

April 22nd, 2018
—THE GOSPEL CHANGES EVERYTHING—
OUR VOCATION IN REDEMPTION
Romans 8:18-23; Colossians 1:15-20

Re-cap

This is our third installment in this mini-series on vocation. Your vocation is what God has *called* you to do in the world. **1 Cor. 7:17** “Let each person lead the life that the Lord has *assigned* to him, and to which God has *called* him. We have been applying this directly to the realm of work. Yet your vocation is bigger than your employment. You still have a “work” or a “calling” even if you don’t work. Some of you are disabled, retired, suffering, unemployed, and God is still calling you to “good works”—to something deeper *even* in your present circumstances.

Thus far we have looked at our work through the lens of creation and the fall. In our first message, we asked the questions: Why is work a blessing? Why is work *necessary* for a fulfilled life? First, work is a blessing because God works. God labors in this world to put on display His greatness, and to spread the wealth of His happiness to the human race. Our work participates in that. Second, work is necessary for a fulfilled life, because our joy rests not only in knowing God but in showing God. We were made as images of God, and we are only fully human when we copy Him by laboring for the good of our neighbor and society all to the glory of God. That is our vocation in creation.

Last week, we looked at our vocation in the fall. We asked the questions: Why is work so *hard*? Why is work *often* such a source of frustration? Work is hard and frustrating because the human race rebelled against God. Adam and Eve turned away from loving God and treasuring Him as supreme, and put themselves in His place. This brought a curse upon every part of the cosmos. We are now filled shame, alienated from God and man, and blaming and accusing others as the source of our problems. And that’s what we bring to work—ourselves. We are the thorns of the earth. That is our vocation in the fall.

How does Jesus redeem your work?

Today we are looking at our vocation in redemption. Please turn with me to Luke 19. This is the story of the Zacchaeus. I really like this story, because the Scripture says he was a short man (**Luke 19:3**). But he was also a chief tax collector and one who used his position in business to defraud people (**Luke 19:2**). On one occasion, Jesus came to Jericho and the crowds swarmed him. Zacchaeus desperately wanted to see Jesus, so climbed up a tree so he catch a glimpse. Jesus spotted him and said “Zacchaeus, hurry and come down, for I must stay at your house today” (**Luke 19:5**) Miraculously and mysteriously, at this moment Jesus caused Zacchaeus to be born again. He climbed up the tree an unbeliever, and he climbed down a believer (**Luke 19:9**). And he declared to Jesus in **Luke 19:8** “Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor. And if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I restore it fourfold.” There was an immediate recognition on Zacchaeus’ part that belonging to Jesus meant He had to change the way that he worked.¹ And the question is: what does that look like? How has gospel changed the way that you ought to work? That is where we are going today.

- ☆ The Gospel Changes The World
- ☆ The Gospel Changes Your Worldview
- ☆ The Gospel Changes Your Work

¹ And Jesus presses this point home in the parable that follows. Look at **v.11** “As they heard *these things*, he proceeded to tell a parable, *because* he was near to Jerusalem, and because they supposed that the kingdom of God was to appear immediately.” The crowd was under the notion that Jesus would usher in the kingdom of God immediately. They didn’t see the cross, they only saw the crown. So Jesus says, picking up in **v.12** “A nobleman went into a far country to receive for himself a kingdom and then return.” Jesus is saying that He is the nobleman, and that after His death, and resurrection He would go into a far country—Heaven—to receive the kingdom from the Father that He purchased. Only after that would He return. So Jesus is now turning to them is instructing them on what they should be doing in the mean time. **v.13** Calling ten of his servants, he gave them ten minas [equivalent to three months’ wages for a laborer], and said to them, ‘Engage in business until I come.’ In between Jesus’ ascension and His return, we are to engage in business until He returns.

The Big Idea...

The gospel changes everything — souls and cities, so now you are free to work
for the glory of God and the good of man

I. The Gospel Changes The World

The gospel changes everything

Please turn with me to **Colossians 1:19-20**. In both our passages today, Paul is laboring to show that what Jesus accomplished on the cross and in His resurrection, was not *merely* the salvation of individual souls, but Jesus is redeeming the whole universe. *Not meaning* that everyone will be saved. But rather that the creation itself and everything that is contained in it is undergoing a metamorphosis—a reconciliation to the Son of God. Paul says in **Colossians 1:19-20** “For in him [Christ] all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself *all things*, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.” What are the all things here? **v.16** tells us: “For by him *all things* were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him.” The *all things* is everything that has ever been created. Everything non-God. Paul is saying all of *those things*, both visible things like cities, or invisible things like the laws of physics are being reconciled² to him.

And this is a frightening and freeing idea for many evangelicals. Because this view makes the world exceedingly large. Jesus did not come *merely* for your individual salvation, He came to change everything. Imagine an acorn. You bury it in the soil, you water it, and it grows into an oak tree. Jesus makes us alive in

² To be reconciled is the picture of bringing something into harmony. Like when a musician tunes his guitar, if it is sharp or flat, he turns the tuning peg, so that his string comes into harmonic alignment with the right sound. The two sounds become one, agreeing with one another.

Him, raising us from the soil of spiritual death to the blue skies of spiritual life. And that's glorious, but many of us stop there. It is a one-dimensional view of the gospel—acorn to oak. Period. Salvation is about that one tree—individual salvation. But that doesn't do justice to what **Colossians 1:20**—that Jesus is “reconciling to himself *all things*...making peace by the blood of his cross.” Now think of everything that comes into existence when that acorn turns into an oak tree. That single oak tree changes the whole ecosystem around it. It becomes a house for the squirrels and the birds to raise their babies. It becomes life giving shade to other plants. It becomes a center for reproduction, not only producing more acorns for future oak trees, but also food for pigeons, duck, pigs, deer, squirrels, mice. Insects find food in the leaves, and birds find twigs for their nests. It also produces raw material for man to use for their own houses, for tools, boats, desks, cabinets, wood floors etc. And when that oak dies, it will bring life back to the soil in its decomposition.

That's like what the Jesus accomplished. He didn't simply bring salvation to individual people—acorn to oak. He changed the whole forest of human existence. John Frame says here:

“The gospel, you see, is not only a message for individuals, telling them how to avoid avoid God's wrath. It is also a message about a kingdom, a society, a new community, a new covenant, a new family, a new nation, a new way of life, and, therefore, a new culture. God calls us to build a city of God, a New Jerusalem.”³

That's our first point. Jesus did not *merely* come to bring individual salvation. He came to revolutionize planet earth. The gospel changes the world.⁴

³ John Frame, *The Doctrine of the Christian Life*, (Phillipsburg, NJ.: P & R Publishing, 2008), pg. 861-862

⁴ See the helpful chart regarding how the gospel re-shapes our worldview on pg. 245 in Tim Keller's *Every Good Endeavor: Connecting Your Word to God's Work*, (New York, NY.: Penguin Group, 2012)

II. The Gospel Changes Your Worldview

The heroes and villains of creation

Every single person at some point adopts a worldview. A worldview is like a pair of glasses through which you look at and interpret the world. A worldview is the story that you believe makes sense of the world. And everybody's worldview has to answer at least three main questions:

1. **Creation:** How should things be?
2. **Fall:** What has gone wrong?
3. **Redemption:** What is the solution to make things right?⁵

Throughout world history, different religions and philosophies have answered those questions radically different from Christianity. For instance, Plato and other ancient Greek philosophers saw physicality as the main problem. Material is bad, spirit is good. Salvation comes through being released from these bodies. Karl Marx saw the rise of class warfare and unequal economies as the enemy, and therefore salvation comes through communism. Sigmund Freud saw the problem as the suppression of pleasure and the rise of morality, and therefore salvation was absolute unrestraint for the individual.

Though these different worldview are radically different, they all have something in common. They all identify our main problem and the solution to that problems as something coming from creation. In other words, the source of evil comes not from sin, *but* evil *is* physicality (Plato) or evil *is* class warfare and economic inequality (Marx) or evil *is* pleasure suppression and morality (Freud). And the solution is simply re-arranging those things down here. The villains and the heroes of these other worldview are *created things*. But the problem is, that if we adopt these other worldviews “we will be demonizing

⁵ adapted from Tim Keller's *Every Good Endeavor: Connecting Your Word to God's Work*, (New York, NY,,: Penguin Group, 2012), pg. 160

something that isn't bad enough to explain the mess we are in; and we will be idolizing something that isn't powerful enough to get us out of it."⁶

The gospel story

Christianity on the other hand, answers those questions entirely different. The problem is not anything created. God created the world very good (**Genesis 1:31**). The problem is sin—which is all of humanity's complete loss of relationship with God. The solution is grace—which is the recovery of that relationship with God through Jesus Christ in the gospel.

Now many Christians can hear that, and all they hear is the acorn and that solitary oak tree. They don't hear the forest. And I'm curious how you are hearing it. When Plato, and Marx, and Freud offered their worldviews, they were claiming the solution to not just one problem, but to every problem. Adopting their perspective on the world, they claimed, would make everything right. That's the claim of the gospel.⁷ Jesus is reconciling all things to Himself.

The gospel speaks to everything

And the clearest example of this to me is Paul's letter to the Corinthians. Please turn with me there. The city of Corinth sat on this narrow strip of land with sea on both sides.⁸ It was a port city, and therefore a crossroads for sea traffic and culture trafficking. The world's cultures all collided in Corinth. It was a hodge lodge of every religious thought under the sun. You can hear this in Paul's writing when he speaks of the many "so-called gods in heaven or on earth" (**1 Cor. 8:5**). Paul wrote this letter because they had written him telling him all the problems they were facing. (**1 Cor. 7:1**). So 1 Corinthians is

⁶ Tim Keller, *Every Good Endeavor: Connecting Your Work to God's Work*, (New York, NY.,: Penguin Group, 2012), pg. 162

⁷ "Religions are totalitarian. They govern everything." John Frame, *The Doctrine of the Christian Life*, (Phillipsburg, NJ.,: P & R Publishing, 2008), pg. 861-862

⁸ an isthmus

essentially Paul's response to all their problems. I counted fifteen such problems.⁹ Let's look at two.

The gospel speaks to moral superiority

The first problem is found in **1 Corinthians 1:10-12**. Paul says "I appeal to you, brothers, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same judgment. [11] For it has been reported to me by Chloe's people that there is quarreling among you, my brothers. [12] What I mean is that each one of you says, "I follow Paul," or "I follow Apollos," or "I follow Cephas," or "I follow Christ." What is the problem? Moral superiority. Self-righteousness. They were adopting the old way of looking at the world. Their heroes and villains were in created things. Their heroes were their own doctrinal positions and their own favorite teachers. And their villains were anyone who didn't line up with them. Like Marx, they had adopted a type of class warfare, only it was spiritual class warfare.

So how do you kill pride and self-righteousness in a Christian? With the gospel. Look at how Paul addresses this problem. He begins his argument in **v. 18**, but let's jump ahead to **v.26** "For consider your calling, brothers: not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not

⁹ **Problem 1:** The dividing, quarreling, party spirit that prevailed in the church—1 Corinthians 1:10-13. **Problem 2:** The church complained that Paul had weak speech—1 Corinthians 2:1-4. **Problem 3:** The lifting up of leaders in the assembly, believing that one leader was to be preferred over another—1 Corinthians 3:1-4 **Problem 4:** The church viewed themselves and the apostles higher than they ought to have—1 Corinthians 4:1, 6. **Problem 5:** Sexual immorality was being permitted by the church leadership—1 Corinthians 5:1 **Problem 6:** Believers were bringing lawsuits against one another —1 Corinthians 6:1ff **Problem 7:** Sexual immorality was still being returned to by Christians—1 Corinthians 6:13ff **Problem 8:** How should we live now that we are Christians? They faced problems of marriage, singleness and God's calling—1 Corinthians 7. **Problem 9:** What about food sacrificed to idols? Is it legitimate to eat or not?—1 Corinthians 8:1-3 **Problem 10:** What about my rights?—1 Corinthians 9:1-15 **Problem 11:** The continuing issue of idolatry—1 Corinthians 10:14 **Problem 12:** How far does our Christian liberty extend?—1 Corinthians 10:23 **Problem 13:** The church was abusing the Lord's table—1 Corinthians 11:17ff **Problem 14:** The church was abusing the spiritual gifts—1 Corinthians 12-14. **Problem 15:** The church was starting to move away from the importance of doctrine—1 Corinthians 15.

many were of noble birth [only Paul can get away with this—he’s saying ‘most of you Corinthians are actually dull-witted, weak-kneed, trailer babies’ So why do you think you have the right to throw your pretended moral superiority over others?]. [27] *But* God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; [28] God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, [29] so that no human being might boast in the presence of God. [30] And because of him you are in Christ Jesus,” Paul rearranges their creation - fall - redemption story line. ‘Corinthians, the villains are *not* those who you think are below you—you are the villains. As sinners, you are the foolish and weak ones in this world. And the heroes are not Paul, or Apollos, the hero is God and His free grace—it is because of Him you are in Christ Jesus.’

The gospel speaks to sexual immorality

The second problem I want us to look at is in 1 Corinthians 6. Here the issue is sexual immorality. And again Paul is going to show that belonging to Jesus Christ doesn’t merely affect individual salvation, but your sex life as well. He says in v.12-13 “All things are lawful for me,” but not all things are helpful. “All things are lawful for me,” but I will not be dominated by anything. [13] “Food is meant for the stomach and the stomach for food.” Notice the quotation marks around these phrases. The translators added these because they believed these were slogans the Corinthians often used. And what this shows us that “the Corinthians...adopted from the culture around them the idea that the body is permitted to have everything that it craves.”¹⁰ Why did they believe that? Because they bought into that old way of looking at the world. The villain, as the Greeks thought, was the material world and therefore it didn’t matter what you did with your bodies. Their hero, was the false kind of Christian freedom that we see today—that you are free to do whatever you want, because God only cares what you believe in your heart not what you do with your actions.

¹⁰ ESV Study Bible, (Wheaton, IL.,: Crossway, 2008), pg. 2198-2199

How does Paul respond? With the gospel. **v.18** “Flee from sexual immorality. Every other sin a person commits is outside the body, but the sexually immoral person sins against his own body. [19] Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, [20] for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body.” Paul rearranges their creation - fall - redemption story line. The villain is not physicality. God loves physicality. He said it was very good. The villain is sin. The hero is not freedom to live however you want. The hero is Christ who has freed you by His blood. You have gained Him and now you are free to live for His glory.

That is a small sampling of the letter to the Corinthian church. Problem after problem is exposed in which the Corinthians have adopted the wrong villains and the wrong heroes.

What are the heroes and villains in your worldview?

Dear congregation, who are you making out to be the villains and heroes in your world?

- ☛ **Think about your marriage.** Perhaps you think your spouse is the villain? Is your hero to find that one person who could understand you and meet your needs? Or if your not married, perhaps your singleness is the villain. Is getting married your hero?
- ☛ **Think about your job.** Is your boss or co-workers the villain? And your hero would be to get a promotion or that so-and-so would be fired. Or your villain is your job itself. The hero would be to get another job altogether.
- ☛ **Think about your health.** Is your poor health the great villain in your life? And just getting better would be your hero?

We could multiply this out just like the Corinthians did to every possible scenario or circumstance.¹¹ What are the villains and heroes in your world? Are you demonizing something that isn't bad enough to explain the mess you're in? Are you idolizing something that isn't powerful enough to get you out of it?

The truth is: you are the villain—you are far more evil than you could possibly imagine yourself to be, even on your worst day. And your hero can not be found in anything or anyone in creation. There's only One who can save you, and only One who can make sense of every event that you go through. His name is Jesus Christ. He is your hero. Don't reduce Him to *merely* Your Savior. Paul labored to show the Corinthians that the gospel of Jesus Christ is the answer to every single problem that they faced.¹² Let the gospel change your entire worldview.

III. The Gospel Changes Your Work

Being a Christian is like visiting a different country

In 2007, I went to Zambia on a short term mission trip. And the only way that I can explain it, is that it is like dreaming while you are awake. Because you experience things that are completely foreign to your everyday experience. For instance, I was walking with several Christian brothers—Zambians through this garden one afternoon. And as we were walking, one of guys slowly grabbed my hand and held it while we were walking—just like married couples hold hands.

¹¹ Paul masterfully corrects them in each case with the gospel. 'Corinthians, why is greed and stinginess so evil? What gives you the power to be generous with those who are in need?' **2 Cor. 8:9** "For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich." 'Corinthians, why should you be ready to give up your rights—those real Christian liberties—in order to serve those weaker in faith?' Because Christ died for those weaker in faith, who are called your brothers—**1 Cor. 8:11** 'Corinthians, why are you bringing lawsuits against your Christians brothers and sisters?' **1 Cor. 6:7** "Why not rather suffer wrong? Why not rather be defrauded?" In other words, 'remember Christ who's suffered your wrong, and was defrauded for you.'

¹² The gospel is not one-dimensional *merely* presenting us with the acorn and the oak. It is infinitely-dimensional presenting us with an ever expanding forest. The gospel speaks to every event under the sun.

Now the only reason why I was able to keep my cool was because my team leader had told me about this. This was a sign of friendship, not of sexual attraction. But how strange it was.

Being a Christian in this world, at work is a lot like that. It's strange. It's like visiting a different country. Because, you work amongst people who are made in the image of God *like you*—who have been given gifts of grace *like you*. But, you also work amongst many people who *unlike you* have not had a personal encounter with the Living Christ, who *unlike you* have a radically different creation - fall - redemption storyline. Those two aspects God's common grace, and God's special grace will make your work often feel like you are visiting a foreign country. Let's look at them one at a time.

1. The Gospel changes our work with the presence of common grace

God has appointed all humanity—believers and unbelievers, men and women, democrats and republicans, heterosexuals and homosexuals to participate in work. One of the most profound implications of the gospel is that of common grace. **2 Cor. 1:20** says "...all the promises of God find their Yes in him [in Christ]." Meaning that, when God *promised* Noah that all the seasons will continue year after year, that both seedtime and harvest would not fail (**Genesis 8:22**), Jesus paid for that promise. Jesus purchased the ability for every human being to cultivate planet earth. So cultivation of the natural world is due to grace.

But cultivation of the social world is also due to grace. **James 1:17** says "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change." "This means that every act of goodness, wisdom, justice, and beauty—no matter *who* does it—is being enabled by God. It is a gift, and therefore a form of grace."¹³ Unbelievers do all their work like us, empowered by God's grace. This is called common grace.

¹³ Tim Keller, *Every Good Endeavor: Connecting Your Word to God's Work*, (New York, NY.,: Penguin Group, 2012), pg. 187-188

Common grace is the love and favor that God *freely* gives to all of humanity.¹⁴ Some of the elements of common grace include¹⁵—God’s restraining the sin of unbelievers (**Genesis 20:6**); God’s gracious gifts of food (**Psalms 145:16-17**) the rain and the sun (**Matthew 5:43-48**) gladness of heart (**Acts 14:17**) and lastly common grace includes God’s gifting unbelievers (as well as believers) with skills and knowledge so they can do good in society (**Isaiah 45:1**). Meaning God has gifted non-Christians with scientific minds, artistic minds, mathematical minds, business adept minds, agricultural minds, construction minds, financial minds, musical minds, and political minds. Why? Because it is through man’s work— both redeemed man and unredeemed man —that God cares for planet earth.¹⁶

And this has profound implications with how we interact with non-Christians in the world and the work place. **One implication**, is that many unbelievers “do great work—even better than Christians.”¹⁷ This is not to say that they are doing it for God’s glory. They are unable to do that. Scripture tells us that unbelievers suppress the truth in unrighteousness (**Romans 1:18**) and that they refuse to honor God in their work (**Romans 1:21**). But since the work and the wisdom itself comes from God’s own hand,¹⁸ it is all too evident that many non-Christians excel their Christian counterparts in work. This is why when you fly on an airplane, you aren’t looking necessarily looking for a Christian pilot, but rather the best pilot. Scripture gives us many examples of God’s people working alongside of non-believers. One example is under King David and King Solomon’s reign. They had a relationship with Hiram, king of

¹⁴ Luke 6:35 “...for he is kind to the ungrateful and the evil.”

¹⁵ John Frame, *The Doctrine of the Christian Life*, (Phillipsburg, NJ.: P & R Publishing, 2008), pg. 860

¹⁶ “Creation is what God makes; culture is what we make. Now of course God is sovereign, so everything we make is also his in one sense. Or, somewhat better: creation is what God makes by himself, and culture is what he makes through us.” *ibid*, pg. 854

¹⁷ Tim Keller, *Every Good Endeavor: Connecting Your Work to God’s Work*, (New York, NY.: Penguin Group, 2012), pg. 185

¹⁸ Isaiah 28:24-28

Tyre. John Frame points out here: “Tyre and Sidon in Scripture are usually examples of wicked cities. But some citizens of these places were expert carpenters and stonemasons. David accepted their help in building his palace, and Solomon accepted their help in building the temple of the Lord. 1 Kings 5:6 says that nobody in Israel could fell timber like the Sidonians.”¹⁹

Another implication of this common grace is that God has made Christians to need non-Christians. Listen to what Keller says here

“God gives out gifts of wisdom, taken, beauty, and skill according to his grace...He casts them across the human race like seed...By rights, sin should be making life on earth here much more unbearable than it is—and in fact, all of creation and culture should have fallen apart by now. The reason it is not worse is because of the gift of common grace.”²⁰

Life would probably be intolerable right now if God wasn't working through unbelievers. How many things do you depend upon for unbelievers' to perform on a daily basis? Who harvested the grain for your bread? Who extracted oil out of the ground so you could have fuel for your car? Who fell the timber for your house? You see God's work in the world through unbelievers is far greater than you can imagine. The Gospel changes your work with the presence of common grace.

2. The Gospel changes your work with the presence of saving grace

Saving grace always leads to salvation. It is that grace that creates the new birth— that transfers you from the kingdom of darkness to the kingdom of light. It is the grace of being united to Jesus Christ by a lively faith. This grace will alter your entire value system at work. This week I read of a woman who worked for a company in Manhattan. After working there just a brief time, she

¹⁹ John Frame, *The Doctrine of the Christian Life*, (Phillipsburg, NJ.: P & R Publishing, 2008), pg. 859-860

²⁰ Tim Keller, *Every Good Endeavor: Connecting Your Work to God's Work*, (New York, NY.: Penguin Group, 2012), pg. 191

made a critical error that should have cost her her job. But something very strange happened. “Her boss went in to his superior and took complete responsibility for what she had done. As a result, he lost some of his reputation and ability to maneuver within the organization. She was amazed at what he had done and went in to thank him. She told him that she had often seen supervisors take credit for what she had accomplished, but she had never seen a supervisor take the blame for something she had done wrong. She wanted to know what made him different. He was very modest and deflected her questions, but she was insistent. Finally he told her, “I am a Christian. That means among other things that God accepts me because Jesus took the blame for the things that I have done wrong. He did that on the cross. That is why I have the desire and sometimes the ability to take the blame for others.” She stared at him for a long moment and asked, “Where do you go to church?”²¹

The takeaway from this story is what *was* behind this man’s actions. Why did He do what He did? **Colossians 3:23** says “Whatever you do, work heartily, *as for the Lord* and not for men,” He was working *as for the Lord*. He saw his work not in the one-dimensional way that the world looks at work—merely to make profit, or to accumulate power, or to become *the real you*. He saw His work as truly working *as for the Lord*. He didn’t see the gospel in terms of individual salvation *only*. His creation - fall - redemption storyline caused Him to see his work as a way reflect Christ in the workplace.

The presence of special grace does frees you to be most fully human in your work. “As Jesus says, to be fully human boils down to loving God and loving our neighbor. Everything else—our accomplishments, our causes, our identity, and our feelings—is a distant second.” Keller says “Of course, this understanding of the nature of reality will have an extensive impact on how we do our work. For example, are relationships a means to the end of accruing power, wealth, and comfort? Or is wealth creation a means to serve the end goal of loving others? One way goes against the grain of the universe made by a triune God, and therefore it cannot honor him or lead to human flourishing. The

²¹ *ibid*, pg. 218-219

other is the paradigm of Christian work.”²² Saving grace is what makes you fully human, freeing you to live by a completely different value system than the unbelieving world.

The gospel changes your work

God’s common grace and God’s saving grace frees us from the bondage of cultural anorexia or cultural gluttony. God’s common grace frees you from the need to avoid “secular” culture (cultural anorexia) because you know that culture at large is not the villain. Sin is. Though unbelievers are still captive to sin, God’s common grace has enabled them to help care for their world through their work. And so you can appreciate their work, learn from them, and not have a Christian superiority complex or be sectarian in how you work.

God’s Saving grace frees you from embracing everything the culture is doing (cultural gluttony), because you know that the fallen world has a different creation - fall - redemption storyline. You can now be fully human at work—working for the good of human flourishing to the glory of God. Your Christian life is not confined to Sunday morning.

Application

Our Doctrine: What’s the relationship between the cultural mandate and the great commission?²³

First, remember that the cultural mandate is found **Genesis 1:28**. God has given us a mandate to replenish and rule the earth. Humanity is to develop the social and natural world for sake of human flourishing to God's glory. It’s important to note that the fall (what we saw last week) did not nullify this mandate. Immediately after Noah’s flood God repeated this mandate in **Genesis**

²² *ibid*, pg. 206

²³ To see the tension more fully developed between these two ideas, see John Frame’s, *The Doctrine of the Christian Life*, (Phillipsburg, NJ.: P & R Publishing, 2008), pg. 307-311

9:1-7. The question for us is, how does this mandate—to develop culture for human flourishing and God’s glory—relate to the great commission in **Matthew 28:19**—to go and make disciples of all nations?

The cultural mandate tells us to fill the earth. Fill the earth with what? With God’s image. With God’s glory.²⁴ So this mandate isn’t *merely* physical, it’s also deeply spiritual. The cultural mandate and the great commission share the same ultimate goal: to fill the earth with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord as the waters cover the seas (**Hab. 2:14**).

The cultural mandate tells us to fill the earth with God’s image—His glory²⁵
The great commission commands us to make disciples of Jesus for God’s glory²⁶

These are not at odds with one another. Neither one can be used as a justification to ignore the other. The truth is, that you cannot avoid witnessing. One theologian has said “Witness is not only what we say, but what we are and do. I recall years ago preparing a message for young people urging them to “witness” to non-Christians concerning their faith. I searched diligently through concordances, trying to find passages in which God commands believers to witness. I couldn’t find any. Scripture does command us to preach, teach, proclaim, and so on, but not to witness. The reason, I think, is that, as in Isaiah 43:10, 12 and Acts 1:8, God has already made us witnesses; we have no choice in the matter. He does not command us to be witnesses because we already are. We can witness truly or falsely, but we cannot avoid witnessing. Witness...

²⁴ “In the beginning, God created us as his “image and glory” (1 Cor. 11:7). So he wanted Adam’s family to spread that glory through the whole world. Adam was not to rule merely for himself, but for God, glorifying God in all that he did. So culture is based on a divine command. Adam must develop culture because that is God’s desire. Culture is for God’s sake.” John Frame, *The Doctrine of the Christian Life*, (Phillipsburg, NJ.: P & R Publishing, 2008), pg. 856

²⁵ Matthew 5:16

²⁶ Greg Beale has said that “the first great commission is **Genesis 1:28** in the cultural mandate. Because it’s not just a cultural commission, it’s a missions commission *ultimately*...both through culture and our godly lives and words.” Source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CGJZeSFyzs0> accessed April 22, 2018

includes not only our words, but all of life.”²⁷ That’s our doctrine. The relationship between the cultural mandate and the great commission is that all of life is meant to advance the glory of God. This is done in our work and our words.

Our Duty: Seek the welfare of the city

When the Jews were being taken away into Babylonian captivity, it would seem like that would be the perfect time for them to despair of all of life and give up on culture building. And I think that many Christians feel the same way about our culture today. But what did God say to them? **Jeremiah 29:4-7**

“Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, to all the exiles whom I have sent into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon: Build houses and live in them; plant gardens and eat their produce. Take wives and have sons and daughters; take wives for your sons, and give your daughters in marriage, that they may bear sons and daughters; multiply there, and do not decrease. But **seek the welfare of the city** where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the LORD on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare.”

The Jews were commanded “seek the welfare of the city.” Welfare in the Hebrew means “completeness.”²⁸ Society is not fully human—not complete—when it is deprived of the glory of God. That is what you have been called into the world to do—to make society complete. Many of your co-workers are in bondage to their false creation - fall - redemption storylines. They are incomplete. They need to see what it means to be fully human. As Keller says here “To be a Christian [at work], then, means much more than just being honest or not sleeping with your coworkers. It even means more than personal evangelism or holding a Bible study at the office. Rather, it means thinking out

²⁷ John Frame, *The Doctrine of the Christian Life*, (Phillipsburg, NJ.: P & R Publishing, 2008), pg. 832

²⁸ Source: <https://www.blueletterbible.org/lang/lexicon/lexicon.cfm?Strong=H7965&t=KJV> accessed April 22, 2018

the implications of the gospel worldview and God's purposes for your whole work life."²⁹ That's our duty: seek the welfare of the city—seek its completeness by working under the storyline of the gospel.

Our Delight: In Christ you have been freed to be fully human

Before you can seek the welfare of the city, you do need to understand what Jesus Christ has done for your soul. If you are an unbeliever, consider that your work is ultimately meaningless without Jesus Christ. That's not to say that God won't use it for the good of human society. It's to say that your work, the good that you do cannot earn you favor with God. You're the villain in this story, because you have sinned against a holy God. Your biggest problem is guilt. And the only solution is forgiveness. You cannot work for that forgiveness. But Jesus Christ did. He worked His whole life—perfectly loving God, perfectly loving humanity, perfectly obeying the law. And then His final work was perfectly paying the penalty for sinners like you and me on the cross. Listen to how He invites you into His work: “Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.” (**Matthew 11:28-29**) You can find rest for your soul in Christ, if you trust Him, surrender to Him, let Him possess you, own you, love you. Forsake all other story lines, all other lesser loves, and turn to Jesus Christ.

For the rest of you, dear brothers and sisters, being in Christ means that you already are fully human. You don't need work to find your identity, or to bolster your self-worth, or accumulate power.

You are adopted into God's family, so you already have your affirmation.

You are justified in God's sight, so you have nothing to prove.

You have been saved through a dying sacrifice, so you are free to be a living one.

²⁹ Tim Keller, *Every Good Endeavor: Connecting Your Work to God's Work*, (New York, NY.: Penguin Group, 2012), pg. 168-169

You are loved ceaselessly, so you can work tirelessly in response to a quiet inner fullness.³⁰

The gospel has changed everything.

³⁰ *ibid*, pg. 233