

Doctrine of Creation

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[0:00] All right, team, shall we give it a go? Well, we're continuing on our series on creation, and we will be taking up the topic of a theology of culture, some reflections toward a theology of culture.

It has often been observed that the Bible begins in a garden and ends in a city. And that arc from Eden's garden to the heavenly city involves a storyline of creation, fall, and redemption.

But it also involves the progression of culture. And while the redemption theme is the one that receives most prominent attention, in theological reflection at least, the cultural motif is also deserving of attention.

Herman Bavinck, the Dutch theologian, goes so far as to say culture, in its broadest sense, is the purpose for which God created man after his image.

What is the cultural mandate that comes to us in creation? And what is the cultural calling that it summons us to? That's the subject of our investigation this morning.

[1:19] Our cultural mandate, its origin, its nature, its complication, and perhaps, if time favors us, a glance at its destiny.

As Bavinck observes, our cultural mandate comes in the context of our being fashioned in God's image. So Genesis 2.27, we've heard this before.

So God created mankind in his own image and said to them, Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it and have dominion.

We might say that our being fashioned in the image of God enables the fulfillment of our unique calling. It is our qualification for our commission.

Now, the image of God is not entirely a translucent concept. There's a longstanding and continuing debate over what precisely it is to be in the image of God. And Nick has illuminated that from every conceivable angle, so I won't spend more time on it, or much more time on it.

[2:25] The historical and cultural background from Moses' day helpfully illuminates the meaning of image. You see, across the ancient Near East, kings, emperors, and potentates would erect images of themselves throughout their lands to represent their dominion.

And these images were representations of the potentate's authority. In making us God's images, He is saying, in effect, I give you authority to represent me in my world.

And we do so by exercising dominion in the world, which reflects God's values, purposes, nature, and character. In other words, kingdom values.

Another contextual clue to the meaning of image of God arises when we appropriately ask, how is God set forth in this narrative?

If mankind is patterned on God, how is God portrayed? What image of God is conveyed in the context of the creation narrative?

[3:38] Well, what we see in the opening chapter of Genesis is God as creator exercising breathtaking creativity. He speaks into existence, sun, moon, stars, land, and sea, a veritable tropical profusion of life forms, both plant and animal, oaks, art of arcs, whales and snails, the peacock, the platypus.

It's a stunning and delightful effervescence of creativity. That is the image we are given of God. But you'll remember also that God is portrayed as ordering.

Genesis 1 gives us a sequence of his ordering acts. He divides. First, he divides order from chaos. The earth was initially formless and void.

Then he divides light from darkness, heaven from earth, land from sea. It seems he is ordering a suitable environment for the things created so they can flourish.

Heaven for stars, sun and moon, land for plants and animals, sky for the denizens of the air, the sea creatures for those that swarm in the water, the sea for creatures that swarm in the water.

[5:03] So here we have an image of God as orderer, as cultivator of the environment, separating, setting bounds, and sustaining it.

So we see God as creative cultivator. And we humans, fashioned in his image, are to image him precisely in that.

We are to be creative cultivators. And notice the concrete, explicit task that God gives to Adam. It reflects this very imaging of God. He gives Adam the task of naming the animals. Every beast in the field and every bird of heaven, God brought before Adam to see what he would name them. Make up any name, Adam. Something suitable and fitting to this particular animal. What will you call it? So Adam images God in exercising his creativity here.

[6:11] And I love that phrase in verse 19. There's almost kind of a wonder and surprise in it, is there not? And whatever the man called the living creature, that was its name.

God lets Adam's creativity stand. God had really given Adam dominion. The sovereign creator, the really creative one, did not critique, improve, or reverse Adam's creative adventure.

Does God come back to Adam? Oh, Adam, hold on, hold on, steady on. Do you really think that's a good name, Adam? Does that really penetrate the essence of this animal?

Wouldn't this be better, Adam? Well, come to think of it, I guess so, God. Why don't you name the next one until I get the hang of it?

You're better at this, God. No. Whatever the man called it, that was its name. The creator seeds creative dominion to mankind.

[7:22] Here. Here. You do it. It's hard to avert sharing a little bit of Moses's wonder here. It's remarkable. God also gives Adam the concrete task of cultivating and tending the garden.

God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it. From the foregoing description of Eden, you get the impression that God had fashioned a very special place.

Now, do you tend to hand off your most special things to someone else, for someone else, especially a junior partner to handle?

As I occasionally heard our girls, our three girls, when they were growing up, Hey, can I borrow that belt you got from Italy? Oh, no, not that one.

That's special. Can you imagine Adam's reaction to God's commission? A God? Are you sure this is a good idea?

[8:27] I mean, this garden is a very special place. Are you sure that you shouldn't be the one to take care of it in case anything goes wrong? I mean, after all, it was a pretty intricate place with a plant department, an animal department, water department, gem department.

No, Adam, you take care of it. You keep it thriving. You make it continue to flourish. You be my cultivator.

You do it as my image. Well, what did that involve? Well, what did God, in an exemplary way, do with it?

It says, God planted a garden in Eden and made to spring up every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food. Adam, I have given you something beautiful, pleasant to the sight, and useful, good for food.

You cultivate those things. Preserve and bring out the beauty and usefulness of what I have given you in this garden.

[9:41] And notice, even in Eden, it seems like there was entropy. At least it required Adam's intervention to sustain its beauty and functionality.

He needed to invest to do it. Here's a question. Were there weeds in Eden? Were there weeds in Eden? I think there were.

For isn't a weed no more than a plant in the wrong place? And surely, eventually, there must have been. Don't you think sycamore seeds and shoots sprang up in the wrong place?

Too dense right under the sycamore tree? Or do you think that the beavers didn't damn the pishon? These concrete tasks God gave to Adam help us to exegete his commission to Adam and Eve. And through them to us. Their posterity. Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it and exercise dominion.

[10:47] So rightly, we recognize that this be fruitful and multiply involves procreation. Certainly that. But, from what we've understood from this context, be fruitful and multiply involves not simply procreation, but creation and cultivation.

That's how we image God. As Adam with the animals, we bring our creativity to bear on his world that God has given us. We fashion things.

Not perhaps entirely ex nihilo, out of nothing at all, but, to use Tolkien's term, as sub-creators. We sub-create things that are beautiful and useful.

We are to spin things, like Adam's animal names, out of our creative imagination. Stories and snow angels, sonnets and skyscrapers, deploying the raw material that God has given us.

Eyes that see and savor proportions. Vocal chords that render sounds as songs. Fingers that move a paintbrush or work a crane.

[12:06] This creational commission has been rightly called a cultural commission, for it calls us to make something of the world.

Homo faber, man and woman, as maker of cultural artifacts. Or perhaps better, homo ludens, from the Latin ludus, which has the delightful semantic range of both school, where we seriously work, and play.

For is not to create both to work and play? I'm trying to catch something of the note of exuberant joy of God's, oh, good, good, good, very good.

Work and play mingled together. It's wonderful. And how else could it be but to combine them, as there's always both a seriousness and a mirth when we are doing what we were created to do.

Now, our culture tends to valorize this creative aspect of image bearing. We tend to laud and lionize creative types, don't we?

[13:33] Artists, not administrators, tend to capture our imaginations. We prize innovation over conservation, though conservation is coming into its own lately, and rightly so.

For, remember, we also and equally image God in cultivation as we do creativity. Keeping a garden beautiful and functional requires a lot of nurture and cultivation.

And so it is with the world that God has given us. Think of families, forests, highways, water supplies, snow removal, research libraries, traffic signals.

I mean, things threaten to slip into the primordial chaos over which God's Spirit first brooded. I mean, just look at your desk or your lawn or even your sock drawer.

I mean, you'd think we could get dominion over our sock drawer, but it's challenging. The chaos just seems to breed. We image God as we keep chaos at bay from slowly and surely encroaching on our ordered environment.

[14:52] Neither were Adam and Eve simply to kind of hold up an Eden, holding back the onslaught. Is it the Alamo or something? They were to advance, to push the ordered beauty of Eden out into the world.

Their multiplying fruitfulness, their creative cultivation was to fill the earth. What expansive horizons for our calling to image God.

There's a lot out there for Adam and Eve and their offspring to creatively encounter. Unless deaf to this music, there should be something here of the feeling like a kid in a candy store.

Don't you feel it? As a start, they just got to jump on naming the beasts of the field, zoology, and the birds of the air, ornithology. But what about the fish?

The monsters of the deep, marine biology. Surely they need creative suitable names too. Adam's posterity will need first creatively to invent, I guess, like the snorkel and the underwater iPad to get that done.

[16:03] And what about the stars? God names them all. We've named a few, but only a few. How gloriously expansive is this calling?

Cultivate. That is, bring out the potential, the latent beauty and blessing. Expose and expound it for our wonder and worship.

Draw out and multiply the fruitfulness of the earth. And indeed, exercise our own creative and cultivating fruitfulness in the process.

Map words on realities. Accurately and artfully. That's one of my favorite parts. This is what it means to subdue.

Now, the term may sound violently extractive, but actually, it is to take some portion of God's creation and to master it in the sense of order it, that it is to image God's creation and to master it in the universe.

[17:11] That it is to image God.

The physicist discovering and delighting in the laws of motion, which govern the universe, and then putting them into creative usefulness in the game of billiards or landing on Mars.

Notice how to image God is to exhibit a nature expressed in an activity.

It's being at work. It's not just an endowment, but an exercise of that endowment in dominion. And we may represent him as his image because we resemble him.

Just as the large images of the ancient Near East depicted Aserbanipal or Amenhotep, we image him as we display his communicable attributes.

[18:17] We love mercy and do justly. We show grace and truth, etc. Now, in this calling to be image bearers, although we all have this generic calling in common, we will each fulfill it in a unique way.

Clearly, God delights in variety, and he has fashioned us, each of us, uniquely as snowflakes when it comes to image bearing. Sure, we all have a sense of justice.

And an impulse to compassion. We all are creative cultivators. But we have those bits in different relations and proportions.

Some tend to the creative side. There's Jeff over there. Others to the cultivation pole. Probably point to a few there. I'm looking at Susan.

Who knows? Some could kind of be happy ladling out soup in shelters, in homeless shelters, all evening. Just happy to do that. Compassion oriented.

[19:29] Others, you know, we're ladling out soup for a while, but pretty soon we kind of drop the ladle and we're stepping back and we're scratching our head. And we're thinking, why is this line so interminably long? What are the structures in society that make this an issue?

And how could we get it? What if we were to Jimmy? There we go. There's someone who's maybe justice oriented. Some compassion, some justice oriented.

And this helps us to account for our individually adapted callings as image bearers. And ideally, this calling will reflect our passions, our gifts, our sensibilities, our judgments, our skills, our delights.

What particularly do you notice acutely? Love, relish, discern.

Those will be clues that will kind of elbow you in the direction of your calling. Once at the Louvre, standing in front of the Mona Lisa with a friend, to my wonder, my friend remarked, observing the painting, look at how that frame is grooved.

[20:37] I hadn't even noticed the Mona Lisa was in a frame. And I just thought, wow. I was staring at the face, trying to make sense of the mercurial smile that's there on the Mona Lisa.

What expression is this? One of the guards seemed to relish my awe and excitement at viewing the art, evidenced by his slightly raised mustache, just betokening a bit of a smile.

Wow. The other guard, there are always two in each room there in the Louvre, the other guard seemed to care more that I not lean in too close to the canvas. With subtlety and grace, he cleared his throat just to catch my attention.

And with a graceful, only just perceptible motion of his hand, restored me to the proper distance and reestablished the carefully cultivated environment for the Mona Lisa.

How delightfully variegated is our image-bearing agency? Just, people are a wonder to see how the image got. It's just a wonder.

[21:45] Well, thus far in our exploration of our calling as image-bearers, we've been entirely positive about our expressions of creativity and cultivation.

But, our divinely given culture-making capacity is subject to a contaminating influence. Sin.

In Genesis 3-7, we see the first pair of image-bearers creatively stitching together fig leaves to fashion garments.

But notice how they are deploying their talents evasively, to conceal, just as they will deploy the trees of the garden to hide themselves from God.

The contamination of sin to our creativity. The reflection, that is the image of God, gets refracted.

[22:52] From those very first fig leaves, cultural creativity gets entwined with sin. And notice how language itself is also stained, deployed for evasion, to conceal truth, to distract from it, rather than to voice truth.

Oh, Lord, it was the woman who you gave me. So, let's briefly consider the contamination of capacity for creative cultivation.

If we just look at one episode that's illuminating, the Tower of Babel stands as emblematic of the powers and perversion, both the powers and the perversion of our culture-making.

I'm not going to take time to read it because it's a pretty familiar story. If you have your Bibles and you're eager to look on, it's in Genesis 11, right at the beginning, 1 through 9. But, I won't say notice, if you don't have the text, but remember.

Remember the animating motives for this great cultural endeavor. Not to glorify God by representing Him.

[24:12] Indeed, they rebelliously repudiate His directive to fill the earth. They rather are motivated by their pride, let us make a name for ourselves, and fear, lest we be dispersed over the face of the whole earth.

On the surface, the story reads like a human Promethean reaching met by the peak of a challenged divine rival on first surface.

Behold, they are one people, and they all have one language, and this is only the beginning of what they will do.

And nothing that they propose to do will be impossible for them. Let us then go down and confuse their language. Is this just divine pique at being challenged?

No. More insight suggests we better understand the episode as exhibiting simultaneous absurdity and gravity.

[25:21] It's Derek Kidner's phrase, marvelous phrase. Simultaneous absurdity and gravity. As to absurdity, while they aspire to have their tower reach to the heavens, God has to come down in order to see it.

Is there something down there? I don't know. I see a new speck. It's akin to the absurdity of trying to hide from God behind a tree. We've already done this before. Absurd.

Absurd. And as to gravity, the phrases, this is only the beginning, and nothing impossible, strike an ominous note.

God interferes with the execution of this cultural enterprise, not so much nor even only from its hubristic spirit, but chiefly from fidelity to his promise that the sinful development of humanity would not again issue in a repeated catastrophe on the scale of the flood.

If this was to be averted, the progress of sin had to be checked. If the whole of humanity had remained concentrated, the power of sin would have likewise remained united and doubtless soon again reached stupendous proportions.

[26:46] It is a powerful testimony to the puissance of our cultural powers as image bearers and the capacity of sin to co-opt those powers that God had to break up the unity of the race to retard the potential for evil, sorrow, and loss.

As many a teacher has discovered, these three boys better not sit next to each other in the class or something really bad is going to happen. You just divide it, you know, divide and conquer that way.

Artfully, the builders' words are subtly laden with indications of their cultural powers gone awry.

So there's this wonderful Hebrew scholar, Robert Alter, and he observes that the words for, in Hebrew, for make bricks and for stone and build for ourselves all contain the sequential consonants of n-bo-ol, which spell mixed up or babble and evoke the words in Hebrew folly, flood, folly, flood.

It's marvelous, marvelous piece. Clearly, there's a good way to be like God. Reflect him, reflect him. And there is a bad way to be like God, to seek to replace him as center.

[28:15] And it is no literary accident that the passage has a chiasmic or palistropic form where it all kind of parallel meets in the middle, which is double-struck. And right in the middle structure, there is the word God, who is to be the hinge of all things that we try to displace.

It's a wonderful passage. So, sin is a contaminant to our cultural projects. It twists them away from their God-glorifying purpose.

Thus, every cultural artifact will be ever only an alloyed good. Like its human fashioner, it will be an amalgam reflecting both the image of God and the stain of sin.

Now, this awareness should make the biblically thoughtful Christian a penetrating and nuanced critic of culture.

She will recognize some goodness in every cultural artifact, for it will somewhere reflect the image of God, inevitably.

[29:32] Her assessment can therefore never be wholly negative. For all sin's corrupting power, it is not, sin is not omnipotent.

It's not omnipotent. And can only deface, never efface, the image-bearing good. Never completely. Neither can her cultural evaluation ever be an unqualified affirmation, for sin's virus is always present in human artifice.

There clings iniquity, even to the holiest of our offerings. So we should be really, really good cultural critics. Always something to affirm.

Always something to challenge and interrogate. Well, we began our reflections with the observation that the biblical story begins in a garden and ends in a city.

[30:30] So let's conclude our investigation with a glance to the end. Revelation 21 and 22 depicts the new heavens and the new earth as Eden-like, this wonderful triple hyphenation, a garden city temple, actually extending over the whole earth with the glory of the Lord covering the whole earth even as the waters cover the sea.

Wow. Seems so final and consummate. So, does that mean the mandate to be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth will have been fulfilled?

Completed? Does our image-bearing commission stop there with the advent of the new heavens and the new earth? Will our cultural efforts and offerings have no place in the everlasting, glorious future?

Well, there are tantalizing suggestions that it will not be so. Consider Christ's parable of the talents in Matthew 25.

The stewards are to take the resources given them by the master and multiply them. Make them fruitful. Two of the three stewards invest the resources well and do faithfully multiply them.

[31:58] But with what is their faithful stewardship rewarded when the master returns? An eternal cruise?

A recliner? No. More to be fruitful and multiply with. An augmented sphere of stewardship in the resurrection life.

You have been faithful in little. I will put you over much. And the somewhat parallel parable in Luke 19 expresses it rule over ten cities to the faithful.

Rule over ten cities. It would seem we continue to fulfill our creation commission to exercise dominion.

And I love that phrase enter into the joy of your master. What is the joy of the master? It's doubtless deep and diverse.

[33:05] But in this context it would seem to be his joy in what he expressed as well done. That is the fruitful multiplying of his resources.

That's the master's joy. It brings divine delight. And we enter into that joy as we continue fruitfully to multiply the much we are given to work with in the eschatological kingdom as we creatively cultivate our ten or five or however many cities over which we are to exercise dominion.

So it would appear the cultural commission given in the garden still defines our calling even in the glorious future.

It would seem the opening up of everlasting horizons will not be the cessation of our cultural task rather it's continuation and indeed amplification.

And does this not make sense? For the task is and ever shall be manifestly incomplete for the potential of what God has fashioned seems endless.

[34:36] us. 1,120 musical works is a lot of realized creative potential but did not Bach have yet more music to make?

Could not notes be arranged in still more extraordinary ways? And did not Rembrandt have more art in him?

Milton more poetry? Pelé more goals? I'm sure you're convinced that that's true. So perhaps it should come as less of a surprise that in John's description of the eschatological New Jerusalem works of culture are streaming into its ever-open gates.

You remember the phrase? The kings of the earth will bring their glory into it. The glory and honor of the nations. Revelation 21.

What are these national glories or treasures the kings of the earth will bring to the holy city, the end time temple? The seer's description is drawn from Isaiah's vision of God's promised future found in Isaiah 60.

[35:54] It's a wonderful vision. We can linger only a moment to make a few observations particularly germane to our theme. The opening language of Isaiah 60 parallels the genesis creation.

Out of thick darkness light arises. This evokes new creation. In verse 3, the nations are represented by kings as bringing their wealth.

The wealth of nations has a familiar ring if you read economics. That is, their choicest treasures.

Camels of Midian, golden frankincense from Sheba, flocks from Kadar.

If this, this would be a period parallel to our, say, chocolates and watches from Switzerland, BMWs and Mercedes from Germany, pasta and gelato from Italy, etc., etc.

Use your imagination. I don't know. all these cultural treasures shall, quote, beautify my beautiful house. That is, adorn the new Jerusalem.

[37:05] And notice, laden with these ethnic offerings are, if we had the text, the ships of Tarshish. Ah, bringing these treasures to the city of the Lord are the ships of Tarshish.

Now, this is an intriguing reference, as the ships of Tarshish, were renowned as large vessels, capable of transporting massive loads great distances.

They were the pride and glory of their pagan possessors. Isaiah describes them in chapter 2 as beautiful craft, but proud and lofty and lifted up.

Thus, the Lord of hosts is, quote, against all the ships of Tarshish. Psalm 48 repeats this condemnation. The Lord will shatter the ships of Tarshish.

Again in Isaiah 23, judgment awaits you, so wail, O ships of Tarshish. So, how do we reconcile this seemingly conflicting assessment of the ships of Tarshish?

[38:14] If they are to be destroyed for their pridefulness, how is it that they show up in the New Jerusalem as instruments of service?

Could it be that the judgment that they must pass through is not an annihilating judgment, but a purifying one?

As Richard Maul asks, could the breaking of the ships of Tarshish be more like the breaking of a horse rather than the breaking of a vase?

It is not that the ships as such will be destroyed, simply their former function. In the New Jerusalem, they're no more the means of pride and rebellion, as they served Jonah, for example, and fleeing the Lord.

No, no. Vessels of mutiny become vessels of ministry. Clearly, many cultural artifacts function idolatrously and give expression to our rebellion.

[39:27] Like the Tower of Babel, they are proud and lofty, things in their present context, but they may be, nonetheless, good and beautiful things worthy of preservation.

the vaulting arch. Surely, it will be preserved. It's an architectural masterpiece, but it must first be stripped of its vaunting pride, or its use in pagan temple or brothel or sweatshop.

These cultural goods must be brought low, but this need not mean their utter destruction. salvation. Their horizon may be transformation.

In our present fallen context, our cultural artifacts are intertwined with sin. They are sin-alloyed glory, contaminated goodness.

But it would appear from Isaiah's vision that God has a purpose to reclaim them. He will reclaim what humans have used to rebel.

[40:40] What we have found in this earth and fashion and fabricated idolatrously and rebelliously, God will not give up for, as Psalm 24 states, the earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof.

What we were to fill the earth with, creational commission, that very fullness is his, it's God's. He will transform it and so reclaim it like the ships of Tarshish. Is this the universal pattern? Will it be so with all of our sin-stained productions that they will be reclaimed?

Well, it seems there is another pattern which might be inferred from another of Isaiah's descriptions, drawn from one of his more famous visions of God's glorious future consummated kingdom.

Isaiah 2, you recall, it says, the Lord will beat swords into plowshares and spears into pruning forks, pruning hooks.

[41:48] It seems some cultural artifacts will have their very identities changed, not simply their instrumentalities.

So their identities will need to change. Ships may remain ships, only put to God's glorifying use. They are recommissioned, we might say.

But swords and spears must become something else to serve God's glory. But even here, they do not become refuse, but are repurposed.

God seems not even to give up the raw material of his created hand. God recycles.

God recycles. It would seem our creator is also redeemer in a very expansive sense. and that he is committed to a grand restoration project.

[42:52] Redemption does not simply involve the souls of his people, but their resurrection, a bodily existence. 1 Corinthians 15 is clear on this. But redemption must also involve this material, earth.

After all, where would these bodily resurrected beings thrive except upon a physical earth? the meek shall inherit the earth, Jesus tells us in the Sermon on the Mount.

Romans 8 gives us a moving description of all creation groaning for the day of redemption when it will come to be set free from its bondage to corruption, to attain a share in the freedom and glory of the redeemed humanity.

So once we rid ourselves of any residual contaminant of Gnosticism, which has often and recently affected the church, that is the exaltation of spirit over a denigrated physical, why it scarcely seems right that it could be otherwise, once we understand that.

How odd for our sovereign God to utterly abandon the earth, the work of his hands, handing it all over to his enemy Satan, splitting the spoils.

[44:07] He'll all take the souls, you have the rest. No! No, there's a wider truth, a wonderfully wider truth to what we sing at Christmas.

He comes to make his blessings flow far as the curse is found. So, summing up, we might formulate our findings thus.

As with creation, so with culture. God does not abandon the work of his hands, creation, neither does he abandon the works of our hands, his image bearers' hands, culture.

New creation, the new heavens and earth will be a place of culture. nature, it will bear the ornaments of the labors of his image bearers.

Our cultural mandate, our image bearing mission shall carry over into eternity to our great relish and his too, the joy of the master.

[45:17] nature. So, what is our response? Our creator king on his return will transform and purify culture from the alloyed amalgam that it now is.

Do we simply await his coming and pray Maranatha, even so come Lord Jesus? No. We do not simply wait, but neither do we ourselves accomplish this transformation.

We cannot simply move from Christ will transform culture to Christians transform culture. We cannot build the heavenly city. Hebrews tells us its builder and maker is God.

It comes down from heaven. But, if we neither merely await this transformation, nor can accomplish it, we can anticipate it.

Live now as citizens of that city to come, reflecting its values and purposes and creative, cultivating joy, having the assurance that as we so live and labor, it will not be in vain.

[46:24] Not be for nothing. The fruit of such labors will have their place in the glorious future. Therefore, writes the apostle, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.

without this hope, a pall is cast over our labors. As Bertrand Russell, the atheist, writes, all the labors of the ages, all the devotion, all the inspiration, all the noonday brightness of human genius are destined to extinction.

And the whole temple of man's achievement must inevitably be buried beneath the debris of a universe in ruins. Now, there's a sanguine vision.

No, your labor is not in vain in the Lord. We may not be able to build the heavenly city, but we may build for it, and we shall build in it, with the purified, creative, cultivating image of God, of which we are now the stewards.

And if our efforts seem so frail and fragile, distorted and disappointing, pathetic and paltry, let us seek that purifying spirit who is himself a part of that future kingdom and can empower us to anticipate it in our lives and labors.

[47:52] Oh, Lord, lend permanence to the work of our hands. Let me stop there and open it up for any questions or comments. By the way, I have an appendix that I will email to people, or we'll figure out a way to get, where I take a couple of the most challenging passages of scripture that seem to suggest, no, the whole thing is going to burn, and give a careful exegesis of those, but that's an appendix to this.

Much to your relief, I'm not going into that now. Yes? Yes? Yes? Yes? Well, I'm not, I don't know how metaphoric you intend me to understand that.

Presumably somewhat metaphoric because there's not going to be another flood to do that. But if indeed the ark stands as type for the means of rescue when God's judgment comes, yes, in one sense, God has built that apparatus in terms of the sacrifice of his son, who is the ark, there is only shelter from judgment in him, Christ the ark, and we are to be, the scripture says, his witnesses. So what we do is like Noah's preaching, we direct people to the only salvation that is in Christ, the ark, that alone will float above the waters of judgment.

So in that sense, that would be the case, and that very much displays much of our calling to be his witness bearers and ambassadors. He makes his appeal through us, it says in 2 Corinthians 5, 20, 21-ish.

[50:02] Yeah, yeah, Jeff. Could you, first of all, thank you. Oh, you're welcome. Thank you for the fire hose. That was amazing. Could you give us a, John, one-minute riff on the culture of wars and what you just presented and how we might have a posture for it?

Excellent. Yes, yes, yes. So one of the things about the culture of wars, it seems like for the Christians, much of our reaction to looking out of our compound and saying, oh my goodness, looks like the world's going to hell in a handbasket.

You know, cats are dating dogs, all kinds of crazy things are happening out there. So we respond in fear. Oh no, I've got three daughters.

They're growing up in this world. And we respond in anger. Hey, this is not what we once had in terms of our influence over society. We didn't lose it. Someone probably took it from us, and it's probably those nasty people out there.

So the whole thing sets us up to cast our neighbors as not only our opponents, but enemies. Hence the word culture war. And to ratchet up the stakes so highly, because if we sadly think we have so much of our lot in this world, the stakes will be so high, we will engage in some sort of gladiatorial contest where winner takes all.

[51:27] When we have frustrated by our failure to persuade, we just go and we use political means to try to wrench things around in our direction. In contrast, I think that the way that we can make our testimony more vivid is everybody's trying to figure out what is a meaningful life.

What's the life worth living? And if we can create in the Christian community something that has a fragrance of Christ and allure of life, something that is vibrant and creative and wonderful, I think people are looking to think, oh, that looks like a life worth living.

So I think that the creative arts, in a way to comprehensively display, this is a life that's oriented toward kingdom values, and this is the one that is most affirming of humanity as rightly discerned, that's a critical part of our witness bearing.

And I think that beauty is often the easiest portal for an unbeliever to encounter.

And even the art, I mean, one of the marvelous things that art does is it's so captivating that it arrests us in our manic lives, and we pause and we ask and we look and we try to attend, and maybe we feel a little bit of transcendence, and that opens up a new set of questions.

[52:55] Because in every piece of beauty, that's just a little shard off the block that is God, the origin. You know, that's the little drop of water where Christ is the ocean.

So if we can get people to attend to beauty and to feel a stirring of beauty, to catch something of the melody of a song they haven't yet heard, to use Lewis's line, or to catch the fragrance of a flower they haven't yet found, I think art is absolutely phenomenally enhancing and critical.

in our witness bearing. And it again, it looks at our neighbors not as enemies, but those who are lost, who are seeking to win in love.

It's not love. Everything is love each other. That's so much. Pretty fundamental. Yeah, I think so too. I think so too. You know how about music, art, music, classical, you know music.

Yeah. Everything from that. Yes. You know, so laugh loudly for the laugh and laugh. It's very hard. I am. In general, everyone. That's right.

[54:12] That's right. All right, team. I think, unless there's one more question, we probably should vacate. We want to, if a couple of you could help with the reordering of the room, that would be great.

thank you if anybody is interested in the appendix on those texts of scripture that often are invoked to challenge this vision just fire me a text and I'll send it to you with the text of this if you want thank you team oh you're welcome yeah thank you oh