

THE NEED FOR RESTORATION



Restoring the Reconciled World Part 2

T. M. Moore

A ReVision Resource from The Fellowship of Ailbe

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Susie Moore, Editing and Finishing

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Welcome to *The Need for Restoration*

The world is not the way God intended it should be. Not by a long shot.

Of course, there is still much that is good in the world, but sin has left its mark on everything God made.

Yet because Jesus has reconciled the sin-stricken world to God, a work of restoration – making all things new – is under way, and you and I are in the thick of it.

We have been given the ministry of reconciliation, and we need to attend to all aspects of that great calling. In this part of our series on *Restoring the Reconciled World*, we'll see why restoration is needed, and begin to glimpse the part we can play in this work.

We hope you find these studies helpful. Take one lesson at a time, reading the Scriptures and narrative aloud, and pausing to reflect on and discuss the questions provided. Don't be in a hurry. Be willing to take more than one session on a lesson if it will allow you to delve more deeply into the subject matter.

If you're in a group, make sure you prepare for each study by reading through the lesson in advance and answering the questions in writing. Take turns leading your group. Let every member share in the privilege and responsibility of facilitating discussions. Group leaders should not feel like they have to "have all the answers." Their task is simply to lead the group through the readings and questions, and to help everyone participate.

These studies are designed as brief introductions to the subject under consideration. We hope they will enlarge your worldview, help you to become more firmly rooted in Scripture, equip you to minister to others, and stimulate you to want to learn more about the Word of God and the Biblical worldview.

We're happy to provide this study at no charge. If you find these studies helpful, we hope you'll consider sending a gift to The Fellowship of Ailbe, to help us in making these resources available to others.

May the Lord bless your study of His Word.

T. M. Moore
Principal

1 God's Plan for Creation

Then God saw everything that He had made, and indeed it was very good. Genesis 1.31

*“Truly, this only I have found:
That God made man upright,
But they have sought out many schemes.”* Ecclesiastes 7.29

In the beginning

The world as we know it today is not what God intended in the beginning. As Neil Plantinga puts it in his book by this title, the world is “not the way it’s supposed to be.” So has God’s will been thwarted? Has His cosmic plan been undermined? Overthrown? Or has God decided that what He originally intended just isn’t going to work?

Hardly. God does not change His mind. He often adjusts His approach to accomplishing His will, as we see in the various forms His covenant takes as it unfolds throughout Scripture. God is sustaining the cosmos toward a great day of restoration, when all things will finally be made new, exactly as God intended, for His praise and glory, and unto the enormous and eternal blessing of His saints and other creatures.

For the time, however, the creation and everything in it groans and travails under foreign occupation. An enemy has invaded the field of the Lord, and he has sown seeds of waste, wickedness, and woe throughout. But the field is still the Lord’s, and His purposes for it will one day be realized. The world and all things in it have been reconciled to God by our Lord Jesus Christ. And He has given us the ministry of reconciliation, so that we might restore the world to the way it *is* supposed to be, if only in part, or the praise and glory of God, and the benefit of the world and its creatures.

In the beginning, God made everything in the vast cosmos *very good*. At that time, the world reflected the beauty, goodness, and truth of God throughout its vast extent. Creatures of all kinds abounded and flourished. A garden existed, which was both prototype and workshop for bringing greater completion and glory to the whole earth. Vast and precious resources existed to be harnessed, developed, and put to use increasing the goodness of God in all the earth. People were set to work in the garden, to extend its “very goodness” by managing and developing its resources and creatures, and bringing other humans into being to join in the work.

But those people were also assigned to *guard* their garden workshop (Gen. 2.15), and it was their failure in this aspect of their remit that plunged the world into its present “not the way it’s supposed to be” condition.

For the praise of God

In spite of creation’s fallen condition, God still intends that it should give Him praise and glory. This is clear from any number of psalms, especially Psalm 148.

If we had any doubts about God’s intentions for His creation, Psalm 148 should dispel those. Here God issues a blanket call to the cosmos to praise and glorify His Name. The galaxies of the heavens, angels and departed saints, sun, moon, stars, sea creatures, all kinds of weather, all sorts of topographies, trees, wild beasts, domesticated cattle, icky things and soaring things, fruits and seeds, princes and judges, men, women, and children, kings and peoples – all are commanded to give God praise and to exalt His glorious Name. This is the way it’s supposed to be, and God is still determined that it shall be so.

The way things are supposed to be is that everything and everyone in the cosmos is to declare the excellencies and goodness of God. Sin has obscured the glory and goodness of God that is throughout the creation (Ps.

33.5). But, as we see in Psalm 148, this is not what God intends. Not from the beginning of the creation, and not now. It is the glory of God to conceal Himself and His praise in the things He has made; it is the glory of His servants to bring out that glory and praise, and thus to enable all of creation to fulfill its God-intended purpose (Prov. 25.2). Our earnest desires must be to see the goodness of God bursting forth in the land of the living (Ps. 27.13).

This requires the work of restoration, which we the people of God undertake in line with God's original design, and throughout all His creation. And God has given us His Kingdom, that our work might prosper in His grace and truth.

A Kingdom of praise and glory

David's prayer for his son, Solomon, envisions a day when that great work of restoration will proceed apace over all the earth. Though his psalm has Solomon in view for the near term, it's clear the larger and longer vision is for the Kingdom Jesus would bring in His coming to the earth.

Here we glimpse the Lord's plan for His Kingdom of righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit – the very Kingdom Jesus has received and bestowed upon us, His people, that we should seek it as our highest priority in everything we do (Rom. 14.17, 18; Dan. 7.13, 14, 18; Matt. 6.33). The Kingdom of God, brought near by Jesus and bestowed in the Holy Spirit, is both the context and operative power for the work of restoration. And what David foresaw in Psalm 72 must guide us as we take up the ministry of reconciliation that has been given to us.

In David's vision of the world being restored, all of creation and its creatures and people give praise, honor, and glory to God. Righteousness abounds, together with justice and peace (vv. 1-4). The fear of God is over all the earth, and He daily refreshes all His creatures, that they might flourish and abound (vv. 5-7). The rule of King Jesus extends throughout the earth; His enemies are helpless before Him; and the nations bring their best gifts to lay at His feet (vv. 8-11). The poor, the needy, and the helpless are lifted by His grace; multitudes come to the salvation of the Lord (vv. 12-14). The works men do abound and prosper, and the Name of the Lord is honored in all nations, for the Lord Himself brings His work of reconciliation to increasing fulfillment (vv. 15-20).

The world is in need of restoration. God intends it. His Kingdom demands it. And we are charged with this great and glorious work.

For Reflection

1. What are some ways we can see that sin has marred the good creation of God?
2. What are some ways you can see that the goodness of the Lord is in all the earth?
3. What does it mean to seek the Kingdom of God through the work of restoration?

Next Steps – Preparation: Pray about the day ahead, and all the opportunities for restoring God's good creation that lie ahead. Commit yourself to seeking His Kingdom in all you do.

2 The Entrance of Sin

... *whatever is not from faith is sin.* Romans 14.23

Sin

Many Christians in our day suffer from an inadequate understanding of sin. It's not that we don't believe in sin; rather, it's that we do not truly understand its pervading, perverting, and perduring power. We tend to think of sin as a moral lapse, something we do that's wrong. We try to avoid such lapses, or at least, to minimize their visibility and damage.

But sin is not, in the first instance, an action. It's not even a thought, not in essence. Sin is a spiritual condition marked by separation from God and subjection to powers bent on evil, wickedness, destruction, dissolution, and death. The condition of sin pervades the vast creation, a pernicious spiritual presence which makes things not the way they're supposed to be. Sin prevents the creation from realizing its full fruitfulness and flourishing, and causes waste and blight and natural disasters to ravage God's good world.

Sin also operates within the soul of every person, a condition Paul describes as the "law of sin" (Rom. 7.21-23). The operative presence of this law in our souls works to obscure the teaching of God's Law, which is holy and righteous and good (Rom. 7.12), and which God has inscribed on the heart of every person (Rom. 2.14). Because people are the image-bearers of God, they know that such things as good and evil exists, and they have a general sense of what is good and ought to be adhered to and taught, as C. S. Lewis argued in his book, *The Abolition of Man*.

But the law of sin perverts the heart, implanting wicked and selfish desires above the desire for God. It corrupts the mind, leading us to embrace half-truths and lies rather than to take every thought captive to make it obedient to Jesus Christ. And the law of sin hijacks our priorities, so that the interests of self trump the interests of Christ and His Kingdom more often than not. Thus all of culture and society reflects the groaning and travailing of the creation because of the ravages of sin.

Sin is deadly spiritual poison which remains in the systems even of those who believe, and which must be actively, aggressively, and continuously sought out, detested, repented of, and forsaken if we are to make progress in the ministry of reconciliation which has been entrusted to us.

Yet it is important to understand that, while God is not the author of sin, nor does He approve it, yet He rules over sin and uses it for His purpose in moving His people to their work of restoration.

The effects of sin

Sin is the result of our first parents' rebellion against God and His Word. In choosing to be their own law-makers, Adam and Eve set aside the clearly-revealed will of God, scorned His threats, abused His creation, transgressed His mandate, and gave His arch-foe a beachhead in the good creation of God. We see the effects of this condition immediately (Gen. 3).

Adam and Eve became ashamed of the way God had made them, and tried to save face before one another with crudely-fashioned coverings. They became blame-shifters – Adam to his wife, Eve to the serpent, and both of them together to God. They cut themselves off from God and actively sought to avoid Him. The beautiful, welcoming, and cooperative garden was forfeited, and the man and woman were thrust out into a world where the condition of sin had already begun working against them. Work that had been designed as a source of beauty, goodness, and prosperity now became tedious and difficult labor, in a creation that seemed determined to frustrate their efforts to make a living. Pain and suffering now attended every human endeavor, including bringing more humans into the world. In Genesis 4, violence among men erupted; whole societies were started for the sole purpose of advancing the power, prestige, and prosperity of the few at the expense

of everyone else. Works of culture are created, celebrating the prowess of sinful men and making it possible to advance their self-serving agenda, without regard for God's original mandate.

The story of humankind, including those chosen by God to be His agents of reconciliation, is the record of sin's ravages. The writer of Hebrews, looking forward to a different world, a world where God's original dominion mandate would increasingly be the way of things, lamented the fact that the world in his day was a far cry from the way it is supposed to be (Heb. 2.5-8; cf. Ps. 8).

Even today, we do not see that very-good-the-way-it's-supposed-to-be world flourishing around us. The goodness of the Lord remains in all the earth, but as Gerard Manley Hopkins wrote, where men refuse to take God's measuring rod into consideration, there "all is seared with trade; bleared, smeared with toil;/ And wears man's smudge and shares man's smell: the soil/Is bare now, nor can foot feel, being shod" ("God's Grandeur").

But...

I hardly need to mount an argument for the continuing and corrupting influence of the condition of sin in the world today. The writer of Hebrews insisted that God's mandate to rule the earth in His stead, and to bring out His goodness and glory in all things, remained then and thus remains today. And though we don't much see that mandate coming to fruition, yet, the writer explained, "we see Jesus". And this is the key to all our work of restoration.

Looking to Jesus is the way to overcome sin and its effects, first, of course, for the new birth and forgiveness that it brings. All who look to Jesus in faith are indwelt by the Holy Spirit and have the Word of the Lord opened to them. They are redeemed from the constricting power of the serpent and set free to know, love, and serve Jesus Christ.

Looking to Jesus, we learn how to bind the devil and grow through temptation. We follow Him in obedience to God's Word for increasing righteousness. We increase in holy power and are transformed into the very likeness of Christ; He increases in us as our sinful self decreases. He leads us into the resurrection life of His Kingdom, showing us the world which is to come, and leading and empowering us to realize more of that coming Kingdom in the here and now of our lives.

Sin does not have the last word in God's creation. But it has powerful effects, and we know them well. We must not be complacent or content with the wretched and wasteful effects of sin. Instead, looking to Him Who has reconciled *all things* to God, we accept our own calling to the ministry of reconciliation and daily take up the work of making all things new in Jesus Christ.

For reflection

1. How do you see the effects of sin continuing in our world today?
2. Why can we as believers not be content with the world being not the way it's supposed to be?
3. How can Christians help one another to be more consistent and fruitful in "looking unto Jesus"?

Next Steps – Transformation: Meditate on Jesus, exalted in glory. What one thing does He show you about His majesty, greatness, holiness, beauty, and power that you can bring to the work of restoration today?

3 The Tragedy of Sin

And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, "Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die." Genesis 2.16, 17

And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a debased mind, to do those things which are not fitting; being filled with all unrighteousness, sexual immorality, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, evil-mindedness; they are whisperers, backbiters, haters of God, violent, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, undiscerning, untrustworthy, unloving, unforgiving, unmerciful; who, knowing the righteous judgment of God, that those who practice such things are deserving of death, not only do the same but also approve of those who practice them. Romans 1.28-32

The fear of death

The entrance of sin to the world brought death. Death is not the way the world is supposed to be. People live in the dark shadow and constant fear of death (Heb. 2.15). Death is the great terror that looms over the world. We know it's inevitable, but we try to postpone it by every means, resort to euphemism when we have to talk about it ("passing away", "crossing over", and the like), and shudder to think of our own end-of-being. The reality and inevitability of death rob us of the *joie de vivre* which is supposed to be ours. We can never be entirely or consistently happy, because the ugly stare of death catches our glance in every place.

Death is the greatest proof of sin, and the strongest provocation to hope for something other than death as our final disposition. That is, death is the great reminder. It reminds us that sin is fatal. And it reminds us that we are not made for death. Why would we try so hard to postpone or avoid it, if death were just our proper end? Why would we fear that for which we have come into existence to know? And why would something in us hope against hope that there might be some cure for our malady, some exit ramp before we come to the bridge-out chasm that plummets to eternal nothingness?

Death is not the way it's supposed to be. Fearing death is not the way it's supposed to be, either. Because in Jesus Christ, victory over death and the grave has been achieved, and the spoils of that victory are being daily distributed to people for whom death holds no terror whatsoever. Having reconciled us to God, Jesus restores us to life as God intends – a modicum of which we enjoy in this life, while the fullness of it remains for a new and fully restored creation.

We who have overcome death and the fear of death are called to bring that sense of freedom and release to the world – the huddling souls, groaning creation, fractured societies, and crippled cultures of our death-stalked world. Jesus is spoiling the kingdom of death and restoring life to everything He touches (Matt. 12.22-29; Rev. 22.5). And we are right there in the mix with Him!

The calling card of death

The path of death is the path of the lie. The lie is the calling card of all those who are enslaved to death. As Paul explained in Romans 1.18-32, all who turn away from the knowledge of God – which is firmly embedded in their souls – do not *not* worship. People are made for God and therefore for worship. In worship we do not grovel before God; we participate in Him, in His beauty, joy, life, and power. We are made for God and made for worship; those who will not worship the God Who made us in His image, will worship another god, one of their own choosing, one that, in some form or another is merely an extension of themselves. Rejecting God, they become their own god, attended by lesser deities of happiness, prestige, and ease, to which they give themselves with all the devotion of a Celtic monk.

Rejecting God, people embark on a black brick road to a non-existent city, all the while failing to notice that

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their journey leads them deeper and deeper, day by day, into the blackness and hopelessness of death. God strains and strives to discourage their resolute decline (cf. Gen. 6.3). Only reluctantly, Paul says, does God “give them up” (vv. 24, 26, 28) to uglier depths of sin, degradation, disillusion, despair, and death. He speaks to them through all that He has made, and they hear His voice (vv. 20, 21); but because they will not obey Him, they hasten on their journey toward death, taking on more of the trappings of sin and death in every facet of their lives.

Jesus came to plug this spiritual and moral Charybdis. He overcomes the gravity of death by the power of life. Jesus reaches to all who will take hold of Him, and He lifts them out of destruction into life and restoration. And He does this by those He has rescued and restored, that we might rescue and restore others in His Name and by His power.

All whom Jesus restores from death He brings increasingly into full and abundant life – life the way it’s supposed to be, for a world that’s supposed to be everywhere glorious and good.

Saved for life

Jesus has not saved us from the downward spiral of sin and death that we should continue in it, or that we should be content for it to continue swallowing neighbors, cultures, societies, creation, and the entire vast cosmos. As He works to restore us from sin to righteousness, death to life, fear to peace, and despair to joy, so He sends us to the world of sin to carry on His work of reconciliation and making all things new.

The Christian who can look at the dying world and simply say, “Good riddance! Bring on the rapture”, has not understood his reason for being. God *so loved the world* that He gave His best Effort and Energy to save it, through the life, death, resurrection, and reign of our Lord Jesus Christ. Dare we do anything other or less than that? All our best time, talents, treasure, and strength, being devoted unreservedly to God, He intends that we should invest in restoring the reconciled world.

No, we shall not succeed in this calling until Jesus returns to cast the devil and death into the eternal abyss. But as death and lies signal to the world that all must dissolve, decay, and die, so the life and truth that we have in Jesus Christ are intended to show the world how it’s really supposed to be – and how it one day will be when the Kingdom comes in all its fullness.

Jesus is making all things new, and thus He shows that death has no hold on Him. He calls us into this project and has appointed us to carry on His work by restoring the reconciled world to ever-increasing measures of its original goodness and glory – one person, one task, and one objective at a time.

For reflection

1. What is “the lie” that Paul mentions in Romans 1.25? How does “the lie” affect the world?
2. Why is it important that we understand that people who do not worship God do not *not* worship? How might you be able to show that to such a person?
3. In this death-ridden world, God is both “giving up” (Rom. 1.18ff) and “making all things new” (Rev. 22.5). Explain.

Next steps – Transformation: What will you “make new” today?

4 Restoring the Soul

*The LORD is my shepherd;
I shall not want.
He makes me to lie down in green pastures;
He leads me beside the still waters.
He restores my soul;
He leads me in the paths of righteousness
For His name's sake.* Psalm 23.1-3

The primacy of the soul

In this series we have seen that the starting point for restoring the reconciled world is working out our own salvation in fear and trembling before the Lord (Phil. 2.12, 13). We focus on Jesus (Col. 3.1-3), and work daily to increase in Him (Phil. 2.12). We look to Jesus also for a vision of creation restored to its original goodness and glory (Heb. 2.5-9), and to grant us the skills and wisdom we need for restoring the reconciled world (Ps. 90.16, 17). In Jesus, we take up the work of restoration in every area of our lives as an act of worship and service, to honor, praise, declare, and glorify Him. Thus we become a kind of first fruits for the world; as we are restored, we become the means whereby Jesus restores the world He has reconciled to God (Jms. 1.18).

But for our lives to be restored, we need to acknowledge, recognize, and overthrow the law of sin which operates within us, in our soul. Sin has entered the world, and the tragedy of it affects even those who believe in Jesus and are committed to following and serving Him. We may earnestly desire to take the ministry of reconciliation that has been given to us, but unless we replace the law of sin with the Law of God, all our wanting to do God's work will come to naught (Rom. 7.13-23).

In ancient Israel, when a new king ascended the throne, his first duty was to write out a copy of the Law of God in his own hand, and submit it for review and approval to the high priest. Then he was to meditate and be refreshed in the Law every day, so that he could rule himself and the people wisely and well (cf. Deut. 17.18-20). Sadly, we have no evidence that any king of Israel ever did that.

But Jesus did. Or rather, is. Having received the Kingdom from His Father and given it to His saints, He has sent His Spirit to write the Law of God on the tablets of our hearts (Ezek. 36.26, 27). As we read and meditate in the Law of God day and night (Ps. 1), the Spirit rewrites what God has already written in us, so that we now have working within us the power whereby the Lord restores our soul (cf. Rom. 2.14, 15; 8.5-11).

Heart, mind, conscience

The Law of God – and all the Word of God, which grows from the soil of God's Law – is the “necessary food” for the restoration of our souls (Job 23.12). As we delight in the Law and Word of God, and feed on it day by day, the Holy Spirit works within us to enable us to learn and obey the Law, making us willing and able to do that which is pleasing to God. And what is pleasing to God is that the redemption His Son has accomplished, and by which He has reconciled the world to His Father, should continue apace in and through us in the world.

So the Law of God gives us the mind of the Spirit and the mind of Christ. The mind is that component of the soul that receives, analyzes, associates, stores, and calls into service all kinds of information. It does this by learning, thinking, reasoning, remembering, relating, and many more such cognitive practices. All who are being renewed in Jesus have the mind of Christ (1 Cor. 2.16); and the Spirit of God works with the Law and Word of God to bring that rich resource to ever fuller realization in us, so that, in effect, we think with the mind of Jesus; we think like He does.

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The Spirit also applies the Law of God to our heart – the seat of all our affections, desires, hopes, aspirations, and longings. The old law of sin bends all these to self-interest and self-love, thus wasting the best part of our soul on ourselves. The Spirit of God uses the Law and Word of God to teach us how to love God with all our soul and strength, our neighbors as ourselves, and one another as Jesus loved us (Matt. 22.34-40; Jn. 13.34, 35).

And the Spirit works to restore our conscience, so that it is *good* and not wicked, and thus reflects the way God made things originally, the way things are supposed to be (1 Tim. 1.5).

The Lord restores our soul in whole and in part as He writes His Law there, and on the foundation of His Law, everything else that Jesus teaches as well. We must not neglect the Law of God. The Law of God is the core curriculum of the Spirit's teaching; it is the key to greatness in the Kingdom of God (Matt. 5.17-19), and the way into holiness, righteousness, and truth (Rom. 7.12).

He restores our soul

David rejoiced in the knowledge that our Good Shepherd restores our soul. As He does, we know peace and abundance – like green pastures and still waters in our soul. The more He restores our soul – heart, mind, and conscience – the more we will be equipped from within to work out our salvation in fear and trembling.

But let us not be so foolish as to suppose that we know better than God how the restoration of our souls should proceed. King Jesus insists on writing the Law of God on the tablets of our hearts, and He has appointed His Holy Spirit as Chief Scribe and Schoolmaster to accomplish that task. If we neglect the Law of God, we shall have nothing with which to overthrow the law of sin that still infests our soul. More doctrine won't restore your soul. More praise music won't restore your soul. More time with your Christian friends won't restore your soul. God only will restore your soul, and He will only do it His way, by writing His Law and all His word on your mind, heart, and conscience – day by day, and all day long.

If you long to rest sweetly in the green pastures and by the still waters of salvation, go to the schoolhouse of the Spirit, enroll in His core curriculum, and open your soul to His teaching and His restoring power and grace.

For reflection

1. The Law of God does not save us. But can we be truly saved without the Law? Explain.
2. Why do we say that the Law of God is the core curriculum for following Jesus?
3. How will you be able to know when the Holy Spirit is effectively writing the Law of God on your heart?

Next steps – Transformation: Add meditating on the Ten Commandments to your daily reading of Scripture. Ask the Lord to show you how each of the commandments should be expressed in love for God and neighbors.

5 Restoring Relationships

Jesus said to him, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets.” Matthew 22.37-40

Palimpsest

In a very real sense, the human soul is spiritual palimpsest. A palimpsest is an ancient manuscript which has been “used again”, thus the meaning of the word [*palimpsest*](#). A scribe or writer would find an old manuscript – typically parchment or vellum – which was considered no longer essential, and he would scrape off as much of the old writing as possible. When that was done, he would use the material to write new content over what would be the still-barely-visible remains of the previous text. Some excellent New Testament manuscripts are palimpsests.

The human soul is like that. All people are born into the world made in the image of God. As part of what that entails, God “writes” His Law on the heart of every human being (Rom. 2.14, 15). Thus, as C. S. Lewis observed in *The Abolition of Man*, and as natural law theorists have argued for centuries, every person has a sense of right and wrong built into their soul. This is one explanation for why there is yet so much good in a world that continues on the path of rejecting God.

Yet like those ancient scribes, we consider the Law of God no longer essential, scrape it off our memory and conscience, and try to bury it under new narratives, which strike us as more appealing, interesting, or likely to satisfy our desires, and which narratives Paul summarizes under the rubric of “the lie” (Rom. 1.18-25).

When people come to faith in Jesus Christ, receiving Him as Savior and Lord, then King Jesus begins writing the Law on their hearts. As He does, the Law comes back clear and pristine, and the lie, like disappearing ink, fades away. That Law is still there, but it needs some serious refreshing, and it takes a lifetime of meditating day and night in God’s Law for that palimpsest soul to be restored.

The question to each of us is: Am I working with the Spirit to scrape off the old narrative of my unbelieving life, and submitting to that Holy Scribe as He rewrites the Law of God on my heart? If not, there’s no hope of your being able to restore the key relationships of your life – your relationship with God, and your relationship with your neighbors.

Relating to God

Jesus insisted that the Law of God is the key to loving God as He commands (Deut. 6.4, 5). This should not surprise us. As the writer of Hebrews explained, all the Law of God points to Jesus – the priesthood, the sacrifices and offerings, and everything that related to the tabernacle. We no longer observe those protocols and practices, because they point us to Jesus. We look to Jesus, and Jesus brings us into the love of God. We love Jesus as we keep His commandments, and His commandments include the Law of God and all His Word (Jn. 14.15).

The Law of God guides us in how to love God, and how thus to restore and maintain the reconciled relationship we have with Him. The Law outlines the forms and elements of worship: humility, singing, praise and thanksgiving, offerings, and the like. The Law teaches us to fear God – a commandment echoed by our Lord Jesus Christ (Deut. 10.12, 13; cf. Matt. 10.28). Fearing God leads to obedience, gratitude, and increased love for God – a reconciled and restored relationship with our Creator and Redeemer.

The Law of God teaches us to recognize and turn away from sin (Rom. 7.7). God hates sin, and when we hate sin (Ps. 97.10), we show that our relationship with God is what it should be. We cannot know sin apart from the Law of God; in giving us His Law, God leads us to regard sin in the same way He does, and not as

before we knew Him, making up the rules for our lives however suited us.

If we neglect the Law of God, God will not hear our prayers (Ps. 66.18). Worse, He will consider our prayers an abomination (Prov. 28.9) and regard us as unrestored and on the side of His enemies (Prov. 25.4).

Now some may not like to think the Law of God is as important as this. Indeed, looking at the state of the Law among believers today, it would seem that many are of the opinion that the Law is not for us. To the extent this is so, it explains why our relationships with God are so lacking in vitality and power. The Holy Spirit intends to rewrite God's Law on your heart. Are you helping or hindering that work?

Relating to others

According to Jesus, love is the defining mark of a believer (Jn. 15.35). Paul said the same (1 Cor. 13). And John was only echoing Jesus in Matthew 22.37-40 when he said that love means keeping the commandments of God – which is not hard to do, because we have the Spirit of God working in us to that end (1 Jn. 5.1-3; Phil. 2.13).

Human relationships as God intends them – for good, and not for evil (Jer. 29.11) – are conducted according to the teaching of God's Law. The first four of God's commandments guide us in restoring and maintaining our relationship with God. The last six do the same for our relationships with people. The laws, precepts, and statutes that group around the last six commandments address all kinds of human relationships, showing us what it means to love our neighbors as ourselves. When Zacchaeus, overflowing with the grace of Jesus, resolved to keep the Law in showing love to his neighbors, Jesus excitedly exclaimed, "Today salvation has come to this house" (Lk. 19.1-9; cf. Ex. 22.1; Lev. 6.5).

The Law of God teaches us how to relate to our parents, our neighbor's property and possessions, governing authorities, immigrants, the poor, and many other kinds and groups of people. The love that comes from God infuses all our relationships with power for holiness, righteousness, and goodness (Rom. 7.12). As we work to restore our relationship with God to ever-greater levels of intimacy and intensity, we will find that love for our neighbors increases accordingly. The Law of God – the acorn to the oak of all His Word – is essential in this great work of restoration.

If we do not take seriously our duty of reading, studying, meditating, talking about, and practicing the Law of God, then the love we need for relating to God and our neighbors will, as Jesus insisted, "grow cold" (Matt. 24.12).

We need to submit to the Spirit – following Jesus and the apostles – as He rewrites the Law of God on the palimpsest of our soul. We shall have neither the wisdom nor inclination to work at restoring relationships apart from the Law of God. The Law will not save us. But we will not be able to know the fullness of our great salvation without it; and if we continue to neglect it, we may ultimately prove not to be saved at all.

For Reflection

1. Why do so many Christians think the Law of God no longer matters?
2. What did Jesus say about keeping the Law in Matthew 5.17-19? What did He mean by that?
3. We don't keep the Law to *be* saved, but *because we are* saved. Explain that in the light of Ephesians 2.8-10.

Next Steps – Preparation: Add daily meditation in the commandments of God to your time with the Lord. How will you do that?

6 Restoring Culture

“And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates. Deuteronomy 6.6-9

Restoration template

By His life, death, and resurrection, Jesus Christ accomplished the redemption of God’s people and the reconciliation of all things to God. God, in turn, has given to us, His people, the ministry of reconciliation, which involves bringing glory to God in all aspects of life by restoring the reconciled world to His goodness. Jesus, enthroned at the Father’s right hand, has given us the Kingdom of God – His indwelling rule in us, by the power of His Holy Spirit – and through us is working to make all things new. Dwelling within all who believe in Jesus, the Holy Spirit is writing the Law of God on our hearts, erasing the old, sinful narrative that guided us for years, and restoring the works of the Law God originally inscribed in our soul as His image-bearers.

The Law of God is the template for our work of restoration – not the complete kit, but the template. The Law won’t save us; only the Gospel can do that. But as the Gospel is received and the Spirit comes to indwell us, the work of learning, delighting in, and obeying God’s Law goes forward as we focus on Jesus, study and meditate on His Law, and build on that template our understanding of all the teaching of His Word.

Beginning in our soul, Jesus works to restore us in love for God – true worship, joyous obedience, and honoring Him in all things – and for our neighbors – showing the love of Jesus to them by word and deed. The Law is the guiding template for this work of restoration. It teaches us to look always to Jesus and, in practical ways, to “put on the Lord Jesus Christ” in all our relationships, roles, and responsibilities. The Gospel establishes the Law, Paul insisted (Rom. 3.31), as the foundation for the Lord’s restoration project. That project will only come to completion in the new heavens and new earth; however, we pursue that work of realizing the Kingdom of God and His righteousness as the defining motif of our lives.

And the Law of God – the learning, living, and teaching of which are key to greatness in God’s Kingdom (Matt. 5.17-19) – provides the essential template from which we derive the first principles and guiding instructions for learning the rest of God’s Word, putting on Jesus, and pursuing the work of restoring the reconciled world.

We ignore the Law of God – those first five books of Moses – to our peril. Let us pray that God will enable us to say with the psalmist, “O, how I love Your Law!” (Ps. 119.97)

The Law and culture

The Law teaches us how to practice the love of God – love for God and our neighbors – so that the grace of God serves as the currency of the divine economy God is bringing to pass on earth as in heaven. But, since human beings are not only *relational* creatures but *cultural* creatures as well, God’s Law directs us in how to make and use culture in loving God and our neighbors.

God is writing His Law on our hearts. He commands us to set it firmly between our eyes – to lodge His Law in our thinking, so that it provides the guiding framework for all our decisions and actions. And He commands us to write His Law on the doorposts of our homes and on the gates of our city. While we may certainly obey this commandment literally, the larger meaning of our text is more expansive. God intends His Law – in all its beauty, goodness, and truth – to serve as the standard for how we conduct our relationships in our homes and communities. But it also intends to shed light on our cultural activities – making a home,

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raising a family, ordering our worship, pursuing our work, making beautiful things, being good stewards of our property and possessions, educating a community, and creating institutions to maintain justice, care for the poor, sustain a flourishing economy, ensure proper inheritances, and defend the community against Law-breakers and other threats. The Law of God speaks in a foundational way to all these matters of culture, directing us how to resume our original mandate to exercise dominion over the earth (Gen. 1.26-28; Ps. 8; Heb. 2.5-9), developing and guarding it and its resources for the glory of God.

The apostles certainly understood this. Both Paul and James invoked the Law of God to redress cultural imbalances and inequities (cf. 1 Cor. 9.8-14; Jms. 5.1-4). Paul appealed, first, to a statute of God's Law directing us in the proper care of the animals that work for us; under the guidance of the Spirit, Paul interpreted this statute to apply to a congregation's responsibility to provide for those who serve it in the ministry of the Word. James rebuked the wealthy who, in direct violation of divine statutes, held back the wages of those who worked for them, rather than remunerate them in a timely manner.

That the Law of God addresses the proper use of the arts within the household of faith is clear from the account of God enlisting the entire community of Israel to construct the tabernacle and its furnishings (Ex. 35, 36), and from God's creating a song for Israel to use in keeping its heritage and covenant obligations in mind (Deut. 31, 32). The Law addresses issues of concerning marriage and divorce, coinage and monetary value, and the practice of justice. God intended His people to use the Law as a template to guide their thinking as they managed their homes and communities for loving God and their neighbors.

We should expect that same Law to guide our thinking in all matters of cultural restoration.

It takes a community

Creating and sustaining a culture that honors God and allows for maximum flourishing of all the members of the community requires that all the members of the community take responsibility for the culture that falls within their spheres of existence and influence. God's people need to learn together, work together, share and assess matters together, and seek the guidance of God's Law – and all His Word – in thinking about the kind of culture – personal, domestic, and communal – that will honor and glorify God.

Our desire is to see the goodness of God abounding on every hand in the culture that we use and make. Culture entails all the artifacts, conventions, and institutions we create in order to define, sustain, and enrich our lives. When we allow the Law of God to guide us in making and using culture, we bring the light of that which is holy and righteous and good to bear on all our cultural choices and activities. As we do, it will be more evident that, throughout the community where God's restorers are at work, everything we do – down to even our choices of diet and manners we use at the table – will point to God, glorify Him, and lead us into His pleasure and joy (1 Cor. 10.31).

God's Law is a rich resource for guiding us into culture that is edifying, liberating, pleasurable, useful, delightful, and good. We should look to it to light our path in all our cultural endeavors, as in all our relationships, roles, and responsibilities (Ps. 119.105).

For Reflection

1. Why does it only make sense that the Law of God should help us in thinking about matters of culture?
2. If we don't look to unfailing standards for culture – like the Law and Word of God – how can we judge whether the culture we make and use is good for us?
3. How confident are you that your use of culture is informed and shape by God's Law and Word?

Next Steps – Transformation: Make a short list of all the ways you will be involved in culture today. Commit these all to the Lord, then prayerfully seek His guidance in making and using culture for His glory.

7 Restoring Creation

For the earnest expectation of the creation eagerly waits for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it in hope; because the creation itself also will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groans and labors with birth pangs together until now. Romans 8.19-22

The bondage of corruption

The environmental movement, which has gained prominence over the past generation, should not be dismissed as merely a leftist, tree-hugging pining for a world without people. The impetus for caring for the creation comes from the image of God, written on the palimpsest of the human soul. It was there from day one of human existence (Gen. 2.15), and while it has been hijacked from its original divine purpose, yet the love of creation manifests itself, by the common grace of God, even in those who have no faith in Him.

Not all conservationists will acknowledge that, but this does not negate two facts: God loves the world He created, and Jesus has reconciled the world and all things in it to God. Further, God has given His people the ministry of reconciliation, and that restoring work includes the natural world around us.

Christians such as John Muir, Bill McKibben, Wendell Berry, Nate Simons, and others have played important roles in calling for the kind of attention and care the creation deserves. It falls within the mission purview of every believer to consider what he or she can do to relieve the world of the bondage of corruption that tends toward its defilement, defacement, and destruction, and to work to bring out the goodness of God in the flora, fauna, ecosystems, and topographies of the earth.

To some of us, this won't seem like Kingdom work. But that's only because our view of the Kingdom is too small. Christ is King over all the vast cosmos, and He commands the creatures of earth to praise and honor Him (Ps. 148). But creation groans under the weight of environmental abuse, human ignorance and indifference, and the Christian community's too-small vision of the rule of King Jesus; and it labors, longing to give birth to greater bounties of life, beauty, and goodness. And it falls to believers to consider what we may do to help restore the fallen and failing creation for the honor and praise of God. Ours is the duty to liberate the manifold voices of creation from whatever gags sin has imposed on them, so that they might join us in praising and thanking the Lord for His abundant goodness.

The Law of God and creation

Awareness of the creation and the importance of treating it properly shows up even in the Law of God. Adam was given the responsibility of *imposing order* on the creation, by naming the animals and pruning the various fruit-bearing plants. This was a work of attention, thoughtfulness, and careful physical labor, so that the many gifts of creation could serve the purposes of God (Ps. 119.89-91).

An appreciation of *the beauty of creation* appears in the constructing of items used for the worship of God. Various of the liturgical furnishings included carvings of almond blossoms and flowers (Ex. 37.17-24). The garments of the priest enfolded gems and beautiful stones, symbolizing the way God looks at His people, and what His people should aspire to be (Ex. 39.8-21). Other priestly garments featured sewn images of pomegranates (Ex. 39.22-26). All this recalls the fact that God made beautiful trees and plants to adorn the garden which He pronounced "very good" in the beginning (Gen. 2.8, 9). God's creation is beautiful, and it falls to His people to appreciate that beauty and to preserve and celebrate it in various ways.

The Law evidences a *conservation mindset* in two statutes. The first, Deuteronomy 22.6, 7, counsels us to be wise in harvesting eggs from a bird's nest. We may take the eggs and young, but not the mother. That way we conserve the life-giving creature for having more offspring. Deuteronomy 20.19, 20 forbids cutting down the fruit trees of one's enemy. They are there to provide food, and should not be plundered for merely practical

purposes.

Other statutes in the Law of God counsel *wise use of the land*, so that fields are not exhausted, nor their fruit-bearing plants prematurely harvested. The practices of farmers in our day of rotating crops, spreading lime and manure, planting nitrogen-rich plants, and allowing fields to lie fallow for a season derive from an innate knowledge of the very sensible instructions in God's Law concerning this aspect of His creation.

Creation is *filled with beauty, rich with potential for supplying human needs, abounding in wisdom and wonder*, yet it can be delicate when abused or misused. We don't need to look very far to see the travailing and hear the groaning of the reconciled-but-not-yet-restored creation. Each of us must consider what we can do within our own spheres of influence.

Restoring creation

Here is not the place to detail the many opportunities available to us to restore the reconciled world of creation so that the goodness of God can abound in the land of the living. But let me suggest some ways you can engage in this aspect of the work of restoration that can bring more beauty, delight, and order to your part of the creation.

First, make an inventory of the opportunities for creation-care available to you. What about your dwelling place? What could you plant or do to bring more beauty to your own patch of earth? How about in your neighborhood or community? Are there any local organizations devoted to creation-care that you might join, or in whose work you might participate?

Second, make an effort to learn the names of things – birds, bugs, trees and shrubs, clouds, stars, topographical features. All the things of creation have names, and the names teach us about them and their place in the created order. Try to learn something about one aspect of creation each month. Take pictures for a notebook or album. Read articles on the Internet. Write down your own observations, and what you think about as you ponder these creatures.

Finally, follow the example of Jesus, and talk with others about the lessons of creation for life in the Kingdom of God. Jesus often used aspects of the creation to enrich our understanding the Kingdom of God. Surely we can learn to do the same. By so doing, we cultivate respect and awareness of the creation, and we create opportunities for talking about the Creator, Who loves His world so much that He gave His only-begotten Son to redeem and reconcile it for His glory.

Our work of restoring the world includes the world of creation. If we all take a small part in that effort, we can make a big difference toward restoring the goodness of God to the land of the living.

For reflection

1. What would you include in your creation inventory?
2. Why is using creation for beauty a way of pointing to the Lord?
3. What can you do to become more consistently involved in restoring the creation?

Next Steps – Preparation: Prepare your own creation inventory, and beginning praying for ways to work restoratively on each item.

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For Reflection or Discussion

1. How would you summarize God's original plan for the creation?
2. How has the entrance of sin affected that plan?
3. Why must restoration begin in the soul?
4. How can believers contribute to restoring culture and creation?
5. What's the most important lesson you've learned from this second installment in our series, *Restoring the Reconciled World*?

The Fellowship of Ailbe

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