book represents the best of experiential, reformed piety. Winslow's understanding of both Scripture and the human heart runs deep. His insights are applicatory and Christ-centered, as this comment from the January 1 reading demonstrates: "Oh, to begin the year with a broken heart for sin, beneath the cross of Immanuel, looking through that cross to the heart of a loving, forgiving Father!" (2).

Joel Beeke's excellent editing has made Winslow more accessible by recasting some of his nineteenth century grammar to fit with modern standards. The result is shorter, more readable sentences that convey the author's words and meaning. This book is also typeset in a new, large print style.

I have been using Winslow since first receiving the book early in the year. Already I rank the volume alongside Spurgeon's *Morning and Evening* and William Jay's *Morning and Evening Exercises*. I highly recommend it as a useful tool to promote meditation on God's Word. Reformation Heritage Books plans to reprint the companion volume, *Evening Thoughts*, next year. ☺

John Quincy Adams, *The Bible Lessons of John Quincy Adams for His Son*. With Introduction by Doug Phillips. Profiles in Fatherhood Series. San Antonio, TX: Vision Forum, 2002. 90 pages.

*Reviewed by Ray Van Neste*

That the view of fatherhood in our culture is confused and skewed is manifest. I remember a few years ago reading of a Brazilian actress whose 4 month old son had been proven by blood tests to be the son of Mick Jagger. Jagger, married to someone else, had yet to visit his son, but the mother said, “He is a very loving father and, as fathers go, Lucas couldn’t be luckier.” “As fathers go”— what an indictment on us! In this setting Doug Phillips’ “Profiles in Fatherhood Series” is a welcome tool pointing us to another vision of fatherhood from days past, a biblical vision fleshed out in imperfect yet noble examples as seen in their letters to their children. There are currently two volumes in the series, both, interestingly, focusing on previous presidents: John Quincy Adams and Teddy Roosevelt.

The John Quincy Adams book contains nine letters he wrote to one of his sons while Adams himself was serving in St. Petersburg as ambassador to Russia and his son was in school in Massachusetts. Far from the modern example mentioned above, Adams though involved in heavy and important business took significant time to communicate to his son. Indeed, he states in his letters that he writes to urge his son to read the Bible and he sets out to teach him how to do so profitably. The first letter opens with Adams expressing delight in his son’s communication that he was reading a chapter in the Bible every evening. In response to this news Adams wrote:

“This information gave me real pleasure; for so great is my veneration for the Bible, and so strong my belief, that when duly read and meditated on, it is of all books in the world, that which contributes most to make men wise, and happy—that the earlier my children begin to read it, the more steadily they pursue the practice of reading it throughout their lives, the more lively and confident will be my hopes that they will prove useful citizens to their country, respectable members of society, and a real blessing to their parents.” (13)

Adams then sets out in the course of his letters to teach his son how to understand and apply the Scriptures, putting together an effective approach to synthesizing Scripture and constructing a biblical worldview. This sense of urgency for his son to read the Scriptures and the sense of duty to inculcate this himself (rather than delegating it to others) is a great example for us today.

It may be useful here to list some quotes which illustrate the goal of these

letters.

“There are, and always have been, where the Holy Scriptures have been known, petty witlings and self-conceited reasoners, who cavil at some of the particular details of this narration.” (24)

“To a man of liberal education, the study of history is not only useful, and important, but altogether indispensable, and with regard to the history contained in the Bible, the observation which Cicero makes respecting that of his own country is much more emphatically applicable, that ‘it is not so much praiseworthy to be acquainted with as it is shameful to be ignorant of it.’” (27)

“The miraculous interposition of Divine power recorded in every part of the Bible, are invariably marked with grandeur and sublimity worthy of the Creator of the world, and before which the gods of Homer, not excepting his Jupiter, dwindle into the most contemptible pigmies.” (45)

“The more you meditate on the laws of Moses, the more striking and brighter does their wisdom appear.” (47)

“Vain, indeed, would be the search among the writings of profane antiquity (not merely of that remote and antiquity, but even in the most refined and philosophical ages of Greece and Rome), to find so broad, so complete and so solid a basis for morality as the Decalogue lays down.” (49)

“I have already observed that the great immovable and eternal foundation of the superiority of scripture morals, to all other morality, was the idea of God disclosed in them and only in them: the unity of God, his omnipotence, his righteousness, his mercy, and the infinity of his attributes, are marked in every line of the Old Testament, in characters which nothing less than blindness, can fail to discern, and nothing less than fraud can misrepresent.” (51)

“...for pathos of narrative; for the selections of incidents that go directly to the heart; for the picturesque of character and manner; the selection of circumstances that mark the individuality of persons; for copiousness, grandeur, and sublimity of imagery; for unanswerable cogency and closeness of reasoning; and for irresistible force of persuasion: no book in the world deserves to be so unceasingly studied, and so profoundly meditated upon as the Bible.” (77)

It must be conceded, as Phillips does in his introduction, that Adams' theology is not exemplary at all points. He had been affected by the rationalism of his day, and this is seen at points in his letters. Phillips, rightly, has not edited this out but allows us to see both wheat and chaff. This does not impede the usefulness of the book. Indeed, it only heightens the challenge to fathers who claim to believe the Bible more completely but take less pains to teach it to their children!

In addition to the letters and Phillips' introduction the book contains the original publisher's introduction and closes with Adams' poem, "The wants of Man," composed in 1874 when he was 74.

There are some places where improvement could be made in future editions. Primarily some more historical background would be helpful. For instance I was left wondering who this son was and what he eventually did in life. It would be nice to have the dates on each letter. The name of the original publisher and date were not given. It may be that some or all of this information is unknown, but if accessible it would only strengthen a great book. Also, there is a frequent unnecessary use of *sic* in regards to British spelling in words such a "recognized" and "practised."

In conclusion, this is a great book and Doug Phillips and Vision Forum are to be thanked once again for making it available. It would make a great gift for fathers. May God use it to spur us on to reclaiming the glorious task of discipling our own children. ☺

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## Letters

Dear *Founders Journal*,

Thank you for exalting our Lord Jesus Christ through the ministry you have. It is so refreshing to see the truth! ...

Because of Christ,  
M. P., via email

.....

Thanks again and for the wonderful help and ministry that the Founders site, and the relationships derived from it, have been to me, my family and our church!

L. F. via email

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