

# **PERSPECTIVES ON RESTORATION**



**Restoring the Reconciled World Part 5**

**T. M. Moore**

*A ReVision Resource from The Fellowship of Ailbe*

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Perspectives on Restoration  
Restoring the Reconciled World Part 5  
A *ReVision* Resource from The Fellowship of Ailbe  
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Waxed Tablet Publications

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## Welcome to *Perspectives on Restoration*

As we bring to a conclusion our study of *Restoring the Reconciled World*, we need to make sure that our perspective on this calling lines up well with God's.

We need to understand His agenda, to learn to think about the world as He does, to engage the mind of Christ, and to take up the work of restoration within our own spheres.

Our final study examines these and related topics, and is designed to sharpen the focus of restoration and help us to think with the mind of God and see with the eyes of Jesus.

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 A Restoration Agenda

*Now therefore, be wise, O kings;  
Be instructed, you judges of the earth.  
Serve the LORD with fear,  
And rejoice with trembling.  
Kiss the Son, lest He be angry,  
And you perish in the way,  
When His wrath is kindled but a little.  
Blessed are all those who put their trust in Him. Psalm 2:10-12*

### *The context for restoration*

The apostle Paul explained that it pleased the Father that in Jesus Christ, all things should be reconciled to God (Col. 1.20). Jesus came into a world in rebellion against God, a world under the rule of Satan and the lie, a world that was lost, disordered, corrupt, and abusive of the goodness of God which abounded in it in infinite and varied ways.

In a very real sense, not much has changed. Our world still seeks to break free of the constraints of God and His Law (Ps. 2:1-3). It traffics in lies and deception (Ps. 12:1-3), promotes material gain and self-interest (Matt. 6:24), and uses the goodness of God with ingratitude, indifference, and even hostility to His divine purposes (Rom. 1:18ff.).

In such a world, Jesus accomplished a great work of reconciliation. By His life, death, and resurrection, He bound the ruler of that world and launched a project of plundering his household (Matt. 12:22-29), taking every thought and everything captive to His rule and order (2 Cor. 10:3-5), for the praise and glory of God (1 Cor. 10:31). His work gained Him the eternal Kingdom of God, which He has given to those who believe in Him and obey His Word (Dan. 7:13-18). His Father has appointed to His subjects the ministry of reconciliation (2 Cor. 5:18, 19), the ongoing phase of Jesus' achievement whereby the fallen world is being recovered, restored, and renewed.

We who have received the ministry of restoration look to God and our Lord Jesus Christ to direct our efforts, and the Holy Spirit and God's Word to instruct and empower us for our work (Phil. 2:13; 2 Tim. 3:15-17). We expect the work of restoring the reconciled world to be arduous, time-consuming, gradual, ongoing, and fraught with potential for bringing glory to God. So we take up this calling and work gladly, looking to Jesus and drawing on His resources to help us, each one in our own sector of the fallen but reconciled world.

Psalm 2 provides us with some general guidelines, items on a restoration agenda that can help us to focus clearly and work diligently in our individual callings.

### *The aim of restoration*

The temporal aim of restoration is blessing (v. 12). We want the goodness of God, which everywhere abounds by His grace (Ps. 33:5), to be recognized, appreciated, enjoyed, and used for His glory, so that His goodness will encourage us to repent from sin and embrace of the reconciling work of Christ (Rom. 2:4).

For this to happen, we need the wisdom of God (v. 10). We are Christ's royal priesthood – rulers and priests (1 Pet. 2:9, 10), whose calling is to bring everything within our purview under the feet of King Jesus as a holy offering to His Name (Ps. 2:10). Christ Himself is the Wisdom of God, the very treasury of all wisdom and knowledge (Col. 2:3). For us to succeed in our calling, we will need to see Jesus clearly, hear Him continuously, obey Him explicitly, and follow Him into whatever relationships, roles, or responsibilities He may be pleased to assign to us. Only as we grow in wisdom will we be able to bring God's wisdom to light,

and thus restore the right use of all things for His praise and glory. Wisdom begins in the fear of God (Ps. 111.10) and grows from there by instruction to discover the plan of God for all aspects of life in the world (Ps. 2.10).

As we grow in wisdom and instruction, our vision of what the blessings of God can look like for our world will become increasingly clear. It is not our mission to deprive the world of its fun, or to impose on it a regimen and order of dourness and doom. We seek the happiness God intends for all His creatures, happiness which can only be found in submission to King Jesus and His Law (Ps. 1.1-3), according to His Kingdom agenda (Rom. 14.17, 18). We don't want anyone to perish in their sin (Ps. 2.11), so we give all diligence to make our own calling and election sure, and to labor diligently to bring the goodness of God and His blessings to our world.

*The restoration project*

Our project for restoring the reconciled world takes up the pattern and template established in Scripture, mirrors the work of Jesus, and seeks above all that He might be seen, known, loved, and worshiped throughout the world. This is the ultimate aim of all our work of restoration, both that which we undertake in our own lives and that which we pursue in the world (Ps. 2.11). We believe that, where restoration is accomplished, the worship of God will increase, and the joy and happiness of those who worship will abound as well.

As the work of restoration proceeds, Jesus fills His people with Himself; His Church becomes more visible as His Body incarnate; His Spirit overflows in rivers of living water to refresh and renew the lost world; and we His people labor in all our endeavors to bring more of the goodness and joy of the Lord to the world (Eph. 1.15-23; 4.8-10; Jn. 7.37-39).

When we read Psalm 2, we may tend to see in the "kings" and "judges of the earth" only those who are in rebellion against the Lord (vv. 2, 10). And, indeed: our desire is that all kings and nations and peoples, and all their cultures and institutions, would break free of the bonds of misguided affections, exploitation, oppression, and mere self-indulgence to know the true happiness that is to be found in serving Jesus. We have hope that, as we persevere in our labors, even those who do not come to faith in Jesus, and even those who continue to regard themselves as His enemies, will see the wisdom, beauty, goodness, and joy that prevails in the restored world, and will submit themselves – in spite of themselves – to the purposes and ways of God (cf. Pss. 66.3; 81.15).

God's answer to a broken world, a world in rebellion, a world indifferent to and even scornful of His mercy, grace, and goodness is to point that world to His King and His rule, and to call the peoples of the world to submit themselves and everything in their lives to Jesus, in loving and joyful service. And we to whom the ministry of restoring the reconciled world has been given are the means and agents whereby God intends to realize that objective.

*For reflection*

1. How would you explain the ministry of restoring the reconciled world to a new believer?
2. Why do we have hope of making real progress in the work of restoration?
3. How can you make Christ's restoration agenda a more continuous presence in your own life?

*Next steps – Preparation: What opportunities for restoring the reconciled world will you have today? Commit them to the Lord in prayer.*

## 2 Things True, Beautiful, and Good

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

I would have lost heart, *unless I had believed*  
*That I would see the goodness of the LORD*  
*In the land of the living.* Psalm 27.13

*Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy—meditate on these things.* Philippians 4.8

*The way things ought to be*

We have seen in this series that the world and everything in it are not, in Neil Plantiga’s phrase, “the way they’re supposed to be.” Sin has brought corruption, degradation, abuse, and waste into the world, wreaking its effects on people, cultures, societies, and the creation in many different ways.

Our calling to restore the reconciled world takes place within this environment, where lost souls are trapped in the lie of unbelief, cultures and societies are blighted and broken, and the whole creation groans and travails, waiting for the liberating work of the sons and daughters of God (Rom. 8.19-22).

Yet for all this (as Hopkins might say), there is still plenty of goodness in the world. Creation still shows the glory of God in many ways. People do good to one another. Societies manage at least a semblance of order and fruitfulness. Wonders of culture abound. All of which is evidence of God’s Spirit, striving with sinful people and restraining them from doing their worst (Gen. 6.3), while the common grace of God sustains and enriches the world, and gives us hints about the way things ought to be.

Things ought to be uniformly good, as God intended when He created the world. God’s truth should be the standard giving guidance to all our relationships, roles, and responsibilities. And when His goodness and truth are present, the beauty of the Lord will emerge in surprising ways. As we set our minds on the work of restoration, we need to think on the things in our life through the lens of God’s truth, goodness, and beauty, meditating on Him and seeking to bring His glory to light in every aspect and facet of our lives (1 Cor. 10.31).

We need to nurture a vision of how things ought to be in our own spheres of influence, and then devote ourselves to the work of restoring the reconciled world wherever our influence may be felt.

*Things true*

It is essential that, increasingly, we establish our lives on the foundation of God’s Word and truth. An old Harvard rule used to insist that the purpose of education was to “lay Christ in the bottom” of a student’s life. This must be the case with each of us if we are to make any real contribution to restoring the reconciled world.

In the life of a Christian, it ought to be that we hunger and thirst for the Lord (Ps. 42.1, 2), that we delight in and feed on His Word as more important than the food we eat (Job 23.12; Jer. 15.16), and that we bring the entirety of our lives into the light of God’s truth, to discover what He intends. In our generation, believers are drifting from reliance on the Bible. Many have come to regard the Bible as little more than a resource for some word of comfort or counsel to bolster them for their day. Few have the kind of attitude toward Scripture that Job and Jeremiah displayed.

It ought to be that believers devour the Word of God, seeking to grow stronger and stronger in the solid meat of God’s truth (Heb. 5.12-14), and laying a sure foundation of truth and a closer relationship with Christ

under every aspect of their lives.

If our daily discipline of seeking Christ in His Word and growing in His truth is not what it ought to be, we will not be able to make progress in restoring the reconciled world. Set aside the first and best hour of each day to seek the Lord in His Word and to bring your life, in all its aspects and facets, into the light of truth. Thus you'll be equipped for every good and beautiful work (2 Tim. 3.15-17).

*Things good*

As you grow in God's truth, you will be able to discern the good works that He intends for you each day (2 Tim. 3.15-17), and to plan and prepare for them accordingly. You'll find that you're more eager to do the work God has appointed to you, and that you'll be able to know how His glory can be revealed in the good works you do each day (Ps. 90.16, 17).

We don't need to go through our days like a pin ball – shot into the game of life and careening and rebounding off situations and circumstances, hoping to do the best we can. We can plan the time of our life for good works, as our study of God's Word makes ever clearer to us which works will most enable us to realize the goodness of the Lord in our own life spheres. And we can call on the power of God's Spirit to be at work within us, willing and doing according to God's good pleasure, above and beyond all we'd ever asked or believed possible, to make us witnesses for our good King Jesus in everything we do (Phil. 2.13; Eph. 3.20; Acts 1.8).

*Things beautiful*

A life of good works, grounded in the truth of God, brings the beauty of God into everything we do. Jesus increases in us as we decrease, and His beauty – His loveliness, excellence, radiance, kindness, charity, and grace – extend through us into every facet of our lives.

The beauty of the Lord can come to expression in many different ways – in our conversations, how we dress and do our work, our table manners, when we're being hospitable to others, how we care for and decorate our homes, our preferences in music and film, and much, much more. The beauty of the Lord brings delight to others, as we see in the apostles before the transfigured glory of Jesus (Matt. 17.1-8). Beauty lifts the soul and tends to edification, as anyone can attest who has ever thrilled at a performance of Handel's "Messiah", contemplated a painting by Vermeer, or meditated on a poem by Hopkins. People in the world long to be counted among the "beautiful people"; we have the wherewithal and calling to become precisely that.

Our world may be a place of pervading gloom, uncertainty, mistrust, and ugliness. But our lives can be islands of truth, goodness, and beauty, attracting others to the hope that is within us and the King Whose reconciling work we are busy about in every aspect of our lives (1 Pet. 3.15; Mic. 4.1-8). But we'll need to nurture a clear and growing vision of the way things ought to be in our spheres of influence, when the truth and goodness and beauty of Jesus are filling us and everything around us with ever-increasing glory (Eph. 4.8-10).

*For reflection*

1. Would you say that your vision for your life sphere is based on God's truth, goodness, and beauty? Explain.
2. How could you improve your use of God's Word to grow in the areas mentioned in this article?
3. What can you do *today* to bring more of God's truth, goodness, and beauty into your life sphere?

*Next steps – Transformation: Take one decisive step for truth, goodness, and beauty today. At the end of the day, give thanks to God for helping you to create an island of the way things ought to be in your sphere of influence.*

### 3 The World to Come

*For He has not put the world to come, of which we speak, in subjection to angels. But one testified in a certain place, saying:*

“What is man that You are mindful of him,  
Or the son of man that You take care of him?  
You have made him a little lower than the angels;  
You have crowned him with glory and honor,  
And set him over the works of Your hands.  
You have put all things in subjection under his feet.”

*For in that He put all in subjection under him, He left nothing that is not put under him. But now we do not yet see all things put under him. But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels, for the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor, that He, by the grace of God, might taste death for everyone. Hebrews 2.5-9*

*The old template and the new*

We recall that the Scriptures repeatedly set forth a pattern or template for the work of restoration. We saw how Noah, Joseph, Joshua, David, Daniel, Ezra and Nehemiah, and Jesus provided examples and instruction for restoring God’s plan for goodness and glory. Each of these typified that great work of restoring the reconciled world which God has given to us.

If we wonder whether the writers of the New Testament understood this, and meant to include a restoration template in their teaching of the Gospel, we must give a resounding “Yes!” From the book of Acts through the epistles of Paul, Peter, and John, it is evident that the old template for restoration underlay their teaching about the implications of the Gospel for life in a fallen and broken world.

The church in Jerusalem set the pace for the rest of the Roman world in creating new communities where selfless sharing, caring for the poor, mutual edification, and sacrificial giving stood out so starkly that unbelievers saw this new “Way” as turning their world upside-down.

The apostles vigorously sought to support and further this project, calling the believers to whom they wrote to envision the coming Kingdom of God and to draw on its power for personal growth, ministry together, and the doing of “every good work” in loving God and their neighbors. They were called to serve Christ in their particular conditions and callings, using the gifts and wisdom of God to do all things for edification and God’s glory.

Paul’s comment that old things had passed away and all things were becoming new (2 Cor. 5.17) applied to the impact of the Gospel in the lives and mission fields of believers, where the old template of restoration, so carefully and consistently set forth throughout the Old Testament and the gospels, was beginning to be realized again.

*Such a great salvation*

The writer of Hebrews presents the most concise restatement of this restoration template (Heb. 2.5-9). He reminded his readers that they were the recipients of “so great a salvation” – an understanding that, according to many contemporary scholars and thinkers, seems to have escaped the notice of believers today, when we are, according to C. S. Lewis, “too easily satisfied” with a small and merely personal salvation.

The salvation that Jesus brings to His followers is so great that it spreads out into every aspect of our lives, enlightening the darkness; bringing new power for righteousness, peace, and joy in the Spirit; making us willing and able to do that which is pleasing to God; equipping us for every good work; leading us to glorify God in all our ways; and making everything that comes under our influence new and fresh and radiant with the resurrection life of Christ. The greatness of this salvation demands a great response and effort on our part. We must not be content merely to rest in the essentials of the Gospel; instead, desiring to become

teachers for all those in our lives, the followers of Christ must press on to learn Him, to grow in grace, and to increase in our great salvation for greater newness, life, and glory (Heb. 5.12-6.12). We must “not become sluggish”, languishing in complacency and unconcerned about the needs of our fallen and broken world; instead, looking to all the great saints of Scripture, we must “imitate those who through faith and patience inherit the promises” – the promises of restoration and renewal in Jesus.

*Not yet, but...*

The writer of Hebrews says that this great salvation is the coming thing. As John had written that the light of the Gospel was driving back the darkness on every hand (1 Jn. 2.8), so the writer of Hebrews insisted that “the world to come” – of which he was speaking – was to be a world in which the great salvation of the Lord brought renewal and restoration to all that Christ has reconciled to the Father – every creature and everything in the fallen world.

The writer of Hebrews reached back to that Old Testament template for restoration, bringing forward David’s visionary restatement of the restoration template from Psalm 8, and insisting that this mandate remains. God has put the world Jesus reconciled under the feet of His people. He calls us to rule the world as His vice-regents, crowned with glory and honor, so that all the works of His hands may be refashioned and restored to bring honor and glory to Him. God Himself cares for us in this great endeavor, and He has given us His Word and Spirit to guide and empower us for the work of restoring the reconciled world.

The writer of Hebrews quickly adds that “now we do not yet see all things put under him” (Heb. 2.8). Of course not! The work was just beginning, and even though, by the time of this epistle, much impressive progress had been made, there was still much work to do. The same is true in our day. As many writers – Christian and non-Christian – have shown, the impact of the Gospel throughout the ages has shaped the course of world history. While the advance of Christ’s rule in the hands of sinful people has not always brought the blessing and goodness God intends – a point Bertrand Russell argued cogently in the middle of the last century – in the main, and overall, the presence of the Gospel throughout the world has resulted in more of God’s goodness, more of His mercy, more of His fruitfulness, and more of His truth to the sinful world than all other worldviews or philosophies or religions combined.

And while today we recognize there is still much to do, we understand that, by looking to Jesus – contemplating Him in all His work and glory, daily being renewed in Him, following His example, serving others in His Name, and proclaiming Him to the world – we can find the focus, faith, fortitude, and fruitfulness to do the work of restoring the reconciled world, beginning right where we are.

The world to come is the restored world of our great salvation, and each of us has a contribution to make. Look to Jesus. Consider Him. Take up the cross He calls you to bear; and seek the Kingdom of God and His righteousness for a new world, reconciled to God and restored to His goodness, increasingly, if not entirely, until He comes.

*For reflection*

1. What did we learn from Jesus and Old Testament saints about the work of restoration?
2. Why do we “not yet” see all things being restored to God’s glory and honor and goodness?
3. How can we be renewed each day in the work of restoring the reconciled world?

*Next steps – Preparation: How can you improve your practice of “seeing” Jesus? What will you begin to do today to make that a more consistent part of your walk with the Lord?*

## 4 Our Neighbor's Glory

*And I will very gladly spend and be spent for your souls; though the more abundantly I love you, the less I am loved. 2 Corinthians 12.15*

*... but grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him be the glory both now and forever. Amen. 2 Peter 3.18*

*The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life,  
And he who wins souls is wise. Proverbs 11.30*

### *Restoring love*

In his book, *God's Good World*, Jonathan R. Wilson insists – rightly – that we must not separate the work of creation from the work of redemption, or the work of redemption from the work of creation. The salvation that we enjoy in Jesus reaches to the whole world, bringing restoration and renewal to all that Jesus has reconciled to the Father by His life, death and resurrection.

Dr. Wilson reminds us that it takes restored people, who are becoming new persons in Jesus Christ, to take up the work of restoration: “The reality of being and becoming a person begins already in Christ. We are not made persons by healing and wholeness; we are made persons in Christ. In the new creation, all will be healed and made whole. In Christ, we will be fully the persons that we are created to be. In that time and for eternity, our full beauty and goodness will shine in the glorious splendor of life.” Thus, as we have previously written, our work of restoring the reconciled world must begin in our own souls, where we are becoming more like Jesus in heart, mind, and conscience day by day.

But love for our neighbors – and especially our believing neighbors – must be a restoring love. We must take up the responsibility of loving our neighbors so that they may increase in wholeness and restoration. C. S. Lewis wrote about this duty in his essay, “The Weight of Glory.” We seek, through increasing obedience, to realize more of the glory, beauty, goodness, truth, and Presence of the Lord in every aspect of our daily lives; and we want the same to be the case for our neighbors. We want to “drink joy from the fountain of joy” together with increasing consistency. We must therefore be continuously mindful of our duty to help our neighbor along in this joyful journey: “The load, or weight, or burden of my neighbour's glory should be laid on my back, a load so heavy that only humility can carry it, and the backs of the proud will be broken” Lewis adds, “All day long we are, in some degree, helping each other to one or other of these destinations. It is in the light of these overwhelming possibilities, it is with the awe and the circumspection proper to them, that we should conduct all our dealings with one another, all friendships, all loves, all play, all politics.”

### *Investing in others*

Paul says that the best investment we can make of our time and energies, next to increasing in Christlikeness ourselves, is to spend and be spent for the souls of our neighbors, especially our believing neighbors.

Paul took as the focus of his ministry the souls of those entrusted to his care. He invested himself and all his resources and energy in nurturing his charges in their minds, hearts, and consciences. He addressed their *understanding*, by seeking ever to enlarge their vision and increase their knowledge, always focusing all his instruction on Christ, the treasury of wisdom and knowledge. He addressed their *affections*, challenging them to search their hearts and bring them into line with the heart of God. And he addressed their *values and priorities*, and the inclination of their *will*, challenging them to put everything in order before Christ, to follow Him in all things.

It will do no good merely to address the outward lives of people, whether to encourage them to take up some disciplines or patch on some practices that ought to be present in the lives of Christ's disciples. We must

*Perspectives on Restoration*

Speak to the inner person. All our most earnest desires for our neighbors, therefore, must drive to the soul, aim at the soul, speak to the soul, and call for revival and renewal in the souls of those to whom God sends us each day.

This is not a call for some “big bang” effort to shake the souls of our neighbors to life. Rather, by our example, conversation, and works, we seek day by day to *show* the glory of God and to *encourage others* to enter that glory with us, that we may know the joy of the Lord together.

*Be ready with the Gospel*

It takes wisdom to live this way, wisdom which comes from the fear of the Lord and increasing in the grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. And it requires that we be always ready with the Gospel, that we might point to Jesus as our happiness and hope (1 Pet. 3.15), encouraging our believing friends to seek Him more earnestly, and calling on our unbelieving neighbors to consider Him and His promises.

As we grow and are more fully restored in Jesus, the fruit of righteousness will be more consistently apparent in all we do. It will take the form of hope, expressed as peace, joy, confidence, buoyancy, and the anticipation of blessing, even in the midst of trials. It will issue in words that calm, affirm, encourage, edify, excite, and challenge. It will be demonstrated in sincere listening, patience and understanding, and a willingness to carry on conversations intermittently and over time. And it will be always ready to give thanks, praise, and glory to God for any goodness, grace, beauty, or truth experienced by others through us (Ps. 115.1).

Lewis sets before us this daunting challenge: “There are no *ordinary* people. You have never talked to a mere mortal. Nations, cultures, “arts, civilisations—these are mortal, and their life is to ours as the life of a gnat. But it is immortals whom we joke with, work with, marry, snub, and exploit—immortal horrors or everlasting splendours...Next to the Blessed Sacrament itself, your neighbour is the holiest object presented to your senses. If he is your Christian neighbour, he is holy in almost the same way, for in him also Christ *vere latitat*—the glorifier and the glorified, Glory Himself, is truly hidden.”

Our work of restoration includes whatever and as much as we can do to help our neighbors realize who they are and what they are called to in Jesus Christ.

*For reflection*

1. What are you doing to make sure that your soul is increasingly being restored to the likeness of Jesus?
2. What can you do to be more conscious of your ongoing duty to help restore the souls of your neighbors?
3. How can believers work together to become more effective in helping others to know the glory and joy of the Lord?

*Next steps – Preparation: Whom do you expect to see today? How will you work to restore their soul? Commit these opportunities to the Lord, and wait on Him to help you prepare for them.*

## 5 Restoring Culture

*Then Peter arose and went with them. When he had come, they brought him to the upper room. And all the widows stood by him weeping, showing the tunics and garments which Dorcas had made while she was with them. Acts 9.39*

*What's in the mirror?*

In her book, *House as a Mirror of Self*, Clare Cooper Marcus observes, “throughout our lives, whether we are conscious of it or not, our home and its contents are very potent statements about who we are.” She adds, “Nesting, home-making is a major means of personal expression and development. We create our immediate environment and then contemplate it and are worked on by it. We find ourselves mirrored in it, see what has not been visible, and integrate the reflection back into our sense of self.” “A right home,” she insists, “can protect, heal, and restore us, express who we are now, and over time help us become who we are meant to be...we are all – all our lives – striving toward a state of wholeness, of being wholly ourselves...the places we live in are reflections of that process, and indeed the places themselves have a powerful effect on our journey toward wholeness.”

I'd like to highlight just a few phrases from these excerpts. It is important that we understand that we “create our immediate environment and then contemplate and are worked on by it.” Our environment – and everything in it – is in many ways a product of our own creative – and restorative – efforts. As we work on it, to bring it to a state of wholeness – in terms of beauty, goodness, truth, excellence, and so forth (Phil. 4.8) – it works on us, to reinforce our vision of life and keep us moving toward wholeness.

We are “mirrored in” the environment we create; put another way, the environment we create – whether our home, or how we dress or converse, or do our work – bears witness to our values, priorities, desires, and thoughts. We must work to create an environment that “can protect, heal, and restore us” and anyone who happens to enter that environment.

All this happens – in our home and all the other environments and cultural activities of our lives – “whether we are conscious of it or not...” Wherever we are, whatever we're doing, whomever we're with, we are declaring something to the world.

This invites us to consider the question as to what our homes, and what all the other environments and cultural activities of our lives, declare about the kind of person we are. What are we saying about such things as order, cleanliness, beauty, wholeness, efficiency, goodness, and truth? Are we even conscious of the fact that we take our environment with us wherever we go, and that the kind of environment we create and maintain speaks to the people in that environment about the things that matter most to us?

*A certain disciple*

We can imagine that Dorcas – whose friends wept at her passing, as they gladly displayed the many lovely items she had made for them – was a woman who thought long and hard about her environment. She was a disciple, a follower of Christ, and a woman “full of good works and charitable deeds” (Acts 9.36). We can imagine that the environment she took with her wherever she went was welcoming and orderly, perhaps adorned with small expressions of beauty, and abounding in good works and kindness, and that she herself must have been a gentle and edifying person in all her ways.

When Dorcas died, her loss was deeply felt. She left memories and precious gifts for the widows of Joppa, and they would likely never forget the impact her life had on them. Dorcas created a culture of goodness and left a legacy of love, beauty, kindness, compassion, and caring for her friends. No wonder they wept so profusely, and sent for Peter to come quickly to their aid.

When the Lord raised her to life again through Peter's word, “it became widely known throughout all Joppa,

and many believed on the Lord” (v. 42).

Never underestimate the impact of a solitary life committed to Christ, especially one that is being restored and restores others through relationships of love and culture of wholeness and beauty. To the extent that we are determined and consistent in working for restoration in our own lives, and conscious of the power of our homes and other cultural environments and activities to mirror and add to that restoration, we can contribute to the restoration of the reconciled world, and make an impact on the people in our lives.

*Becoming culturally conscious*

Culture is one of the arenas in which God is pleased to dwell, and through which He desires to make His glory known to the world. As believers, like Dorcas, we will want to make the most of every opportunity to use everyday culture as a pointer to the Kingdom and glory of God (Eph. 5.15-17). This, at least in part, is what it means to walk as a child of the light – to let the light of Christ and His glory refract through the prisms of every aspect of our lives, so that, through all the daily details of life we are making the knowledge of God and His glory a matter of focus.

We refract the objective, eternal glory of God through the unique situations, opportunities, and operations of our everyday lives. It will help us to bear in mind what Alexander Schmemmann has explained, “Each ounce of matter belongs to God and is to find in God its fulfillment. Each instant of time is God’s time and is to fulfill itself as God’s eternity. Nothing is ‘neutral.’ For the Holy Spirit, as a ray of light, as a smile of joy, has ‘touched’ all things, all time – revealing all of them as precious stones of a precious temple” (*For the Life of the World*).

Everyday culture provides a rich mine of precious stones and a wealth of tools for restoring the reconciled world, as we bring about changes in our cultural practices that mirror the character of God and pique the curiosity of our neighbors. And, as Andy Crouch wisely observes, “The bigger the cultural change we hope for, the longer we must be willing to invest, work and wait for it” (*Culture Making*).

We are all Dorcas. All our culture is a mirror of who we are, what we love, and what we hope for in this world. Let us make every effort, in our homes, workplaces, and in all we do, to mirror the beauty, goodness, and truth of God as we persevere in restoring the reconciled world.

*For reflection*

1. What do your home and other environments and cultural activities mirror about you?
2. Christ has reconciled “all things” to God. We are called to do “all things” to the glory of God. What are the implications of this for your everyday cultural activities?
3. What should be the role of Scripture and prayer in helping you to mirror God to the world through your environments and activities?

*Next steps – Preparation: Spend a few minutes meditating on the various environments you will enter today, and the aspects of culture you will engage there. Thank and praise God for each of these, and commit each one to mirroring the reconciliation of Jesus.*

## 6 A Restoration Mindset

*If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth.* Colossians 3.1, 2

For “who has known the mind of the Lord that he may instruct Him?” *But we have the mind of Christ.* 1 Corinthians 2.16

*Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy—meditate on these things.* Philippians 4.8

*Do nothing?*

As I write, a worker is in our basement, which we recently had finished to house my study and our bookstore. The work took several months to complete; and the finished product is lovely, eminently usable, and honoring to the Lord. It meets our needs both for now and the foreseeable future, as we consider other ways this room may be used in serving the Lord.

For now, the worker is busy tearing down sheetrock from the walls and ceiling, and preparing to rip up a portion of the floor.

A ruinous, corrupting, destructive power has found its way into our new basement. Rainwater. Sinful water, I’m sure. That beautiful design and finished work, that welcoming and productive space, that delightful décor are ruined, and are being torn down. Once the workers find how the water is coming in, and fix that leak inside and out, the work will begin to restore our basement to its original state of goodness, beauty, and comfort.

Of course, Susie I could just look at this mess and say, “Oh well, what do you expect in an imperfect world? Water happens. It’s going to take a lot of work and patience to restore this, and it will not be convenient to have to work around all that activity. Do we really need to worry about this? After all, we’re saved, our sins are forgiven, and we’re going to heaven to be with the Lord and leave this fallen, faulty world behind. Let’s not bother. After all, once this is fixed, there’ll just be something else, and we can’t spend all our time setting things right.”

But we have seen how lovely and good and praiseworthy that room was when our builders finished it. And we just can’t get that out of our mind. And this home has been entrusted to us, to care for it like Adam and Eve in the garden. So of course, we can’t just do nothing. We have to fix the problem and restore the study to its original condition, and bring back the warmth, beauty, and usefulness of this space.

So, we’ve set our minds to getting it right, and we’re trying to be patient as we keep focused on what we know will be the result of this restorative work. Some day.

*Sent like Jesus*

We have been sent to the world on a mission of reconciliation – just as Jesus was sent (Jn. 20.21; 2 Cor. 5.17-21). Wherever we are in the world, whatever aspects or niches or sectors of the world have been entrusted to us – all our relationships, roles, and responsibilities – have come under the corrupting influence of sin. Things in our world are not the way they’re supposed to be. They were that way when Jesus came, and He devoted all His time and strength to launch the great project of redemption, reconciliation, and restoration which has come down to us today, and will continue until Jesus returns to finish His work of making all things new.

So working to restore the reconciled world is not an option for those who claim to be followers of Jesus Christ. We have the mind of Christ. We understand that God's original plan for beauty, goodness, and truth has been compromised and largely set aside. We look to Jesus, setting our minds on Him, exalted in glory and splendor and majesty, and we take up our daily work of ministering the Word of reconciliation into every place where sin has leaked in to weaken, corrupt, and destroy.

Every day we are presented with opportunities to do the work of restoring the reconciled world. We can see areas of needed growth in our own souls, and things in our lives that can be improved and made more honoring to God. We need to think and plan ("consider", Heb. 10.24) various ways to encourage our believing friends to greater glory in whatever they do (1 Cor. 10.31). We must consider our homes, yards, workplaces, and all our material possessions, and ask the Lord to show us what excellence, goodness, beauty, loveliness, nobility, and glory will look like when these areas are being restored to God's goodness.

So let's get busy. Let us pray, "Lord, let Your work appear to Your servants. Establish the work of our hands. Teach us to number our days and make the best use of our time, so that you may be glorified in all that we do" (Ps. 90.12, 16, 17; Eph. 5.15-17).

Every day offers opportunities for restoring the reconciled world, by our words and deeds, following the Word of reconciliation entrusted to us.

*Getting the right mindset*

How can we make sure that our thinking and planning are aligned with our calling to restore the reconciled world? Let me suggest four import aspects of a restoration mindset.

*God's original plan.* First, exercise your mind to understand God's original plan for the world. Meditate and pray through Genesis 1 and 2. See the goodness of everything God made, the enormous potential for resources to be developed and put to good use, the suggestion of culture, community, collaboration, and the continuous presence of the Lord in all our endeavors. Let that vision outline and color your own vision for that part of the world to which God sends you each day.

*See Jesus.* Set your mind on Jesus, exalted in glory, reigning in radiant majesty and might, upholding the cosmos and everything in it by His Word of power, working by His Word and Spirit, in and through His Church, to make all things new. Set the Lord always before you in whatever you are doing (Ps. 16.8), so that all your time and efforts will go to His work of making all things new.

*Think with the mind of Christ.* A mind is a terrible thing to waste, especially the mind of Christ. We can always learn to think new thoughts, see our lives from the vantage point of being seated with Christ (Eph. 2.6), and allow His grace, mercy, and truth to be the guiding standards for all we do. Yes, we'll have to work at this, but we're not going to repair the damage sin has brought into this world without some inconvenience and effort, beginning with learning what it means to think like Jesus.

*Be shaped in prayer.* Susie and I have been praying about this basement since we first noticed the water coming in after a big storm, now some three months ago. We continue to pray about it, and praying keeps the vision of our beautiful study and bookstore alive, and keeps us calling and emailing and meeting with the people who can fix this, and looking forward to a restored basement, all the damage and corruption merely an unpleasant memory. Pray about your calling to restore the reconciled world. Nothing good or lasting happens apart from prayer; but *by* prayer and *in* prayer, we can do all that God calls us to in restoring the reconciled world.

*For reflection*

1. Why is the work of restoration an important part of our calling as followers of Jesus?

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2. Do you feel ready and equipped to take up this work each day? In what ways do you need to grow or improve?

3. How can you implement more consistently the four disciplines that lead to a restoration mindset?

*Next steps – Preparation: Today, give praise and thanks to God that He has entrusted you with this great work of restoring the reconciled world. Then begin putting in place the four disciplines that can give you a restoration mindset.*

## 7 A Long Haul, and Steady

*“Rain down, you heavens, from above,  
And let the skies pour down righteousness;  
Let the earth open, let them bring forth salvation,  
And let righteousness spring up together.  
I, the LORD, have created it.”* Isaiah 45.8

### *Restoring Israel*

Our text occurs in the middle of God’s promised restoration of Israel from Babylon. He says through the prophet that He will raise up His servant, Cyrus – not even born as of this time – to be the one who will free Israel from their captivity in Babylon and send them back to the land of promise (Is. 45.1-7). It didn’t matter that Cyrus wasn’t born yet. Or that he didn’t know the Lord. God, Who makes light and darkness, and brings peace and calamity to nations, will do His will with Cyrus, that His people might be restored to their homeland.

Along with Cyrus, God would raise up other leaders and prophets – Ezra and Nehemiah, as we have seen – to lead and direct the people in the work of rebuilding the temple and the wall of Jerusalem.

Our text occurs as a reminder of God’s overall plan for His land and, by implication and extension, His creation as a whole. His intention could not be more clear: His salvation and righteousness are to descend from heaven and fill the earth. God Himself will do it.

Let’s take a closer look.

### *Heaven to earth*

God’s intends that the earth should be as He originally intended, a garden of righteousness and salvation, expressing the goodness of Him Who is its creator.

To that end, the heavens will rain righteousness upon the earth, so that the goodness of God is everywhere present and fruitful (Ps. 33.5). But this goodness is only, as it were, in seed form, and requiring planting, cultivation, and nurturing. It must be acknowledged, attended to, developed, and declared before it can realize its full potential to glorify the Creator.

God’s righteousness “trickles” or “drips” on the earth; it does not pour down in torrents (רָעַף, *raaph*, trickle, drip). It comes gently, steadily, nearly imperceptibly, but truly and continuously, flowing like a mountain stream (יָזַל, *yizlu*, flow, trickle, drop, distil). It flows, as Jesus explained, in and through all those in whom the Holy Spirit has come to abide, bringing the gift of salvation and the power for making all things new (Jn. 7.37-39).

Earth receives the righteousness of heaven, as it comes in the form of the Lord’s salvation, even our Lord Jesus Christ and His Kingdom, coming on earth as in heaven. Those who open to Him and receive Him become the fertile ground in which salvation and righteousness rain down, take root, grow, and flourish, and from which they flow to water the whole earth.

God thus shows that Cyrus will fulfill a measure of His purpose in returning Israel to their land. But he and they are a type of God’s greater plan for the world, in the days when His righteousness and salvation are growing together in the earth – the days in which we live. We are not fulfilling our promise or purpose if we do not seek to bring the goodness of the Lord to light in all aspects of life, and to proclaim and bring His salvation to every creature.

We are called to the ministry of reconciliation, and the work of restoration that entails. This calling is for the long haul, and we are to make steady progress in it, receiving and increasing in, trickling and flowing the goodness of God back to His creation, wherever He sends us to serve.

*A warning, a call, and a promise*

This passage, in which God recalls His purpose for the earth, and explains His intention in returning His people to the land, is followed by a stern warning to any who fail to hear the Word of the Lord:

*“Woe to him who strives with his Maker!*

*Let the potsherd strive with the potsherds of the earth!*

*Shall the clay say to him who forms it, ‘What are you making?’” (Is. 45.9)*

It is not our calling to question the reasonableness, possibilities, likelihood, or convenience of what God has declared. Who are we to strive with Him Who is making all things new? Who are we to choose to receive His gift of salvation, but not His mandate to restore the reconciled world? God has promised to be present with us in the work of restoring His creation (Is. 45.11, 12). He will direct all our ways as we work to rebuild and restore the world according to His purpose and plan (v. 13). He will provide us with all the resources we need to restore the reconciled world (v. 14), and He will unfold the fullness of our everlasting salvation as we take up the work He has appointed to us (vv. 15, 16).

This passage ends with a sovereign call and promise which, while it applied directly to Israel in the days of their restoration from Babylon, still holds true for all who will hear it, embrace it, claim it, and give themselves to it today:

*“I am the LORD, and there is no other.  
I have not spoken in secret,  
In a dark place of the earth;  
I did not say to the seed of Jacob,  
‘Seek Me in vain’;  
I, the LORD, speak righteousness,  
I declare things that are right.  
Assemble yourselves and come;  
Draw near together,  
You who have escaped from the nations.  
They have no knowledge,  
Who carry the wood of their carved image,  
And pray to a god that cannot save.  
Tell and bring forth your case;  
Yes, let them take counsel together.  
Who has declared this from ancient time?  
Who has told it from that time?  
Have not I, the LORD?  
And there is no other God besides Me,  
A just God and a Savior;  
There is none besides Me.  
Look to Me, and be saved,  
All you ends of the earth!  
For I am God, and there is no other.  
I have sworn by Myself;  
The word has gone out of My mouth in righteousness,  
And shall not return,*

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*That to Me every knee shall bow,  
Every tongue shall take an oath.  
He shall say,  
'Surely in the LORD I have righteousness and strength.  
To Him men shall come,  
And all shall be ashamed  
Who are incensed against Him.  
In the LORD all the descendants of Israel  
Shall be justified, and shall glory.'*" (Is. 45:18-25)

May we be found among those who believe God's Word, receive His salvation and ministry of reconciliation, and work by His truth and grace to restore the reconciled world, for the praise of His glory and the benefit of all the earth.

*For reflection*

1. In what ways is the restoration of Israel to Jerusalem a type or symbol of our calling today?
2. What is God's purpose in appointing us to the ministry of reconciliation?
3. How can believers encourage one another in the work of restoring the reconciled world?

*Next steps – Preparation: Give praise and thanks to God for His salvation and His calling. What will you do today to further the work of restoring the reconciled world in your Personal Mission Field?*

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*For Reflection or Discussion*

1. What do we mean by a “mindset” for restoration?
2. How can we help our fellow believers increase in the glory of the Lord?
3. Which aspects of culture am I called to use for God’s glory? How can I improve in this?
4. What can we learn about the work of restoration by looking to the Old Testament?
5. What’s the most important lesson about perspectives on restoration you have learned from this study? How are you putting that lesson to work in your life?

*For prayer:*

## The Fellowship of Ailbe

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Thank you.