THE CONSEQUENCE OF CHOICE:
CULTURE AS PRECURSOR TO THE GOSPEL

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THE CONSEQUENCE OF CHOICE:
CULTURE AS PRECURSOR TO THE GOSPEL

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PREFACE

This thesis would not have been possible without the support of several significant people. I am deeply grateful to Dr. Bryan Baise and the staff of the Professional Doctoral Studies Program at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary for their assistance in completing this effort. I would also like to thank the faculty and students with whom I interacted during my studies, all of whom contributed in a meaningful way.

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Gary Wilkins

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The relationship between culture and the gospel is being felt with new urgency in the twenty-first century church in North America. The use of the term *culture* has grown exponentially in Evangelical communication. Most of this attention falls on contemporary, or popular culture. The mandate to engage "the culture" has shaped the methods of evangelism discipleship available in many churches, and the term culture is now used to gather up the many small things that reflect what it means to be the household of God. In the "infinite dialogue"[1] between the church and the world, the term culture now features prominently in the conversation.

This dependence on the term *culture* has come to the church from academia. Culture has evolved from an area of isolated study to become an essential concept in the effort to understand the world. It seems one cannot describe anything at any length without referring to *culture*.[2] Yet even those in academic circles are forced to admit the meaning of the term culture is unclear. *The Journal of Cultural Economy* was established in 2007 to explore the impact culture makes on the material economy. In an editorial published in January 2017, the editors reflected on the progression of this study of culture over those ten years.[3] They summarized, "Culture seemed to mean everything, and therefore nothing," prompting them to conclude, "It should be clear that culture is doing

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[1] H. Richard Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture*, rev. ed. (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1975), 39. Niebuhr says that "given these two complex realties—Christ and culture—an infinite dialogue must develop in the Christian conscience and the Christian community."

[2] A recent search on Amazon returned over 622,000 books with "culture" in their titles.

[3] Melinda Cooper and Liz McFall, "Ten Years after: It's the Economy and Culture, Stupid!" *Journal of Cultural Economy* 10, no. 1 (January 2, 2017): 2.

some work that quantitative analysis is not rendering visible."[4] In other words, even the academic experts who provided the concept of culture do not understand what they mean by it.

What does *culture* mean? More specifically, what do these various authors or speakers mean when they refer to culture? While most authors who focus on culture define it at some point, the term is rarely qualified in the broader conversation in which the idea of culture plays such an important role. Not surprisingly, *culture* is in the "Top 1% of lookups"[5] on Merriam-Webster.com, after being named "Word of the Year" in 2014 for being defined online more than any other word.[6] The meaning provided for culture through these online searches was "a kind of academic attention to systematic behavior that allows us to identify and isolate an idea, issue, or group."[7]

Culture seems to refer to complex patterns of human interaction which one does not understand, but nevertheless accept as true. People are comfortable with the term *culture* and are growing increasingly dependent on it. This dependence on culture was visible in an article describing the effect of many unconventional choices made by the 2017 World Series Champion Houston Astros. The story ended by quoting General Manager, Jeff Luhnow: "Culture is a hard thing to really quantify," Luhnow said. "But when you see it you know it's there."[8]

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[4] Cooper and McFall*, Ten Years After*, 4.

[5] "Definition of CULTURE," accessed October 31, 2017, https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/culture.

[6] "2014 Word of the Year: Culture," accessed October 31, 2017, https://www.merriam-webster.com/words-at-play/2014-word-of-the-year.

[7] Ibid.

[8] Jared Diamond, "The Chemistry Experiment behind the Astros Winning the World Series," *Wall Street Journal*, November 2, 2017, sec. Life, https://www.wsj.com/articles/how-the-astros-hit-on-a-winning-formula-1509648139.

Culture in the Church

Culture has become central to the language of the evangelical church. One prominent perspective argues that, after suffering the fallout of arguments inside the church over worship style and casual dress, churches now face a growing sense of disconnect from what was happening outside.[9] The logic is, that those churches which adapted and became more "culturally relevant" quickly grew, while churches that stayed the same have plateaued or drifted into non-existence. Internal culture is attributed with making the difference.[10] This interest in culture was commonly defined as "the shared beliefs and values that drive the behavior of a group of people."[11] This seems to fit within the "academic attention to systematic behavior" defined by Merriam Webster online, but with a shift in how culture works. Culture has gone from something one observes in a group to the thing that drives the behavior of that group.

Such an assertion opens the possibility that you can shape the culture and the behavior you desire will follow. This is what Evangelical authors Geiger and Peck assert when they say, "Leaders must own the culture of the ministry they are leading."[12] Something about this understanding of culture seemed to explain the role of the church in its mission to change how people think and live. One could quickly observe how any initiative within the church that claimed to "engage the culture" was considered worthwhile, and any concerns expressed about the wisdom of such a move could be countered by arguing it was culturally relevant.

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[9] Ed Stetzer, "Breaking Church-Growth Barriers: Build a Bigger Leadership Table," *The Exchange | A Blog by Ed Stetzer*, accessed September 5, 2017, http://www.christianitytoday.com/edstetzer/2017/august/breaking-church-growth-barriers-build-bigger-leadership-tab.html.

[10] Eric Geiger and Kevin Peck, *Designed to Lead: The Church and Leadership Development* (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2016), 59.

[11] Ibid., 15.

[12] Ibid., 17.

Challenging This Concept of Culture

   The pervasive references to culture raise the need for clarity in the very concept itself, both inside and outside the church. This has become more urgent as the concept of culture imported into the church has come from the academic experts in the social sciences. Much can be learned from such attention to systematic behavior, but uncritically accepting their explanation has potentially done the church a grave disservice. This creates a tension between those who view culture as something that humans can shape and control and those who view culture as something which points to what controls and shapes people.

   It seems some are enamored with the utility of the word because there is not an object or area of life to which, it seems, culture does not apply. But while one stares at the ever-expanding amount of cultural evidence, one must stop and consider some basic questions. Where does culture come from? Why is it important? What does it mean?

   If one discovers a beautiful flower in the woods, that is the glory of nature. But if one paints a picture of the flower, that is culture. And, if one takes a picture of that flower and posts it to social media, that too is a form of culture,. The flower becomes cultural when one ceases to observe it in its natural setting and place it in a human one. Thus, culture comes from people.

   But not everything that comes from humans is considered culture. People generate mountains of garbage every day which most would not consider culture, until, that is, someone uses that garbage to make art. Now one can assert that garbage is cultural. And, someone else may point to the mountains of garbage as evidence of the culture of consumerism. Again, garbage in that context is seen as cultural in a way that it is not when it was used for artistic expression. Thus, culture is important because it allows people to assign meaning to objects and activities.

   Is everything one says meaningful in a cultural way? People jot down notes on scraps of paper and dispose of them, adding to the mounds of garbage. And yet, some

scraps of paper become meaningful when in hindsight people realize they first captured an important idea. Or, many scraps together tell about some part of humanity and the way it interacts with the world. Scraps of paper can become meaningful in a cultural way because, looking back, one can see how they connect to each other and other things. Thus, culture gains meaning from discernable patterns that reveal how one thing connects to other things.

Culture as A Consequence of Choice

The consistent aspect of culture in answering all three of these questions is choice. When people choose to use anything to say something in a way that connects to other things, culture has been used. One has chosen those words, or that setting, or a specific context, or a combination of all three, because one understands the meaning one will give to what one is hoping to communicate. With a cultural framework one can, to some degree, evaluate the impact of various choices and choose the one that best fits one's goals.

In this sense, culture is a consequence of choice. When the General Manager of the 2017 World Series Champion Houston Astros, Jeff Luhnow, talks about the culture of his team, he is describing the sum total of the countless choices made by his coaches and players. Many of these choices were unorthodox by the standards of professional baseball, and the effect of those choices could not be easily seen until they were adopted by the team and expressed consistently over hundreds of games leading up to winning game seven of the 2017 World Series.

Culture is the word that best describes the cumulative impact of those connected choices. One can still observe the output of culture, such as the things that are made and results of human interaction, but while there is much to be gained from this academic attention, it will always be in hindsight. However, defining culture as a consequence of choice offers insights into the cause of the things one can observe. While

it may not be a crystal ball into the next fad or trend, it can make what does happen less perplexing. This also helps one manage the pace of cultural change. When the pace of output of cultural things increases, people have more evidence with which to evaluate and refine their understanding of the choices which caused that consequence.

Much of the recent conversation about culture is the result of the proliferation of choices faced in daily life. The advance of civilization, itself an expression of culture, has moved beyond the daily necessity of food and shelter and created leisure time and disposable income. Simply put, people living in the Western world today now face an ever-increasing number of choices of what to do and how to do it, a process which has only been sped up by technology. Not only is this population more interconnected, but the massive quantities of data those connected lives produce are being analyzed and shaped by algorithms that control how individuals interact with the digital world.[13] No longer is it necessary for human beings to make every choice that shapes culture. Data analytics can take a few choices and amplify them, preselecting options and narrowing the number of future choices.[14]

Culture's ability to narrow choices is not new, since in the past, inherited culture served that function. Where and to whom one was born defined where that person would live, what one would wear and how one would contribute to society. To reject the choices made for one often required rejecting the culture and context of one's birth entirely and to risk becoming an outcast. But a boy or girl born in the West since the beginning of the twenty first century will see choosing each of those things as an inherent right and believe the act of choosing forms their social identity. Yet, one depends on the culture to categorize the countless choices one must make. Humans need culture to make

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[13] Luke Dormehl, *The Formula: How Algorithms Solve All Our Problems ... and Create More* (New York: WH Allen, 2014). 2

[14] Ibid., 188.

sense of an overwhelmingly complex world.

While the choice-simplifying ability of culture has not changed, the general awareness of it has. Every company and organization always had a culture, but before the last couple of generations, where one worked and what one did was largely decided by a larger culture. Thus, a company culture had to reconcile itself to that larger culture and not to the individual worker. But now, with the shift to a knowledge economy and an employment market driven by choice, companies face the need to identify their culture. Defining this culture simplifies the choices of those working for them and explains the choices the company will make in finding those they wish to hire.

Churches also feel the need to understand culture. Until recently, how one worshiped was decided by the nation and family heritage into which one was born. Only in the last half century has the decision of where to attend church become a major preoccupation for Christians. Only in the face of this choice, created by a culture of mobility, did questions of how to structure communities of faith become relevant. As the number and range of choices in worship style, casual or formal dress, and all the other options multiplied, so did the pressure on those leading the church to identify its culture. Culture in the church narrows the choices one believes are important and explains how those choices have been made.

The Dynamic Nature of Culture

Culture is indispensable in this day and age because it frames up previous choices, and it simplifies the current choices one must now make. In this sense, culture is dynamic, because new choices must always be made, and those choices adjust the framework for receiving previous choices and making future ones. This dynamic nature of culture is uneven, because, by virtue of the leadership position of some, those individuals' choices have a greater effect than others. But it would be a mistake to believe one can shape and control culture completely by one's choices. Followers must choose

how to respond to the leader's decision, and the contributing factors and consequences of those choices are beyond what the leader's choice can control.

This dynamic nature of culture is well represented in academic literature,[15] including those who have sought to define a theology of culture.[16] If one accepts the academic definition, that "culture is the shared beliefs and values that drive the behavior of a group of people,"[17] then one can draw the logical conclusion that culture changes as values and beliefs change. But as this academic definition has been brought into the church, it appears that some authors have concluded they can reverse the order, making culture the driver of shared beliefs and values. This opens the door to assumptions about culture that are not supported by this definition.

This is not to suggest that the church must be bound to academia, but if Christian authors will use the academic definition of culture, they must use it consistently in order to draw upon the academic authority they imply in using the term culture. The idea of culture received from academia is largely passive and observed, but the idea of culture represented in some Christian books is active and controllable.

Culture and the Christian Mission

Culture as a consequence of choice has profound implications for the mission of sharing the gospel. Understanding the culture in which one shares the gospel impacts how one present its claims and how one interprets the response, or choice made, by those who will believe. The significance given to the choice to obey Christ cannot be isolated from the culture in which it is heard, nor can the experience of choosing to believe be separated from the culture in which that choice is made.

[15] Stella Ting-Toomey, *Communicating across Cultures* (New York: The Guilford Press, 1999), 9.

[16] T. J. Gorringe, *Furthering Humanity: A Theology of Culture by T.J. Gorringe* (Burlington, VT: Routledge, 2004). 4.

[17] Geiger and Peck, *Designed to Lead*, 15.

Culture as a consequence of choice is integral to the Christian mission to "go and make disciples of all nations" (Matt 26:19). To obey that command is a choice, and "teaching them to obey" (Matt 26:20) requires changing the understanding of choosing for those who will be discipled. One's culture shapes the context for the choice to follow Christ, and how one understands that choice. Culture also shapes how one can teach others to obey everything Jesus commanded us. Thus, the command to go and make disciples is nothing short of a call to make new, gospel-shaped cultures.

This relationship can be traced throughout church history. The nature of belief and the form it took in the Christian community must be understood in the context of the implications of the choice to obey Christ in that culture. If that choice was to obey the emperor or die, the decision to obey and follow Christ required forming a culture against that prevailing culture. When the prevailing culture changed to support the choice of obeying Christ, that decision looked very different. Even though the doctrinal essence of that choice remained the same, how that choice was made necessarily changed. Thus, the culture created by the mission of the church was shaped by the culture in which the church carried out that mission.

This raises some important questions. Is it biblical to understand culture as a consequence of choice? Can evidence for it be found in Scripture, and does a record exist of interacting with that biblical evidence in the Christian literature on culture? If found, does that evidence point to the experience of culture one can observe now, and does it equip the church to move forward in the fulfillment of the Great Commission with new energy and effect? Answering these questions is the purpose of this thesis.

Thesis Statement

This thesis presents a biblical definition of culture as a consequence of choice, providing a framework to harmonize the existing conversations about culture and offering a perspective on God's purpose for culture as a precursor to the gospel.

A Biblical Framework for this Thesis

For culture as a consequence of choice to be integral to God's redemptive purpose, it must be anchored in the nature of mankind before the fall. Scripture reveals, in God's decision to create man (Gen 1:26-31) and his interactions with man and woman in the garden (Gen 2:4-25), a progression of empowering choice in those he has created in his image. The essential difference between man and the rest of creation is his ability to create culture through the choices he is required to make.

The significance of culture as a consequence of choice becomes clear in Adam and Eve's decision to disobey God's command, thus bringing sin into the world (Gen 3:1-7). Since Genesis 1-2 establishes culture as a consequence of choice, the consequences of mankind's choice to disobey have profound cultural implications. No longer is choice purely an act that expresses mankind's purpose as those made in the image of the creator. Now choice has become an act of rebellion, defying the authority of the one who gave mankind the ability to choose. The culture created by those choices is permanently marked by the shame that results from the sinfulness of those choices.

But God chooses to act, establishing a culture of redemption that addresses the culture of sin and shame (Gen 3:8-13). God pronounces the consequences of the decision to disobey (Gen 3:14-19) and then acts in a redemptive way towards his creation (Gen 3:20-24). This establishes a pattern of mankind's attempts at culture failing to cover their shame and God's offer of the gospel within that cultural context succeeding where one has failed. This pattern of the failed consequences of sin radiate outward until the culture they create is dispersed "over the face of all the earth" (Gen 11:9).[18] But then God acts again, choosing Abram to be the father of a great nation, so that through him, "all the families of the earth may be blessed" (Gen 12:3). Abram, in choosing to obey, forsakes his historical culture to be part of this new, redemptive culture. Now culture as a

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[18] Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotations are from the English Standard Version.

consequence of choice shows a clear distinction between defying God and honoring his purpose of redemption.

These patterns continue in the New Testament in how the church is commanded to respond to one another. Colossians 3 shows how, as those made alive in Christ, believers are able to choose between life and death and the culture that results from those choices. Here the idea that culture is the consequence of choice breathes new life into one's view of the Christian mission. As the direction of the flow of culture is observed, one may be struck by the similarities one sees to the culture of the Roman world which surrounded the New Testament church.

Biblical Implications of the Thesis

Our age of technologically accelerated choice calls into question what it means to be human.[19] If culture is a consequence of choice and people is shaped by their culture, does that prove an individual is simply a product of his or her environment? For many, the answer is yes, but for others, that option is gnawingly empty. For them, an essential truth is missing from such an explanation. That truth is that their very existence is because of the choice of a divine creator, who in giving them the ability to choose, knew they would disobey. Yet he had already chosen those who would believe in him and sent his Son, who chose to die, that in him, they may choose new life. Culture is a consequence of choice, but so too is salvation.

Culture as a consequence of choice is a precursor to the gospel, which is the beautiful, dynamic, mysterious work of God for the salvation of those he chose to create. Answering his call to go and make disciples means choosing to accept the choices he has made in how he created us, how he allowed mankind's fall into sin and how he has provided a way of salvation. That story is not only told through culture, it depends upon

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[19] Dormehl, *The Formula*. 239

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one's ability to choose and the significance attached to those choices. The consequences of choices are constantly reinforced by the culture in which those choices exist. Thus, culture as a consequence of choice is a precursor to the gospel.

Survey of Current Literature

The consequences of one's choice to obey or disobey God's commands carry through to the very end of Scripture, showing clearly that individuals do choose, and experience consequences for those choices. One aspect of this thesis will examine biblically how those experiences form together into something identified as culture and how believers, as those who desire to obey God, apply the biblical insights gained.

Inherent in the discussion of culture is the temptation to believe it is a problem unique to this time.[20] The questions about culture are often raised by what is new, and living in the industrial age of pop culture, one must force oneself to look away from this immediate horizon and take a longer view. Thankfully there are many who have wrestled with the question in their own time and have provided much useful material to help construct an organizing framework.

That said, the perspective on culture this thesis will discuss is unique to this time. The cultures shaped by the gospel are shaped by the cultures in which believers carry out that mission. But those cultures are also shaped by the cultural influence of gospel. Indeed, that is a stated objective of the Christian mission to make disciples. This thesis is written to cast biblical light on a particular view of culture while the window which provides that view remains open, beginning with the ideas which have contributed to the current perspective.

The Historical Perspective of Culture

H. Richard Niebuhr published *Christ and Culture* in 1956, opening with this

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[20] D. A. Carson, *Christ and Culture Revisited*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), 7.

line: "A many-sided debate about the relations of Christianity and civilization is being carried on in our time."[21] Thus, when Niebuhr says that "given these two complex realties—Christ and culture—an infinite dialogue must develop in the Christian conscience and the Christian community,"[22] the reader is being invited to join a conversation already underway. Niebuhr, and the books he has inspired, provides an entry point for this dialogue, because his organizing framework has guided much of the conversation to now, and he looks for his larger perspective in church history.

The essential framework for much of Niebuhr's argument is tracking the movement of the church between Christ and the world, discussing the five categories of interaction between Christ and culture. While his approach is theological, he uses Scripture sparingly, choosing only to include Paul and John as examples of two of the five categories of engagement between Christ and culture.

Niebuhr limits his observations to the interaction between Christ and the New Testament church and thus does not consider the origins of culture in the creation account. From his point of view, the church is the established institution and his objective is to relate culture to it. Despite this limited perspective, he still arrives at choice as an essential aspect to culture. As he works out the broader implications of the historical dialogue between Christ and culture as he has presented it, he concludes that what is most important in the Christian's interaction with culture is the "critical present decision of loyalty and disloyalty to Christ."[23] Thus Niebuhr underscores the importance of culture as a consequence of choice.

Many responses to Niebuhr's framework have been offered, the most noteworthy of which is *Christ and Culture Revisited*, by D. A. Carson. Carson takes

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[21] Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture*, 1.

[22] Ibid., 39.

[23] Ibid., 248.

exception to Niebuhr's attempt to separate the church from culture stating that "all exemplifications of faith, Christian and otherwise, are necessarily expressed within forms that are cultural."[24] Instead of Niebuhr's categories of interaction between Christ and culture, Carson examines the cultural responses to the "huge cultural forces" of secularism, democracy, freedom and power.[25] He comments on how the democratic freedom to choose reveals the division between cultural consequences, stating, "The democratic tradition in the West . . . encourages freedom toward doing your own thing, hedonism, self-centeredness, and consumerism. By contrast, the Bible encourages freedom . . . toward living our lives as those who bear God's image and who have been transformed by his grace."[26]

Carson's thoroughly biblical approach acknowledges the redemptive story line, with its origins in creation and the fall.[27] He concludes by arguing against Niebuhr's "mutually exclusive stances" of Christ against culture and Christ transforming culture, giving support instead that "the rich complexity of biblical norms, worked out in the Bible's story line, tells us that these two often operate simultaneously."[28] His argument unfolds as he traces the cultural consequences of choice, calling his readers finally to "trust and obey and leave the results to God."[29] Thus, Carson identifies choice as an inherent aspect of culture with a perspective that begins in creation.

Culture as Worldview

Francis Schaeffer's approach to apologetics came from within history and

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[24] Carson, *Christ and Culture Revisited*, 24.

[25] Ibid., 115.

[26] Ibid., 138.

[27] Ibid., 47.

[28] Ibid., 227.

[29] Ibid.

philosophy and gave him keen insight into the progression of Western civilization toward secularism. Schaeffer's remarkable knowledge of literature and art is the basis for his book *How Shall We Then Live*, in which he demonstrates the destructive effect of removing Christian values from a society founded on them. Schaeffer, perhaps better than anyone, has perfected the apologetics of high culture, accurately predicting the loss of true creativity in the arts as the West has abandoned a worldview based on seeing humanity as the creation of a wise and loving creator.

Through his L'Abri community, Schaeffer significantly influenced many who would become prominent voices for the return of Christian values into the institutions of American society. One such voice is Charles Colson, who in 1999 wrote *How Now Shall We Then Live* to revisit Schaeffer's primary themes and update them for the end of the twentieth century. Colson's co-author, Nancy Pearcey, studied at L'Abri and served for seven years as the Francis A. Schaeffer Scholar at the World Journalism Institute.

In her 2005 book *Total Truth: Liberating Christianity from Its Cultural Captivity,* Pearcey looks to creation for the foundation of humanity's creativity and purpose as those created in the image of God, stating, "Each of us has a role to play in cultivating the creation and working out God's norms for a just and humane society." [30] While establishing a broad base for Christian engagement, Pearcey follows Schaeffer by focusing on the philosophical separation of values and truth that has taken place in academia and tracing its progression into many areas of life. She asserts, "If we aspire to engage the battle where it is really being fought, we must find ways to overcome the dichotomy between sacred and secular, public and private, fact and value—demonstrating to the world that a Christian worldview alone offers a whole and integral truth."[31]

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[30] Nancy R. Pearcey and Phillip E. Johnson, *Total Truth: Liberating Christianity from Its Cultural Captivity*, paperback ed. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2004), 50.

[31] Ibid.

Culture and Christian Living

As already noted, Eric Geiger and Kevin Peck adhere to an academically influenced definition of culture in *Designed to Lead: The Church and Leadership Development*. They state that "for leaders to be developed consistently and intentionally, churches must possess conviction, culture, and constructs." [32] Culture is the essential link between beliefs and programs, and as such they assert that "beliefs about truth, time and space, and the nature of humans all greatly impact the cultures leaders cultivate." [33] The importance of creation is mentioned and the role of choice is implied, but the assumption is that culture is something humanity can manage to its own ends.

A more thoughtful book on the current experience with culture is *A Practical Guide to Culture: Helping the Next Generation Navigate Today's World,* by John Stonestreet and Brett Kunkle. Written to help parents deal with the onslaught of entertainment media, Stonestreet and Kunkle give a brief, but well-rounded description of culture, including the role of choice, or freedom in forming it. They state, "Culture refers not to what humans do by instinct or nature (like circulating blood, eating food, having sex, or sleeping) but to what they do freely."[34] They observe that "culture is dynamic. It changes according to human innovations, inventions, fashions, and ideas."[35]

Stonestreet and Kunkle point towards culture as a consequence of choice, stating that "ideas and their consequences become embedded in a culture, reinforced by the stuff we use (artifacts) and our institutions."[36] And they assert that "if the Scriptures tell the true Story of the world, then our current cultural moment is part of its story

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[32] Geiger and Peck, *Designed to Lead*, 14.

[33] Ibid., 104.

[34] John Stonestreet and Brett Kunkle, *A Practical Guide to Culture: Helping the Next Generation Navigate Today's World* (Colorado Springs: David C. Cook, 2017), 32.

[35] Ibid., 33.

[36] Ibid., 38.

line."[37] This brief, but clearly written book accomplishes much in moving its readers beyond the static, academic attention view of culture. And Stonestreet and Kunkle's effort to anchor culture in the redemptive narrative of Scripture is refreshing and helpful.

A Theology of Culture

Stonestreet and Kunkle draw their definition of culture from Andy Crouch in *Culture Making: Recovering Our Creative Calling.* While Crouch anchors his discussion in the real, material world, defining culture as "what human beings make of the world,"[38] his definition does not prevent him from pressing beyond tangible goods into the realm of meaning. "Culture is not just what human beings make of the world; it is not just the way human beings make sense of the world; it is in fact part of the world that every new human being has to make something of."[39] This perspective moves to the origin of culture in the opening chapters of Genesis, where Crouch observes, "God was the first gardener, the first culture maker."[40]

This culture-making ability is expressed in those he created in his image and is essential to humanity's purpose, since "God's first and best gift to humanity is culture, the realm in which human beings themselves will be the cultivators and creators."[41] Crouch then presses his definition through the narrative of the fall, noting that Adam and Eve "sewed fig leaves together . . . the creation of that basic cultural good called clothing.… This is how deeply culture is embedded in the human character: it is the first response to sin, the first place where the inward alienation from God finds its outward

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[37] Stonestreet and Kunkle, *A Practical Guide to Culture*, 50.

[38] Andy Crouch, *Culture Making: Recovering Our Creative Calling*, (Grand Rapids: IVP Books, 2013). 23, Kindle.

[39] Ibid., 25.

[40] Ibid., 108.

[41] Ibid., 110.

expression."[42] This tension between culture as a consequence of sin and as a means of grace is fleshed out through the remainder of the book. As Crouch summarizes, "Culture is God's original plan for humanity—and it is God's original gift to humanity, both duty and grace."[43]

Such thoughtful reexamining of culture gives new hope to the current conversation. But it also raises questions about a fuller treatment of this idea of culture throughout all of Scripture. Answering those questions is the objective of *Created and Creating, A Biblical Theology of Culture*, by William Edgar, whose objective is to show that "the Bible teaches that cultural engagement before the living God is, along with worship, the fundamental calling for the human race.… My hope is in the end to reshape cultural criticism itself along biblical lines and to encourage the reader to engage in cultural work in a judicious manner."[44]

Edgar thoroughly builds his case, giving careful attention to how Christ and the biblical authors interact with humanity's place in the fallen world. He asserts, "If we understand the sum total of human life as it can be redeemed and as it can then carry the mission of God into the world, then it is most appropriate to deem such activity cultural."[45] He locates the source of culture as the "cultural mandate" (Gen 1:26), stating, "Genesis underscores the human calling to develop and extend God's purposes in the world."[46] While the experience of fulfilling this calling is not within Edgar's scope, the theological framework for furthering that discussion is solidly in place.

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[42] Crouch, *Culture Making,* 114.

[43] Ibid., 175.

[44] William Edgar, *Created and Creating: A Biblical Theology of Culture* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2017), 87.

[45] Ibid., 123.

[46] Ibid., 174.

Void in the Literature

With such a wealth of thorough, well-reasoned material, a gap becomes more apparent. The three lines of thought all seem to trend to a common destination, yet don't arrive at any shared understanding. The historical approach of Niebuhr and Carson, cultural critiques from Pearcey and Crouch and application of an academic definition each contribute invaluable aspects to the conversation, yet they fail to meet each other and thus identify a functional, biblically framed definition. Most of these authors offer some kind of a biblical framework for culture, and Crouch and Edgar anchor that framework in creation. But as each applies that framework from within one of the three perspectives on culture, each leaves unchallenged the inherent limitations of that perspective, and untested the framework of the others.

The Current Perspective on Culture

As culture evolves, so must the aspects of culture to be considered. What seemed to explain culture even 10 years ago can seem incomplete now. Just as Niebuhr, writing in the aftermath of World War II did not address globalism, Carson, writing before 2007, did not see the need to address the impact of the modern "smart phones" about to come on the market. Even as one cannot imagine what will define the world 10 or 50 years from now, one can affirm the effort to press more deeply into Scripture and strengthen that biblical framework to prepare for whatever it may be.

At some level, Carson's encouragement to "trust and obey and leave the results to God"[47] will always be right. Yet as technology makes more and more decisions, the very nature of trust and obey will change. How, for an example, should a Christian view riding in a driverless car? Is society equipped to know the moral framework underlying the code that determines who the car will protect and who it will sacrifice in the event of

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[47] Carson, *Christ and Culture Revisited*, 227.

a fatal crash?[48] While decisions like this will garner public scrutiny, one is generally unaware of the countless ways technology is making smaller decisions on a daily basis. Any understanding of culture that does not clearly explain the importance of choice is at a severe disadvantage.

Perhaps the longest historical study of culture exists within the philosophical framework of art. And while there is much that can be said about the loss of cultured creativity, doing so does not help one understand the mass and popular forms of expression that have taken its place. This disadvantage is felt by those who revert to culture as material goods, or "high" culture in their basic framework, even though there is much to learn from the process of choice demonstrated in the arts and artistic creativity. But technology is progressively overriding one's sense of choice in shaping the culture one experiences, as computers, smart phones and digital signs mediate an increasing amount of one's interactions with others. Even the online sites most people visit look different to each, as a browsing history is used to control the search options shown one in the future, and any purchase one makes on Amazon influences which products will be suggested the next time one logs on.

While the lessons of history and the insights of analysis still have a place, one simply lack the time to evaluate and respond to the rising tide of cultural expression and all the worldviews it contains. To better educate Christian youth in "all the 'isms'"[49] as Pearcey suggests is not without value. Nor is the move to making things together, as Crouch and his wife suggest in their recent book, *The Tech-Wise Family*.[50] Yet as education moves online with tools such as Canvas and Google Classroom, is one

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[48] Larry Greenemeier, "Driverless Cars Will Face Moral Dilemmas," *Scientific American*, accessed December 9, 2017, https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/driverless-cars-will-face-moral-dilemmas/.

[49] Pearcey and Johnson, *Total Truth*. 126.

[50] Andy Crouch and Amy Crouch, *The Tech-Wise Family: Everyday Steps for Putting Technology in Its Proper Place* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2017).

equipped to understand what choices have already been made and what options one will never see? Culture as a consequence of choice provides a new vantage point from which to gain a glimpse of much of life that has already receded into the background.

The increased attention given to culture provides more material to consider, yet it proves problematic to assume a credible academic definition of culture is consistent with a biblical framework. While it is helpful and even necessary to start with the academic view of culture as shared values and beliefs, it is particularly concerning when Christian authors have no recourse but to revert to secular scholars to give support to their theological arguments.

Geiger and Peck assert, "Building on the expert work of Edgar Schein, church culture can be seen in three layers, each layer building and depending on the layer below it," concluding "all three layers make up the culture in a church."[51] Later, they state, "Culture, in John Kotter's model, is not changed until the end of the change process.… As difficult as changing behavior is, changing church culture is even more difficult."[52] While these are valuable observations that deserve careful consideration, they are not qualified by biblical interpretation and instead are offered as evidence for the model and method to "manage and shape the culture"[53] that the authors recommend.

Stonestreet and Kunkle do much to develop the academic observation of culture into a biblical framework, but at the end of their book, they look to another source of authority. Referencing behavioral psychologist James Marcia and his "extensive research on adolescent identity formation" they conclude, "His insights, we believe, are critical."[54] Critical they may be, yet perhaps more critical is the ability to apply a biblical

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[51] Geiger and Peck, *Designed to Lead*, 126.

[52] Ibid., 139.

[53] Ibid., 208.

[54] Stonestreet and Kunkle, *A Practical Guide to Culture*, 109.

model of culture to these important questions, rather than look for support for a biblical model from extensive secular research.

Conclusion

Carson and Edgar have done much to develop a biblical framework, but they do not bring it into the realm of practical application. Pearcey, Stonestreet and Kunkel, and Geiger and Peck offer practical help to those trying to understand culture, yet they lack a theological framework that lends biblical authority. Crouch has worked further into this conversation than anyone else, but his definition of culture seems under equipped to address the explosion of technical forces now acting on individual lives every day. An opportunity lies in integrating these definitions, thereby bringing together the detached parts of the conversation. These authors make helpful biblical contributions, but those contributions must be fitted together into a cohesive, scriptural framework.

Thus, in the following chapters, culture as a consequence of choice will be shown first in creation before the fall, then in creation and mankind's efforts to cover the shame of their sin, and finally in the hope of the gospel and its fulfillment in the church. This will demonstrate its place as part of God's design and integral to accomplishing his redemptive purpose in the world.

CHAPTER 2

A BIBLICAL DEFINITION OF CULTURE

Introduction

The essential question to answer in developing a biblical definition of culture is this: Does culture originate with God or man? In an ontological sense, all things originate with God, yet there are things which originate with man in the sense man takes the elements of physical creation and while working within its unchanging laws, develops new products. And while all the components of such a process—the raw material, ingenuity and the constant state of the universe—all originate with God, one does not attribute the product, such as a smart phone, to God.

The primary reason for this distinction is that if something originated with God, one must trace its origins, in one sense or another, to God's eternal nature. The created universe has not existed for all eternity, but the eternal nature of the Triune God has. This eternal nature includes a plan or purpose that includes creation and in particular, mankind created in his image. Indeed, the account of creation is replete with connections between God's nature and the world that he created and multiple places throughout the Bible repeat this theme (i.e., Ps 19, John 1:1-2, Col 1:15-17). Thus, one can argue biblically that the created world, before the fall, is a representation of the eternal, unchanging nature of God

Seeking the Origins of Culture

The same approach can be applied to the study of culture. If culture is to be defined biblically, then one must find its origins either in mankind's fall into sin, in mankind's prelapsarian, sinless state, or in the nature of God before the creation of man.

Clearly, what one chooses to view as culture will predispose which of these categories it can fit into. If culture is only observed as the expression of what is unbiblical in the arts, society or the media, then culture can only exist after the fall, as those unbiblical actions trace their origins to a postlapsarian world. But if culture is observed, not simply as what people express now, but the way that expression comes about, then a prelapsarian origin may be possible. If culture is prelapsarian, then can some form of its origin be traced to before creation? This third position, identified as the Pre-Creation view of culture, will be argued for in this chapter.

The thesis for this chapter is that defining culture as a consequence of choice identifies the biblical origin of culture in God before the creation of man.

Critique of Definitions of Culture

D.A Carson observed in 2012 that "'culture' has become a fairly plastic concept that means something like 'the set of values broadly shared by some subset of the human population.'"[1] While one quickly encounters the limitations of this particular definition, it seems generally representative of what a sampling of authors mean by culture. Some, such as Eric Geiger and Kevin Peck, simply state that "culture is the shared beliefs and values that drive the behavior of a group of people," and offer no attribution for that definition.[2] This definition is now broadly accepted to the degree that it seems to have become the common understanding of culture.

While this definition serves as a starting point, it creates a challenge by not including any point of reference outside the group which it identifies. The shared set of values that define such a group are not specified, and neither is the nature of the connections to those values which holds that group together. This definition also creates a

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[1] D. A. Carson, *Christ and Culture Revisited*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), 1.

[2] Eric Geiger and Kevin Peck, *Designed to Lead: The Church and Leadership Development* (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2016), 15.

problem in that any individuals who assemble around one set of values bring other values, some of which will not be shared by all in the group. In addition, beliefs and values change, and the way the values and beliefs of some influence the values and beliefs of others is an important consideration in a definition of culture.

Despite the initial clarity this definition of culture may provide, as one encounters the increasing numbers of cultures in the globalist age, the picture it paints quickly becomes unmanageably complex. The result is a maze of overlapping cultures, each with various, sometimes undisclosed values and beliefs. As a result, the public conversation around culture can become so abstract as to appear nonsensical. Although one might wish to talk about it in an authoritative way, culture can and will mean something different to every individual.

The Postlapsarian View of Culture

The predominant view of culture which has arguably sparked the most conversation in the church is associated with what is portrayed through the "popular" visual mediums of TV, movies and magazines.[3] The view of American culture as moving away from its biblical foundations and toward the influence of sin is frequently addressed by those who decry the immorality of the entertainment media. This view was given a dramatic frame by Charles Colson, who drew parallels between the destruction of Rome by the Barbarians and a "crisis in the character of our culture."[4] Colson was a leading voice in defining "the culture war . . . as a cosmic struggle between worldviews."[5]

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[3] R. Albert Mohler, Jr., *We Cannot Be Silent: Speaking Truth to a Culture Redefining Sex, Marriage, and the Very Meaning of Right and Wrong* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2015), 61–62.

[4] Charles Colson and Ellen Santilli Vaughn, *Against the Night: Living in the New Dark Ages* (Ann Arbor, MI: Vine Books, 1989), 11.

[5] Charles W. Colson and Nancy Pearcey, *How Now Shall We Live?* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 1999), 17.

The Battle Against "The Culture"

This frequent reference to "The Culture," as the source of these unbiblical values came to represent what was portrayed on pages and screens, carried on the airwaves and eventually espoused in many of the primary institutions in society.[6] Yet "The Culture" was also used to describe the products that carried these unbiblical values, such as the music, movies and TV shows carried through the popular mediums. Because of the sinful behaviors these cultural products portrayed, one is told that "the culture . . . undermines and replaces the biblical worldview,"[7] and one should respond to those in "the media . . . as with all other hostile groups."[8] As a result, many in the church in America became aware of culture through hearing that culture is the reason American beliefs and values are moving from a biblical view of morality to an unbiblical one.

Some of those who have sought to move the conversation about culture away from this war on "The Culture" have been frustrated by how deeply rooted this notion has become. In a recent article, Crouch pointed out the unproductive effect of referring to culture as a broadly definable thing. What others refer to as "The Culture," he describes as a "national ethos," which "is constantly being contested, challenged, and reimagined by different groups."[9] He argues that "rather than engaging in largely imaginary relationships with the world system," the better response is to realize "we are called to real people in a real place."[10] In the face of this cultural complexity, Crouch is directing his readers back to the importance of the immediate context.

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[6] Colson and Vaughn, *Against the Night*, 23.

[7] N. Allan Moseley, *Thinking Against the Grain: Developing a Biblical Worldview in a Culture of Myths* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 2003), 39.

[8] D. A. Carson, John D. Woodbridge, and Carl F. H. Henry, eds., *God and Culture: Essays in Honor of Carl F.H. Henry* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Pub Co, 1993), 274.

[9] Andy Crouch, "Stop Engaging 'The Culture,' Because It Doesn't Exist," *ChristianityToday.Com*, 1, accessed September 5, 2017, http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2016/julaug/theculture-doesnt-exist.html.

[10] Ibid., 2.

While Crouch argues against the existence of "one monolithic 'culture,'"[11] he seeks to make his readers aware of how broad and persuasive that concept of culture is. He argues that the act of being involved with "to real people in a real place" actually counteracts the pull of "The Culture." He writes, "The more fully human we become, entwined in relationships of empowering mutual dependence—the less bound and tempted we will be by 'the culture.' And the less bound we are by 'the culture,' the more we are able to actually influence culture around us."[12] Crouch's argument is that "The Culture" is, in fact, a cultural creation itself. Thus, the way to fight the culture is to be culturally active and create alternatives to it.

The Limitations of a Postlapsarian View

This challenge reveals a weakness in the postlapsarian view of culture. To some, the evidence that every human being is affected by sin means no cultural product will be good, and no motivation to create cultural products will be completely without the influence of sin. By the same measure, the very ability to create is an expression of the character of God. This means that any creation, regardless how vile and immoral, will to some degree reflect the nature of the Creator. Thus, the battle over culture moved from between right and wrong to a matter of degree and the argument that nearly any cultural product could be used to honor, or dishonor God.

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A Prelapsarian View of Culture
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The narrowness of the postlapsarian view exposes the need for a deeper understanding of culture, prompting a renewed effort to find a biblical explanation for its origin. This discussion has centered on the tension between culture as defined by what it produces (a product) and how it produces it (a process).

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[11] Crouch, *Stop Engaging 'The Culture',* 1.

[12] Ibid., 2.

Culture as Abstraction and Derivation

This tension between concept and product, or idea and concrete expression, is present in the reoccurring theme of culture as abstraction or derivation, addressed by Kenneth Myers and Marvin Olasky in 1989. In order to distinguish between categories of culture, they first look for "transcendent norms for assessing culture,"[13] and offering an explanation of how culture, as they see it, comes about.

Myers and Olasky state that culture is an abstraction, meaning culture cannot be effectively observed in detail, but rather must be viewed from a distance, allowing its various irregularities to blend together.[15] In other words, culture is something that exists above the details of culture that one observes, and it is up to the observer to envision what that might be. Another view of culture has been expressed by Ted Turnau, who wrote in 2012 that culture is derivative.[16] This means the tangible things one can observe are cultural products but are not the culture itself. Rather, "Culture just is this imaging of God's creativity through our human creativity."[17] In Turnau's view, culture comes out of the things one makes and one discovers culture as one actualizes it.

It is important to remember that these authors begin with popular culture and are drawing conclusions from that to culture in general. Some of the difference of these two perspectives on culture may be explained by what had transpired over the 25 years between when the two books were published in the number of sources for what they describe as popular culture. Myers and Olasky could, in 1989, refer to the "study of popular culture"[18] while assuming that popular was readily identifiable. Turnau, in 2012,

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[13] Ken Myers and Marvin Olasky, *All God's Children and Blue Suede Shoes: Christians and Popular Culture*, new ed. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 29.

[15] Myers and Olasky, *All God's Children and Blue Suede Shoes*, 30.

[16] Ted Turnau, *Popologetics: Popular Culture in Christian Perspective* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2012), 57.

[17] Ibid.

[18] Myers and Olasky, *All God's Children and Blue Suede Shoes*, 26.

defines popular culture as "the type of culture received, rather than the individual work itself, which may not be well known."[19] Popular, to Turnau, is no longer something that everybody knows, but rather what is "widely received in our everyday world."[20] Thus, in 2012, "popular" refers to the mechanism by which a product is received, regardless of how obscure that particular product may be.

Turnau's view of culture as derivation better fits the experience of the seeming unlimited, widely received sources of culture today. Yet there is still something compelling about the perspective of culture as an abstraction given by Myers and Olasky. The familiar definition, that culture is the collective beliefs and values of a particular group of people, is this type of abstraction. The generalized norms of beliefs, values, and people make this definition broad and flexible, as the items that make up each of these categories between different cultures can be diametrically opposed, or irregular. One can press on these differences to identify subcultures while also stepping back to draw some generalized conclusions.

To talk about culture in any generalized sense means allowing the irregularities of any particular cultural product to be absorbed into the abstract transcendent norms that Meyers and Olasky define. When one examines culture in detail, one must group individual, irregular products into these themes, understanding them to be derived from the broader, cultural abstractions. Thus, culture as an abstraction and culture as derivation, are interdependent.

The Prelapsarian Origin of Culture

Identifying culture as either abstraction or derivation becomes relevant to identifying the origin of culture before the fall. If culture is an abstraction, then it can be

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[19] Turnau, *Popologetics*, 6.

[20] Ibid.

argued that the abstraction originates in the world before sin. In that sense, culture is inherently good. Anything that is bad about culture can be explained by the effect of sin on the products of that culture and not on the culture itself. This is the argument Myers and Olasky make as they seek to demonstrate that the products of popular culture are derivative of the broader themes of human existence. They describe the function of culture broadly as "the human effort to give structure to life."[21] Thus, culture as abstraction is consistent with the prelapsarian view of culture's origin.

Yet the view that culture is derivative can make a similar argument. If culture is a derivation, then it inherently receives its nature from what it is derived. Turnau writes, "If culture is primarily a reshaping of the good things that God has created and given to us, then nothing in culture is to be rejected out of hand."[22] Since good and bad culture cannot be distinguished from the ultimate source in God's good creation, then the process, means or motivation for culture must be what makes culture good or bad.

Since one cannot isolate either abstraction or derivation as the definition for culture, one must consider what happens between the two. Perhaps culture is better defined as the dynamic movement between abstraction and derivation, as what holds the concept and product together and compels one to move from idea to concrete expression and then back to the idea.

If culture is not either an abstraction or a derivation, but is actually the dynamic movement between the two, that may offer an explanation for the unsatisfying attempts to define culture thus far. This dynamic nature of culture is, perhaps, the explanation for the plastic concept of culture that Carson refers to, implying that it melds itself to one's wishes and needs. If one wishes to talk about culture as an abstraction, culture can be that. If one needs to discuss a derived product, culture can fit that as well.

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[21] Myers and Olasky, *All God's Children and Blue Suede Shoes*, 30.

[22] Turnau, *Popologetics*, 45.

Thus, since neither culture as abstraction nor culture as derivative is a definitive definition of culture, and as both describe aspects of culture, the two are inextricably linked.

The Impulse to Create

Since culture cannot be categorized as either an abstraction or a derivation, then the focus shifts from what culture is to what culture does. Here one must consider a third component of the tension between culture as abstraction and culture as derivation: the impulse to create. Here too, is where Myers and Olasky, and Turnau, draw together the origins of culture in creation before the fall and the motivation to create that reflects the tension between culture as abstraction and culture as derivation.

Myers and Olasky argue that "what we find beautiful or entertaining or *moving* is rooted in our spiritual life [emphasis mine]."[23] They state that the origin of this connection between spiritual life and culture is in Genesis 1:28, identifying God's mandate to man to be fruitful and multiply as "the great flowering of all human culture."[24] This conviction leads them to state, "Culture, as we see it, originated in Genesis, was intended by God to be a fulfillment of the image of God, and imitation of God."[25] First conceived of by the creator God, culture was the means by which God moved those who bear his image to carry out his purpose.

Turnau, in examining the derivative nature of culture, looks to creation as the source of all things given to humanity with which they are to work. He also connects culture and the image of God in Genesis 1: 26-28, stating, "We have the innate ability to be creative like God, but in a creaturely, derivative mode."[26] Just as God expressed his

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[23] Myers and Olasky, *All God's Children and Blue Suede Shoes*, 27.

[24] Ibid., 39.

[25] Ibid.

[26] Turnau, *Popologetics*, 57.

infinite character in a finite creation, people are compelled to express such abstract concepts as beauty and love in derived, tangible products. As Turnau writes, "Culture is simply a working out of our heart response to the inbuilt messages of creation."[27] Thus, culture is the expression of the impulse to create as those created in the image of God and for his glory.

This impulse to create is clearly within God's original purpose in creating man. In describing Adam's existence before the fall, Myers and Olasky observe, "There was no separation between his culture and his loving worship of his Lord."[28] At this point, they offer an observation that is strikingly similar for the overall thesis of this work, stating, "The more we study *culture in its total context*, the more we are impressed with the fact that it is *the result of* billions of *separate choices* by millions of people [emphasis mine]."[29] Indeed, their efforts to view culture in its broad, biblical context and grapple with the tension between culture as abstraction and derivation, have led them to a description not unlike my own, that culture is the consequence of choice.

But does this prelapsarian view of culture and the possibility of a pre-creation origin for culture hold in the broader discussion about culture? While the discussion around popular culture has been constructive for understanding how one views the most widely available cultural products, the same tension between culture as abstraction and culture as derivation features in Niebuhr's more philosophical framework as well.

Abstraction and Derivation in Niebuhr

Myers and Olasky's description of culture as "the human effort to give structure to life" echoes Niebuhr's definition of culture. Niebuhr draws his original

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[27] Turnau, *Popologetics*, 47.

[28] Myers and Olasky, *All God's Children and Blue Suede Shoes*, 42.

[29] Ibid., 32.

definition from Bronislaw Malinowski's article in the 1947 *Encyclopedia of Social Sciences*. "Culture is the 'artificial, secondary environment' which man superimposes on the natural. It comprises language, habits, ideas, beliefs, customs, social organization, inherited artifacts, technical processes, and values."[30] Niebuhr then acknowledges the derivative function of culture in his own description, saying, "Culture in all its forms and varieties is concerned with the temporal and material realization of values."[31] He continues, that "because all these actualizations of purpose are accomplished in transient and perishing stuff, cultural activity is almost as much concerned with the *conservation of values* as with their realization [emphasis his]."[32] Thus, the derivative nature of culture seeks to capture permanent things in "transient and perishing stuff."

But Niebuhr's assertion that culture is "transient and perishing stuff" highlights the importance of identifying the origin of culture to the subsequent theological implications of that view of culture. As Edgar notes,

> Niebuhr sets up a contrast that stems from a category error. Instead of relating the living, triune God to the creation (which was once perfect, but is now fallen and yet is being redeemed) by his revelation and his active involvement with the world, Niebuhr contrasts a rather abstract "Christ" with what he calls the "artificial, secondary environment" human beings have developed.[33]

Crouch also takes exception to the abstraction of Christ in Niebuhr's work, commenting, "Niebuhr framed his book in terms of two highly abstract words: Christ and Culture."[34] He goes on to state, "Niebuhr was well aware that his 'Christ' was a flesh-and-blood first-century Hebrew man, and that his 'culture' was an abstraction away from

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[30] H. Richard Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture*, rev. ed. (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1975), 32.

[31] Ibid., 36.

[32] Ibid., 37.

[33] William Edgar, *Created and Creating: A Biblical Theology of Culture* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2017), 55.

[34] Andy Crouch, *Culture Making: Recovering Our Creative Calling*, (Grand Rapids: IVP Books, 2013), 180, Kindle.

concrete cultures and cultural goods. But these nuances are hard to perceive in monolithic phrases like 'Christ above culture' and 'Christ and culture in paradox.'"[35] Crouch and Edgar have identified a tension in Niebuhr between his view of culture as abstraction and derivative.

The unresolved tension in Niebuhr between culture as abstraction and culture as derivation creates a theological problem in applying the gospel to culture. Edgar notes that "the theological root problem in Niebuhr comes from a deficient view of creation,"[36] and the place of the person of Christ in the world as creator, sustainer, and redeemer.[37] Crouch, for his part, argues that perhaps Niebuhr "does not do justice to culture at its best, which is to say culture in the hands of Christ," seen in the person of Jesus when he "takes the most basic stuff of the world, breaks it, blesses it and offers it back to us, made whole and made new."[38]

Both Edgar and Crouch identify the same problem in Niebuhr's framework of an abstract Christ set over or against a derived and secondary culture. And in their responses, each comes out on a different side of the equation. Crouch states that "Niebuhr's motifs have worn grooves in Christian thinking, steering us toward the assumption that there must be one right answer: that 'Christ' would always be 'against' or 'in paradox with' or 'transforming' culture wherever and however it was expressed."[39] This abstract view of culture demeans the products of culture, and Crouch instead argues for the derivative position, stating that "we talk about culture as if it were primarily a set

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[35] Crouch, *Culture Making,* 180–81.

[36] Edgar, *Created and Creating*, 56.

[37] Ibid.

[38] Crouch, *Culture Making*, 184.

[39] Ibid., 181.

of ideas when it is primarily a set of tangible goods."[40] Thus, these "tangible goods" are in essence a derivative view of culture and are the means by which cultural meaning is created and shared.

Edgar, for his part, makes the connection between Niebuhr's "category error" and his dependence on Malinowski and "the anthropological school known as functionalism . . . who believed religion was a basic response to the biopsychological nature of human beings."[41] Thus, Edgar and Crouch believe they have detected the influence of this postlapsarian view of culture in Niebuhr and through Niebuhr's influence on those who followed him.

Possibilities within the Prelapsarian View

Having argued that Niebuhr's position is theologically inadequate, both Crouch and Edgar have offered their own version of the culture as abstraction and culture as derivation views, while both have acknowledged the tension between the two. The preliminary definition, that culture is the consequence of choice, can now be expanded. Culture, in one sense, is the expression of one's ability to conceive of something in the abstract and to choose if and how to represent it in the concrete. In this way, culture would reflect the impulse one has to make things or do things in a certain way, because that way expresses something one believes to be important and true. Is it possible then, that culture is the aspect of God's nature given to man which allows humans to see in the abstract and yet function in the derived? If this is the case, mankind's unique ability to envision and create may reflect something of a cultural origin in God.

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[40] Crouch, *Culture Making*, 10.

[41] Edgar, *Created and Creating*, 55.

A Pre-Creation View of Culture

If there is biblical evidence for a Pre-Creation view of culture, it will be found in what the Bible speaks of the nature of choice and the consequences of those choices in the person and character of God. First, one must ask if such a relationship between choice and consequence can be identified in the nature of God in Scripture. And second, one must see if evidence of that relationship, once established, is passed on to mankind as those who bear his image. If the possibility of both these assertions can found, then one will have the beginning of a biblical framework for culture.

Previous discussions of the nature of choice in the person and character of God reside largely in the philosophical realm related to God's freedom to act. Historically, this has focused on the postlapsarian issues of the problem of evil and the relationship between divine sovereignty and human responsibility, particularly as it relates to salvation. Yet recent questions about the eternal subordination of the Son, and particularly how that informs the church's understanding of gender, have caused some to look more closely at what Scripture speaks about the relational dynamics among the members of the Trinity. This has moved the discussion of choice in God's nature from a predominantly postlapsarian focus to a pre-creation focus. And it has also given helpful insight into the interactions among the members of the Trinity and how they reveal the nature of choice and their motivations in the person and character of God.

Choice in the Person of Jesus Christ

While much of what is written on the nature of God's choice is in service of the understanding of his interaction with a postlapsarian world and humanity, within that conversation are insights into the nature of choice revealed in the Triune God.[42] A similar approach is necessary in answering questions about the nature of choice among the

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[42] John M. Frame, *The Doctrine of God*, A Theology of Lordship (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2002), 241.

members of the Trinity. As there is "nothing in the NT that expressly formulates the doctrine of the Trinity,"[43] one must begin with what is recorded of the interactions between the Father and Jesus during his time on earth. Then one may ask if those interactions reveal evidence of choice among the members of the Trinity.

Matthew 11:25-27 describes an interaction between the Father and the Son that begins in the context of salvation but moves into a discussion of the nature of the Trinity. Jesus says, "No one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him" (Matt 11:27). While the effect of this choice is the salvation of those who know the Father, it also offers a glimpse into how this choice is made.

D. A. Carson comments on this passage, that "the Son has not only knowledge but the authority to choose those to whom he will reveal God." He notes the parallel construction between what was pleasing to God's will and what the Son chooses to reveal.[44] Thus, while the Son has freedom to choose, he chooses what pleases the Father. Letham also notes this parallel in his discussion of this passage, writing, "To know the Father is a gift given by the Son to whomever *he* chooses [emphasis his]."[45] He concludes, this illustrates "a communion of life and love between the Father and the Son in the being of God—both a distinction and an identity."[46] This passage reveals how the choice exercised by God in salvation allows one to look deeper into the nature of choice among the members of the Trinity.

Matthew 11:25-27 also introduces the possibility that there is a textual basis to talk about choice and each member of the Trinity, as these verses use two of the Greek

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[43] Robert Letham, *The Holy Trinity: In Scripture, History, Theology, and Worship* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 2004), 309.

[44] D. A. Carson, *Matthew*, in vol. 8 of *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1984), 277.

[45] Letham, *The Holy Trinity*, 37.

[46] Ibid., 38.

words for choice and both are applied to God. The first of these is εὐδοκία (11:26 "your gracious will" ESV), meaning satisfaction, or subjectively to delight and is used elsewhere to refer to God's desire (Luke 2:14, 10:21, Eph 1:5, 9, Phl 2:13) and of men who desire good (Rom 10:1, Phil 1:15, 2 Thes. 1:11).[47] The second is βούλομαι, meaning to will, or reflexively to be willing, which is used often to describe the choices, or desires of men to carry out good (Matt 1:19, Acts 15:37, 19:30, Phil 1:12) and for ill (Mark 15:15, Acts 5:33, Jas 4:4).

What is notable about βούλομαι is that it is used in the New Testament specifically with each member of the Trinity. It is applied here to the Son and in the parallel passage in Luke 10:21, as well as 2 Peter 3:9, where "the Lord and Savior" (3:2) is the "Lord . . . not wishing that any should perish" (3:9). Both of these uses make reference to Christ's fulfillment of the purpose given him by his Father. βούλομαι is also applied to the Father in Luke 22:42, where Jesus prays "Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me" and James 1:18, referring to the "Father of lights" who "Of his own will . . . brought us forth by the word of truth." Once again, the relationship between the purpose of the Father and the work of the Son is in view. And βούλομαι is applied to the Spirit in 1 Corinthians 12:11, where the Spirit apportions spiritual gifts "to each one . . . as he wills."[48]

As Brian Edgar observes, Paul "uses Spirit, Lord and God as terms for persons in relationship."[49] The emphasis on relationship, and the language with which Scripture describes the way the persons of the Trinity carry out their roles in that relationship,

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[47] Barclay Newman, "εὐδοκία," in *A Concise Greek-English Dictionary of the New Testament*, rev. electronic ed. (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2011).

[48] A parallel passage in Heb 2:4, referring to "gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according his will," uses θέλησις, the single New Testament occurrence of the accusative of θέλω as opposed to βούλομαι which is the middle voice of θέλησις.

[49] Brian Edgar, *The Message of the Trinity: Life in God* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2005), 253.

implies that the Father, Son and Spirit freely choose to do what they know will please the other two.[50] Thus, βούλομαι, when used of the individual members of the Trinity, indicates that the will, desire or choice exercised by one person of the Trinity is done with another person of the Trinity in view.

While one may expect the members of the Trinity to work in perfect cooperation, one is not left to infer why such cooperation exists between Jesus and his Father. In John 14, Jesus explains that his love for the Father is his specific motivation for his choice to obey. The Trinitarian structure of this passage highlights the explicit connection made between obedience and love for Christ (14:15, 21, 23).[51] Jesus begins by saying, "If you love me, you will keep my commandments" (14:15) and the Holy Spirit will be given as a "Helper" to those who truly know, love and obey Christ (14:16-17). A further connection is made between those who truly know and obey Christ's commands, thus demonstrating their love for him and those whom the Father will love (14:21). And finally, the dwelling of the Father and the Son is with those who love and obey the words of Christ (14:23), with the aid of the Holy Spirit (14:26).

But this description of intimacy, obedience and love is about to be challenged by what will take place on the cross and that is what Jesus addresses next (27-30). He concludes this discourse by revealing a most profound truth about the nature of obedience and love. Jesus says, "I do as the Father has commanded me, so that the world may know that I love the Father" (31). Thus, Jesus' choice to obediently lay down his life is motivated by his love for the Father.

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[50] This pattern is underscored when describing the Spirit in 1 Cor 12, as both the Father and the Son are mentioned, consistent with the specific role of the Spirit as being sent by both the Father and the Son. It can also be seen in Heb 2:4, as the "great salvation" which the author is describing was "declared at first by the Lord" (2:3) then "God [the Father who] also bore witness" (2:4).

[51] Edgar, *The Message of the Trinity*, 169.

Choice in the Eternal Nature of God

The final link between the choice explained by Christ in John 14:31 and the eternal nature of the Trinity is revealed in Jesus' prayer in John 17. Here, all that he has described to the disciples in chapters 14-16 is reiterated in his prayer with the Father.[52] Jesus begins by stating in 17:2-3 that the authority to give eternal life has been given him by God. As already discussed related to Matthew 11:25-27, this is a genuine choice exercised by Christ, and here he affirms that his motivation for completing the work on the cross is that "the Son may glorify you" (John 17:1).[53] This motivation originates in the relationship between Christ and the Father in eternity past, as Jesus prays, "glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had with you before the world existed" (17:5). Thus, the motivation for Jesus' choice to obediently complete the work of salvation is rooted in the nature of the glory he shared in his relationship with the Father in eternity past.

Our understanding of this motivation is deepened towards the end of the prayer, when Jesus prays that those the Father has given him may "see my glory that you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world" (John 17:24). The glory Jesus shared with his father is bound together with the love they share. As Ware comments, "Jesus' joy was found in keeping the commandments of his Father."[54] This he does because he loves his Father and desires to do what will glorify and please him. Thus, the impulse that moves Christ to obediently complete his work of salvation is the knowledge he has of the relationship shared between him and the Father and the desire to represent that in concrete terms to his community of followers.

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[52] D. A. Carson, *The Farewell Discourse and Final Prayer of Jesus: An Exposition of John 14-17* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1980), 177.

[53] Ibid., 178.

[54] Bruce A. Ware, *God's Greater Glory: The Exalted God of Scripture and the Christian Faith* (Grand Rapids: Crossway, 2004), 202.

In this sense, the church is a culture which is the consequence of the choice Christ made to lay down his life. The impulse to make that choice came from Christ's knowledge of the pre-creation reality of the perfect fellowship of the Trinity and his unique ability to act in a concrete way that would demonstrate that reality to others. To extend this thought further, the gospel, as existing in the mind of the Triune God from eternity past and made manifest in the work of Christ, reflects the biblical framework for culture proposed by this thesis.

We must now place this observation about the cultural typology of the gospel into the broader theological discussion of the nature of choice in the character of God. Christ's work on the cross was a unique act done by the unique second person of the Trinity at a unique moment in divine and human history. And yet, as his followers, believers are called to choose to trust in that act and to live out the consequences of his choice and theirs. The implications of this for one's understanding of, and interactions with culture are profound. Yet before examining these implications, one must place this view of culture in a broader, more established theological category of the nature of freedom.

Views of the Nature of Freedom

The doctrinal conversation about the nature of freedom necessarily involves both the nature of human freedom and divine freedom and the relationship between them. On the one hand, libertarian freedom asserts that mankind has the ability to choose between alternative opportunities with equal ease. On the other hand, compatibilist freedom asserts one need only one opportunity, as long as one is free to do what one desires to do.[55] Both of these positions assume that one can envision the consequences of those choices to the degree necessary to see them as different from one another.

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[55] Frame, *The Doctrine of God*, 136–37.

The libertarian requirement that a free choice is made between equal alternatives is not helpful in considering the nature of choice among the members of the Trinity. Indeed, insisting in all cases that God must have such alternatives in order to be free "would introduce incoherence into the doctrine of God."[56] Thus, libertarian freedom does not offer an understanding of the nature of God's choice that is applicable to culture as the consequence of those choices.

Compatibilist freedom, having given a high place to the sovereignty of God, assumes that God's purpose is primary and consistent in all of human experience. This experience of freedom is only possible because God has determined the purpose and outcome of each individual life. Rather than laboring under the freedom to choose between equal alternatives, those choices fit within the purpose God has determined for his creation. Against the argument that a free choice cannot be made to fit within what God has determined, Frame asserts that that the key component to freedom is that one "can still act according to our character and desires."[57] This understanding of choice finds common ground with the conversation surrounding Jonathan Edwards' *Freedom of the Will.* Sam Storms, in his discussion of libertarian freedom, states that for Edwards, "The cause of an act of will is that motive which appears most agreeable to the mind."[58]

While this form of freedom was imprinted on man when he was created in God's image, the character of man, in its postlapsarian state, is not capable of always doing what is right and good. Thus, compatibilist freedom applies equally to divine freedom and human freedom, but the character and desires which are expressed in that freedom are always good in God, but not always good in man.

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[56] Jay W. Richards, *The Untamed God: A Philosophical Exploration of Divine Perfection, Simplicity, and Immutability* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2003), 248.

[57] Frame, *The Doctrine of God*, 136.

[58] Sam Storms, *A God Entranced Vision of All Things: The Legacy of Jonathan Edwards*, ed. John Piper and Justin Taylor (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2004), 210.

Compatibilist Freedom and Culture

Compatibilist freedom places a strikingly different emphasis on choice than libertarian freedom, requiring only one option, and a compulsion, or impulse, to choose that option. In addition, compatibilist freedom opens the possibility that, rather than God waiting on people to choose between the equal alternatives of libertarian freedom, he is active in guiding them to the one choice that aligns with his plan. Thus, compatibilist freedom presents the possibility that what has been described as culture is actually part of God's means to accomplish his purpose through one's choosing what one desires.

This particular expression of compatibilist freedom is given fuller expression in the position described as freedom of inclination. Here, God is viewed as actively directing and shaping one's desires to accomplish the outcome he has ordained. This means God's purpose is worked out in specific detail, not just in broad strokes. Ware describes freedom of inclination as "our choosing and doing according to what we are inclined most, or what we desire most, to do."[59] The central tenet of freedom of inclination is one's ability to envision, and then act on, one's greatest desire in any given situation. This freedom of inclination applies equally to God and to believers, although one's ability to see and act on what one desires most is profoundly affected by sin. Thus, freedom of inclination argues that one is capable of envisioning something that does not yet exist or has not yet come to pass and choosing to actualize it through one's agency.

Here is room in the theological position of freedom of inclination in God for a pre-creation view of culture. Indeed, creation itself is a consequence of choice on the part of God of expressing the spiritual reality of his nature in a physical form. One's existence, and in particular as those created in the image of God, is a physical expression of the spiritual existence of a Triune God. As will be demonstrated, God envisioned this physical and spiritual state and chose to send Christ to make it a physical and spiritual

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[59] Ware, *God's Greater Glory*, 25.

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reality. It is not unreasonable to look for the same mechanism to operate in humanity, as those created in God's image and chosen to carry forward his work in creation.

A Biblical Framework for Culture

Compatibilist freedom provides a view of choice among the members of the Trinity that can be applied to human choice. More specifically, the view of freedom of inclination seems to be particularly relevant to the view of culture as a consequence of choice. And here, in the doctrine of freedom of inclination, is the beginning of a biblical framework for culture. When examined together, freedom of inclination and culture as the consequence of choice offer several conclusions and applications.

First, one must have a way to understand choice biblically that can be applied consistently to God, man before the fall and man after the fall. This means that culture as a consequence of choice can be developed as a biblical framework for culture.

Second, if culture is a consequence of choice and choice is present in the nature of God before creation, then an argument could be made that the origin of culture exists in the nature of God. This would mean culture is not sinful, nor is it only found in humanity, but that culture's existence is a reflection of the nature of God and thus is intended by God to reflect something of his character.

Third, there is biblical evidence for how God works within the means of human desire to influence the choices of man, without violating the freedom of mankind. Culture is a plausible description among others for how such a means of influence could work. Such a view of culture should offer ways to understand cultural issues in this day and how to respond to them in a way that is honoring to God and edifying to his people.

Fourth, if culture applies to mankind before and after the fall and is a means by which God influences the choices of men and woman, it will be affected by the gospel. Culture, then, is not only the framework within which the gospel is communicated, it is part of the means by which the gospel is effective. As different choices are made by

individuals because of the work of Christ on believer's behalf, the consequences of those choices will shape a culture that reflects the changed desires of those people.

Conclusion

Since culture is a consequence of choice, and freedom of choice is a necessary component of the nature of God, the effort to find a biblical framework for culture has found an essential theological dimension. No longer is a discussion of culture simply a way to categorize or generalize the behaviors of a group of people. Rather, culture as a consequence of choice is a way to discern and describe the redemptive work of God in his creation.

Culture is the consequence of how the collective effect of individual's ability to choose is structured, preserved, and combined for mankind's future benefit and direction. Since one can understand choice and consequence in a biblical way, this is a framework to biblically understand culture. Such a framework should then yield biblical insight into why and how one's choices are culturally consequential. The biblical account of creation contains the evidence for the expression of God's choice in creation, the transfer of that ability to mankind and the effects of the choice to sin on culture.

CHAPTER 3

THE INCLINATION TO CHOOSE GIVEN TO MAN

Introduction

Culture is a consequence of choice. Of the three elements of this definition, the origins of choice in God as evidenced by the interactions of the members of the Trinity have been examined, including how the nature of that choice extends into one's understanding of human choice as freedom of inclination. Also considered is how culture is characterized by the dynamic movement between what one envisions and the steps one takes to actualize that vision. This dynamic is created by the impulse to create based on one's ability to envision something that does not yet exist and express that idea in a tangible product. Yet to be explored is the structure by which the consequences of one's choices are rendered into culture.

The account of creation is where scriptural evidence of this dynamic movement and a structure for culture as a consequence choice can be seen. Beginning with the assumption that what God created is a consequence of choices he made, it is therefore reasonable to conclude creation is an accurate derivation of his purpose in those choices. As such, it is not necessary to consider the consequences of God's choices before creation, since Scripture's focus is instead on how the ability to choose is communicated to mankind. Thus, for this discussion, the limits of culture are defined by the choices of man, made within the context of the created world in which God has placed him.

Culture is defined by the expression of God's freedom of inclination to move from what he envisioned to actualize in creation and in the consequences of God's choice to give that creative ability to mankind.

Choice in the Theology of Creation

A biblical framework for culture as a consequence of choice must trace out the dynamic movement between how God envisioned creation and how it was actualized into the reality described in Scripture. Having argued that choice exists eternally in the Trinity, one can assert that the existence of choice is not foreign to the nature of God and thus originates before the creation of the cosmos. Choice then, as part of the nature and character of God, was imprinted onto creation and onto mankind in his distinct role in creation. Thus, by examining choice as the freedom of inclination expressed in the dynamic movement between vision and reality, one will have the parameters of a biblical framework for culture as a consequence of choice.

Recent work on the theology of creation has identified the possibility of such a framework. In *The Faithful Creator*, Ron Highfield states, "God creates the world he wants, a world that includes our free acts whereby we, as free subjects, become causes of new states of affairs."[1] The "new states of affairs" Highfield describes are consequences, caused by individual's free choices, which carry beyond the acts of physical creation to "the world with all its internal relationships."[2] Thus, Highfield has identified the parameters for defining culture as a consequence of choice within the biblical account of creation.[3]

Clarification of Terms

Before one can embark on this study, it will be helpful to clarify what is meant by envision and actualization and how these terms relate to the concepts of abstraction and derivation. In the previous chapter, the argument was made to locate the definition of

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[1] Ron Highfield, *The Faithful Creator: Affirming Creation and Providence in an Age of Anxiety* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2015), 225.

[2] Ibid., 224.

[3] While Highfield does not define culture, on p. 166 he reveals narrower understanding of culture than what I am proposing here, mentioning the "social prestige" of science in our "culture."

culture between abstraction and derivation, as an expression of the dynamic movement between the two. But as will soon be demonstrated, the terms abstraction and derivation have inherent limitations when one moves this conversation into the realm of theology. God is beyond human ability to fully comprehend, but he is not abstract in that he actually exists. For that reason, an intermediary term is needed to describe what happens in one's mind when one considers these spiritual things.

One can speak of abstractions as concepts or ideas that do not exist, either because they are metaphysical in nature and cannot be made, or because they have not yet been made. But abstractions come into some form of existence when one's mind conceive of them. This mental conception is perhaps best represented by the term envision, which describes our ability to imagine or expect that something that does not yet exist, but could. Unlike imagination on its own, which does not necessarily connect to reality, envision implies thinking of something that can or should be created.

To move from what one envisions to that desired reality is to actualize, or to make something we envision happen. To speak of culture as derivative means to discern its shape or characteristics from what one has actualized. This ascribes a level of meaning to what one produces because it expresses in some form one's beliefs and values applied to that situation. When one moves this concept into the theological discussion, one must thus account for the effect of sin.[4]

This returns one to the critical component in defining culture, which is choice. Even if one is not aware of one's choices, the possibility of choice still exists. If one can conceive of another way to express an abstraction, then one has, at some level, chosen to express it in the form it has taken. They may not have been aware of the choice they were making, or the processes may have involved deliberately choosing the one expression

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[4] Ted Turnau, *Popologetics: Popular Culture in Christian Perspective* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2012), 178.

that best suits the abstract notion from among many that have been considered. Either way, choice is always involved in actualizing something from what one has envisioned. Ideas seem to come unbidden but actualizing them requires a choice made at some level.

Regardless of one's experience of choosing, deciding how to actualize what one envisions is always influenced by many factors. These combine to result in one's inclination to choose one form of actualization over another. As Terry Eagleton, a British literary theorist observes, "The very word 'culture' contains a tension between making and being made, rationality and spontaneity."[5] In a very real sense, one is being acted upon by culture even while one is acting on it oneself.

With this in mind, one is now ready to examine this view of culture in a scriptural context, beginning with the account of creation. Three questions must be considered as one begins to develop the definition of culture as a consequence of choice. First, what evidence does one have that God envisioned creation before he created it? Second, how does God establish the role of man so that the consequence of mankind's choices in creation can discerned? And third, how does sin affect mankind's inclination and the relationships within the created world?

God's Inclination in His Choice to Create

The book of Genesis begins with the statement, "In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth" (Gen 1:1). In the first 25 verses of this first chapter of the Bible, one sees the unfolding of the consequences of God's choices in his work of creation. Commentators note the variety of understandings of Genesis 1:1-2, as it sets the interpretive framework for Genesis 1-2.[6] Is Genesis 1:1 an introductory statement that applies to the whole of the creation account, or is it part of the activity of the first day

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[5] Terry Eagleton, *The Idea of Culture* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2000), 5.

[6] John E. Hartley, *Genesis*, of *Understanding the Bible Commentary Series*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2012), 40. Hartley considers four of the "numerous explanations" offered.

described in verse 3-5? That answer will determine what significance one gives to the description of the earth as "without form and void" in Genesis 1:2.

The State of Creation "In The Beginning"

If Genesis 1:1-5 is a complete unit, describing what God accomplished in the first 24 hours of creation, then the state of creation in verse 2 is of momentary concern. If, on the other hand, Genesis 1:1-2 is the introduction to all of the creation account, the description of the earth as "without form and void" in Genesis 1:2 gains significance as the beginning state of God's work of creation. This textual and theological question has been influenced by the debate between evolution and creation.[7] Those who argue that Genesis 1:1 is part of the first day generally do so in order to uphold the six-day, young earth view of Genesis 1 and 2. Others have proposed that Genesis 1:2 is a "gap" in the narrative which allows for the billions of years required for evolution, but this view has failed to stand up to further scrutiny.[8]

A third, more nuanced position, has been articulated by Old Testament Scholar, Richard Averbeck. He takes Genesis 1:1 to be "an independent clause serving as a title announcing the subject of Genesis 1, not the actual beginning of God's creation work in the chapter."[9] This perspective sees Genesis 1:2 as describing the beginning of the actual account of the "work" of creation as "without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep," and suggests a more literal interpretation of the condition of the earth in Genesis 1:2 as "a wasteland and empty."[10] In the account of the following

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[7] Jonathan R. Wilson, *God's Good World: Reclaiming the Doctrine of Creation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013), 16. Wilson observes that our focus on the debate between science and religion has left our theology of creation underdeveloped.

[8] Trevor Craigen, "Can Deep Time Be Embedded in Genesis," in *Coming to Grips with Genesis: Biblical Authority and the Age of the Earth*, ed. Terry Mortenson and Thane H. Ury (Green Forest, AR: New Leaf Publishing Group, 2008), 195. Craigen references Richard Niessen's "33 significant discrepancies between creation and evolution."

[9] Richard Averbeck et al., *Reading Genesis 1-2: An Evangelical Conversation*, ed. J. Daryl Charles (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2013), 10.

[10] Kenneth Mathews, *Genesis 1-11:26: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy*

days, what is unproductive becomes productive, and what is uninhabited becomes inhabited. The pattern that emerges is two sets of three days, with days three and six each containing two acts of creation, rather than the single act of the other days.[11]

In the past, this pattern of two sets of three days was seen as the foundation of the framework view, which interprets Genesis 1 as "a figurative description of actual events."[12] But, Averbeck argues, to see these patterns does not necessarily require interpreting Genesis 1-2 as figurative and thus concluding it is not a literal account of God's work of creation. Though it does show "affinities with the so-called 'framework hypothesis,'" he concludes it also varies from it in significant ways, noting that this framework does not lead to reading Genesis as myth, but does emphasize that "each day of creation has a common literary pattern."[13] Thus, observing a pattern in the six days of creation is not at odds with a literal interpretation of those days as twenty four hours.

This common literary pattern, Averbeck states, reveals an unfolding theme in creation, as "it is clear that the 'and God said' units running through the chapter beginning in verse 3 progressively eliminate the conditions of verse 2."[14] A such, one is not forced to choose between reading Genesis 1 as a historical account and discerning a broader theme of what God accomplishes in that account. Thus, creation is a consequence of God's choice to create out of nothing and how he creates is revealed in a progressive pattern, moving from empty and void to divided and filled.

Scripture, The New American Commentary, vol. 1A (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 1996), 115.

[11] Mathews, *Genesis 1-11:26*, 115.

[12] John D. Currid, *Genesis*, vol. 1, Evangelical Press Study Commentary (Darlington, UK: Evangelical Press, 2003), 34.

[13] Averbeck et al., *Reading Genesis 1-2*, 31.

[14] Ibid., 11.

Dynamic Movement in Creation

The sense of movement in this pattern is identified by John E. Hartley, Old Testament scholar, in his commentary of Genesis in the *Understanding the Bible* series. In his discussion of the different interpretations of Genesis 1:2 he concludes, "The author highlights a key theme of Scripture, the polarity between cosmic order and chaos."[15] He concludes, "The focus here is on God's sovereignty over the dynamic movement between cosmos and chaos."[16] John H. Walton, professor of Old Testament at Wheaton College, identifies this pattern of dynamic movement like this: "God's creative work is defined as bringing order to this non-ordered existence."[17]

Since the results of this work are successively pronounced good by God, the pattern of creation moves from an earth that was a non-ordered wasteland to an ordered world. The account of creation does not focus on creation ex nihilo, thus it does not describe the movement from envisioning to actualization in the creative work of God.[18] Rather, God records his work of working out of what was already there through the work of dividing and filling. This established the relationship between actualization and the movement from non-order to order.

This concept of creation from non-order to order is not new, however, as Augustine, in the *Confessions*, described the earth of Genesis 1:2 as "invisible and unorganized.… From this, another visible and organized heaven and earth were to be made."[19] Again he states, in *On the Literal Interpretation of Genesis*, "this matter that is

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[15] Hartley, *Genesis*, 40–41.

[16] Ibid., 42.

[17] John H. Walton, *The Lost World of Adam and Eve: Genesis 2-3 and the Human Origins Debate* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2015), 149. See a fuller discussion of Walton's view later in this chapter.

[18] Prov 8:22-31 does imply movement from God envisioning creation then actualizing it, but its highly literary nature would require a level of analysis that is not possible in this thesis.

[19] Andrew Louth, *Genesis 1-11*, in vol. 1 of *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture: Old Testament*, ed. Thomas C. Oden (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2001), 4.

order and distinguished by the next work of God is called the invisible and unformed earth."[20] And creation as an expression of the envisioned into the actualized was hinted at by Basil the Great, when he wrote, "Even before this world and order of things existed of which our mind can form an idea but of which we can say nothing, because it is too lofty a subject."[21] Thus, in the church fathers one finds the first expression of creation as envisioned to actualized, seen in the progress from non-order to order.

Highfield, Wilson, and Walton, are among authors who have made recent contributions to the theological view of this pattern in Genesis 1-3, laying an important foundation for this biblical study of culture. Wilson underscores the relationship between creation and culture, stating, "A Christian doctrine of creation . . . generates an understanding of culture."[22] Walton asserts, "God did not just build the cosmos, he made it work in a certain way for a certain reason."[23] Thus, one sees evidence that God envisioned how the cosmos would work and was inclined to express in his choice to create through a pattern of dynamic movement from non-order to a state of order.

God's Choice in Creating Man

The creation of mankind brings to completion the dynamic movement from non-order to order as what God envisioned for creation is fully actualized in creation. The work of God in creation continues in Genesis 1:26, but with some notable changes in the pattern of the first six days. Where before, God had divided the emptiness and filled the earth with an abundance of creatures, he now creates only one couple, to whom God now gives the responsibility to fill and subdue all of creation. This shift is underscored by the juxtaposition of plurality in God's dialogue, "Let us make man in our image, in our

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[20] Louth, *Genesis 1-11*, 5.

[21] Ibid., 2.

[22] Wilson, *God's Good World*, 20.

[23] Walton, *The Lost World of Adam and Eve*, 34.

likeness" (Gen 1:26), giving evidence of the plurality of the Godhead.[24] This plurality of the nature of God is conveyed to man, who is subsequently identified as "male and female" (1:27).[25]

The plurality of the dialogue around the creation of man reveals that creation is an expression of the abundance of the life of the Trinity. In *God's Good World*, Wilson argues that this pattern is foundational to all of redemptive history.[26] Wilson identifies the source of life in the Trinity as "the superabundance of creation,"[27] stating, "The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit create out of God's own life."[28] In his view, this life is the source of all creation and exists within the free choice of the members of the Trinity to give themselves to one another. He concludes, "From this mutuality of giving and receiving, which simply is life, . . . the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit give life to something other than God: creation."[29] Thus, Wilson describes the creation of all life as the consequence of the free choice of the members of the Trinity.

Envision and Actualize in Creation

The creation of man reveals the dynamic movement from envisioned to actualized in creation. Wilson observes, "The role of the Father is to envision and initiate the work of creation that is accomplished by the Son and completed by the Spirit."[30] From humanity's perspective within creation, the complete and perfect relationships among the members of the Godhead are beyond what can be comprehended, and yet

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[24] Mathews, *Genesis 1-11:26*, 163.

[25] Ibid., 173.

[26] Wilson, *God's Good World*, 12.

[27] Ibid., 18.

[28] Ibid., 76.

[29] Ibid.

[30] Ibid., 95.

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Scripture portrays one's experience in creation as an actualization of those relationships.[31] Thus, the account of creation establishes the pattern of dynamic movement between what one can envision of the nature of the Trinity, to how that nature is actualized in the creation of life and human life in particular.

The first account of creation is complete and one now sees God's objective. Genesis 2:1-3 gives a clear conclusion to the description of God's work of creation, stating twice that God "finished" his work and "rested," and three times referencing the work God "had done." God's objective was not to be finished with his work because it was wearisome. Rather, the subsequent verses will reveal that God's purpose in creating was to enjoy his work with those created in his image.

Genesis 1:2 is the beginning point for a pattern of dynamic movement that unfolds in the rest of the chapter. And, the pattern revealed in Genesis 1 creates a sense of movement in the text which becomes a framework for understanding what unfolds in Genesis 2-3 and continues through all of Scripture. The impulse behind this dynamic movement is God's inclination to move from the nature of the Trinity to the actualized, physical world. This movement is given extra emphasis in the creation of man as a plural expression of the plurality of the Godhead. Thus, creation, in every aspect, is a consequence of the choice of God.

God's Choice Given to Man

Genesis 2:4 begins a second, more focused account of creation. The section opens with the term תּוֹלְדוֹת, ("toledot," generations, or account), which will become a regular grammatical divider throughout the rest of Genesis. The use of תּוֹלְדוֹת in 2:4 marks what follows as the start of the account of "mankind and their environment."[32]

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[31] See chap. 2 for this discussion.

[32] Mathews, *Genesis 1-11:26*, 35.

Now days three and six receive the attention, with the majority of Genesis 2 developing the meaning of the dominion given to man in 1:26-28.[33]

The nature of God's choice relative to mankind is underscored in Genesis 2:4, when the name Yahweh is first used, indicating God's "determining his own nature, or his choices, or even his own being, without any dependence on us."[34] Yet, this is the name of the covenantal God and gives context to the relationship one sees unfolding between God and the man created in his image.[35] Thus, what begins at Genesis 2:4 is the description of the nature of choice as the freedom of inclination given to man by God.

Inclination Given to Man at Creation

The pattern of dynamic movement between non-order and order will be continued in the work God gives man to do in the garden he has created. The second account of creation also begins with identifying non-order in creation.[36] In describing creation as having no plants, Genesis 2:5 parallels the empty and void of Genesis 1:2.[37] What follows is a detailed description of the ordering of God's creation, but now specifically for mankind. In this garden are trees which are "pleasant to the sight and good for food" (2:9) and a river which becomes four rivers, as well as gold and precious stones. Everything speaks of God's abundance for mankind in creation.[38] God places the man into his abundance "to work and keep it" (2:15), not out of necessity for man or God, but to fulfill his purpose of "subduing the earth" (1:28) as one created in God's

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[33] Mathews, *Genesis 1-11:26*, 189.

[34] John M. Frame, *The Doctrine of God*, *A Theology of Lordship* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2002), 48.

[35] Mathews, *Genesis 1-11:26*, 193.

[36] Ibid., 183.

[37] Hartley, *Genesis*, 59. Hartley notes the parallel between the presence of water in 2:6 to the Spirit in 1:2.

[38] Mathews, *Genesis 1-11:26*, 201, 208.

image. Thus, man is expected to pursue this purpose as an expression of his inclination to fulfill the purpose given to him by God.

This fits the pattern of freedom of inclination expressed in the choices God gives to man as he fulfills his purpose as the one who will rule over creation. Man must take what he envisions of his purpose given by God to fill and subdue, actualizing that in the work of moving from non-order to order in creation. God planted a garden (2:8), but man is responsible to work and keep it (2:16). God created all the animals (1:24-25), but man chose their names (2:19). As Walton observes, "the order that God brought focused on people in his image to join with him in the continuing process of bringing order."[39] In that continuing process, God has revealed to man a pattern of dynamic movement from non-order to order in what he created. Thus, the inclination possessed by God is expressed in man's ability to move from his envisioned purpose to the work of actualizing what he envisions, carried out in the context of God's creation.

Inclination Expressed by Man

God now states that it is "not good that man should be alone" (2:18). This aspect of the plurality of God's nature expressed in creation is still non-ordered. Being alone, man does not reflect the image of the God who created him (1:27) and is not able to fulfill the primary part of his purpose which is to "be fruitful and multiply" (1:28). Adam, on his own, is not able to continue the giving of life out of the abundance of the plurality of the Triune God. Thus, the envisioned purpose of mankind to continue the work of creation cannot yet be actualized.

The description of this account demonstrates the importance of mankind's freedom of inclination in two ways. First, God brought the animals to Adam, allowing

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[39] Walton, *The Lost World of Adam and Eve*, 150.

him to assess his desire to have "a helper fit for him" (2:20).[40] Adam's inclination to have a helper is revealed in seeing that none of the beasts fit that need. Second, after creating woman out of man, God "brought her to the man" (2:22), presenting her to Adam as a gift.[41] Adam's first recorded speech (2:23) expresses his recognition of the fulfillment of his inclination.[42] Adam then names the Woman, defining their relationship to one another and completing the process begun in verse 18. The pattern of non-order to order and pronouncing it good, mirrors the pattern by which God created in Genesis 1. Thus, God enables man to express his freedom of inclination by choosing to receive the woman as a fit for him and speaking his approval of the ordering of his world.

The blessing God gave in 1:28 is now detailed in the institution of marriage.[43] Man and woman together now have the means to continue God's ordering work of creation. They can continue to overcome non-order by cultivating and naming what God has created. And they can, together, extend the order of the image of God by giving life to children formed out of the woman. Genesis 2:25 provides the culmination of the creation of man and woman in the garden God provided for them. In a condition reminiscent of the conclusion of God's work of creation in 2:1-3, mankind can now rest from his quest to find the means to fulfill the purpose given him by God. He and the woman together have the freedom to pursue their inclination to work and bring order, to be "one flesh," and thereby continue the work of creation in the pattern of how God created them. Thus, God has created mankind to act out of the man's and woman's inclination to fulfill the purpose God has given to them.

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[40] Mathews, *Genesis 1-11:26*, 218.

[41] Ibid.

[42] Ibid. Matthews' observation that the man "exclaims in poetic verse" is an acknowledgement of man's unique ability to express abstract thought in speech.

[43] Ibid., 222–24.

Mankind's Inclination Corrupted by Sin

Until this point, consequence has existed in creation as the expression of the relationships between the members of the Trinity expressed in the work of creation. Non-order, or what is "not good" is not evil, but rather the stuff from which the ongoing work of creation will be made.[44] The creation account through Genesis 2 reveals a pattern of God involving man in the ongoing work of moving from non-order to order. The man and woman exist in a state of peace, even though the work of ordering has just begun. They are free to choose according to their inclination and must keep in mind only one prohibition from God. At the end of each day, and all throughout the seventh day, they rest and enjoy the fruit of their work. But the text gives no indication at how long this condition lasts, as immediately in Genesis 3:1 the narrative moves forward.

Confusion Introduced by the Serpent

The consequences of mankind's choice to sin are not explained in theological terms in this narrative. Rather, one must observe the events as they are recorded, discerning from them the consequences that sin has on the man and woman and God's response to them. The serpent that enters the garden in Genesis 3:1 is a creature that was part of God's good creation, but has come under the influence of Satan.[45] With his first words he calls into question the clarity and purpose of God's prohibition against eating from the tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil.[46]

The woman's responses are within what God has said to the man, but each time the wording of God's command is changed.[47] Her final statement recasts God's

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[44] Mathews, *Genesis 1-11:26*, 126.

[45] Ibid., 234.

[46] Commentators disagree on whether the woman was sinning by talking to the serpent. Mathews says she was; Hartley says she was not. It is not clear from the text, or elsewhere in Scripture that talking to the serpent was considered part of the original sin.

[47] Hartley, *Genesis*, 65.

instruction that they "shall not eat" (2:17) as "neither shall you touch it, lest you die" (3:3). The serpent seizes on this final discrepancy, contradicting God's explicit statement of judgement by saying "You will not surely die" (3:4).

The serpent then asserts that God's reason for this prohibition was to keep the full, divine knowledge of good and evil from the man and woman.[48] Rather than telling her to eat the fruit and disobey God's command, he created a sense of false scarcity in her ability to fulfill the purpose given her by God. This sets the woman's understanding of God's command about his good creation against her desire to fulfill God's purpose.[49] Thus, the false scarcity created by the Serpent can only be satisfied by eating the one thing prohibited in God's abundant creation.

Inclination as Temptation

The woman is tempted because the fruit was "good for food . . . a delight to the eyes, and . . . desired to make one wise" (3:6). All three of these descriptions speak to her inclination to eat, but the first two, which appeal to her appetite for food and delight, are descriptions of the fruit of every tree in the garden (2:9). The third, which appeals to her desire to be wise, is unique to this tree. Only this tree promises knowledge of something that the man and woman have not yet experienced. This highlights the temptation to be wise as the inclination which prompts the woman to sin, as the other desires could be fulfilled by God's creation without transgressing his law.

The woman ate and so did her husband, who had been with her all along.[50] In that moment, their state of being "naked and not ashamed" (2:25) is removed. The serpent had promised they would know good from evil (3:5), and they now experience

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[48] Hartley, *Genesis*, 66.

[49] Mathews, *Genesis 1-11:26*, 238.

[50] Ibid. The "you" is plural throughout the passage.

evil as the knowledge "that they were naked" (3:7). What had been described as good in creation—the serpent, the tree and their nakedness—is now not good. This is not a return to the non-ordered state previously seen in creation. Rather, the serpent's questioning of the words and character of God, and mankind's choice to disobey, have introduced disorder into the world that God has ordered.

The Disordering Effect of Sin on Creation

With the fall and its effects is a third state of the created world, as into the ordered state has come disorder. By disobeying the command God gave them not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, the man and woman have asserted their sense of order over the one defined for them by God. Walton states, "the serpent . . . launched disorder when people decided they themselves desired to be the source and center of wisdom and order.… The result was not order centered on them but disorder in which sin reigned.[51]

The events recorded in the aftermath of the choice to disobey communicate a clear undoing of what God had established in his work of creation. While each relationship has previously found only good in the freedom of inclination, they are now set with conflicting purposes.

The effects of this disorder on the man and woman are immediately apparent. (3:7). The "naked and unashamed" of 2:25 is replaced by shame, as the inclination to make coverings for themselves reveals.[52] Currid notes that in Genesis 2:25, nakedness "symbolizes mankind's complete openness and innocence, so now the covering is a figure of the breakdown of that oneness. The man and the woman are alienated one from

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[51] Walton, *The Lost World of Adam and Eve*, 150.

[52] Currid, *Genesis*, 120.

the other."[53] This impulse to cover and hide is evidence that the state of being "not ashamed" is replaced with a "disturbing self-consciousness."[54]

Their first response to this shame is that they "made themselves" coverings. This act is significant, as it is the first use of the term עשׂה (made) to describe an action of man, whereas it has previously only been attributed to God.[55] As Crouch comments, "The first human act after the consumption of the fruit is cultural, the creation of that basic cultural good called clothing."[56] Mankind continues in the pattern of Genesis 2 by making things from God's creation, but the motivation for that action is to hide the disorder of shame, not to fulfill God's purpose of bringing order to non-order.

In addition, man and woman respond in an uncharacteristic way to the presence of God. While they are experiencing alienation from each other, they now find shared purpose in hiding from God.[57] The ordered existence of the garden as a place for man to work and keep (2:15), has become a means by which to avoid fellowship, as they "hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God among the trees of the garden" (3:8). Thus, the actions of the man and woman reveal their first impulses are to cover themselves and hide, which reveals the disordering effect of shame on their inclination.

The disorder of sin has come into the ordered world of God's creation. This completes the three states of order that Walton identifies for people's current experience in the cosmos: non-order, order, and disorder.[58] The effect of sin on the order of creation has been to cause disorder, as the serpent and the tree have become not good in God's

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[53] Currid, *Genesis*, 120.

[54] Hartley, *Genesis*, 68.

[55] Mathews, *Genesis 1-11*, 128. See discussion on "create" and "make."

[56] Andy Crouch, *Culture Making: Recovering Our Creative Calling*, Kindle (Grand Rapids: IVP Books, 2013), 114.

[57] Mathews, *Genesis 1-11:26*, 239.

[58] Walton, *The Lost World of Adam and Eve*, 151.

creation. The effect of shame on the order of relationships is seen in the disorder of the man's and woman's impulse to cover their nakedness and to hide from God.

God's Inclination Toward the Disorder of Creation

The effects of sin on the relationships between the man and his wife, and between God and man, are profound. Into the hiding and shame, God calls, summoning the man and woman to their usual fellowship with him.[59] In response, Adam admits his sense of shame, which has been motivated by his guilt, admitting he was "afraid" because he was "naked," and so he "hid" (3:10).[60] God now asks the four questions, the first three directed at Adam and the fourth to his wife. These questions are not for God's benefit, but rather are designed to reveal to man what God already knows.[61]

God Curses Creation

After drawing the man and his wife into the open through his questions, God now states what the new reality will be. This is a reordering of the cosmos based on the presence of sin and shame. Where God had blessed his creation, he now curses it. He takes the events that have transpired and gives them permanent significance through the curses he pronounces. Where sin recast mankind's inclination in relationship to the rest of creation, one another and God, the curses now articulate the ongoing effect of sin on man and woman's inclinations in each of those relationships.

He begins by saying to the serpent, "Because you have done this" (3:14), clearly connecting the serpent's actions to the consequences that follow.[62] The animosity between the offspring of serpent and the offspring of the woman is the root of much of

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[59] Hartley, *Genesis*, 68.

[60] Mathews, *Genesis 1-11:26*, 241.

[61] Currid, *Genesis*, 123–24.

[62] Mathews, *Genesis 1-11:26*, 243.

the conflict in the rest of Genesis,[63] finally culminating in the conflict between Satan and the Messiah.[64] The "beast of the field" (3:1) is now a threat to mankind, representing conflict between man and his environment. Whereas man was to have dominion over "every creeping thing" (1:26), now he must fear the serpent and its inclination to strike him and his offspring (3:15).

God then addresses the woman and his statement to her is brief and direct. While the word "cursed" is not repeated, the effects of sin on the woman are related to her "two primary roles" as mother and wife.[65] Both of these relationships will be affected by pain: childbearing with physical pain and her marriage with emotional pain.[66] There is much debate over the nature of the "desire" the woman will have for her husband and the "rule" he will have over her (2:16), but the contrast to the intimacy and fellowship described in 2:23-25 is clear.[67] Where the woman's inclination was to be a helper to her husband, now her inclination is to "be contrary" to him.

The man is now given the specific reason for his curse, which is "because you have listened to the voice of your wife" (3:17), as opposed to the voice of God. God then restates the command that he gave to Adam in 2:17 and pronounces, "cursed is the ground because of you." Man is not cursed and neither is the work that he must do.[68] Rather, as Mathews observes, the "ground that was under the man's care in the garden as his source of joy and life (2:15) becomes the source of pain for the man's wearisome existence (v.17)."[69] Now the ground will produce "thorns and thistles" and man will eat

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[63] Currid, *Genesis*, 130.

[64] Mathews, *Genesis 1-11:26*, 248.

[65] Ibid., 249.

[66] Currid, *Genesis*, 132.

[67] Hartley, *Genesis*, 69.

[68] Currid, *Genesis*, 135, 137.

[69] Mathews, *Genesis 1-11:26*, 252.

"by the sweat of your face" (3:19). This is in sharp contrast to the implied ability to gather food from the abundance of creation (1:30).

Here is where death is pronounced, not as a sudden punishment, but as a long, toilsome regression to the state of non-order, becoming part of the ground from which man came as "a living creature" (2:7). As Currid observes, "God places pain for males and females at the center of the effort to sustain life."[70] Where man's inclination was to cultivate and order the rest of creation, his inclination will now be to struggle with the ground, until finally in death, he becomes part of it again.

Restatement of the Purpose of Man

The entrance of sin into the world has permanently changed the physical creation and the inclination of mankind's choices within it. Yet the text also reaffirms mankind's role in God's created order and how his inclinations will guide him in fulfilling that role. First, Adam names his wife Eve, reaffirming his headship in their order of creation (2:23) and his ability to bring order from non-order by naming what God has made (2:19).[71] Second, God makes (כְּתֹנֶת) garments of skins to replace the loincloths of fig leaves they made for themselves. Their inclination to cover their shame remains, so God "clothed them" (3:21), indicating his care for their needs in the "hostile environment to which they will be banished."[72]

One more consequence must be addressed, which is Adam and Eve's access to the superabundance of creation. God returns to the intra-Trinitarian dialogue from 1:26, to reveal the reasoning behind his decision to remove man and woman from the garden.[73] In their new state of "knowing good and evil" (3:22), mankind must not be able to live

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[70] Hartley, *Genesis*, 70.

[71] Mathews, *Genesis 1-11:26*, 254.

[72] Ibid.

[73] Ibid., 256.

forever sustained by the tree of life. Rather they must "work the ground" as dictated in the curse. Since they disobeyed God's prohibition against eating the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, God "drove" them out and placed a fiery barrier between them and the tree of life (3:24).

The condition of the disorder in creation becomes clear in the curses God pronounces. Augustine, in *Two Books on Genesis Against the Manichaeans,* draws the spiritual parallel when he states, "Anyone born in this life has difficulty in discovering the truth because of the corruptible body."[74] This implies the greater sense of disorder that applies to all of men's endeavors, not just his work with physical creation. Thus, the implications of the fall affect people's intellects, as well as their bodies and souls.

Adam and Eve now find themselves in a creation that is cursed, ashamed before God, at enmity with the serpent, and in conflict with each other. With this new reality comes the certainty of pain and toil in order to sustain life, yet their irrepressible inclination remains to overcome these difficulties and continue the work of creation.

God's pattern in creation is clearly established as the work of defining emptiness and filling it with good things for and through us. But now, man has been excluded from the world of rest and abundance God created for him and instead exists in a world of toil and scarcity. These consequences of their choice are the defining realities of the culture one lives with today.

Cultural Consequences of the Fall

While the effects of sin and the curses pronounced by God are devastating, there is reason for hope. Not only has God planted the seed of the gospel in his curse against the serpent, he has reaffirmed man's purpose and the basic cultural framework which will guide God's purpose of salvation moving forward. This state of affairs is what

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[74] Louth, *Genesis 1-11*, 94.

occupies the rest of the narrative of Scripture, beginning with Genesis 4. Hartley traces out the "movement between abundance and want" through the account of the fall, the rest of Genesis 4-11, the blessings and curses of the nation of Israel and the promise of a new heaven and new earth.[75] Genesis 1-11 sets the stage for the call of Abram in Genesis 12 as the beginning of God's specific mission of redemption in the world. Thus, the condition of the cosmos at the end of Genesis 3 must be considered in light of the unfolding of salvation history, specifically in the life of Jesus Christ.

Culture as Precursor to the Gospel

The dynamic movement from non-order to order, then disorder to reorder is a consistent component of the theologies of creation proposed by Walton, Wilson, and Highfield. Walton, in describing the non-order, order, disorder sequence through Genesis 3, identifies Christ as the end of these states of being. He states, "Jesus has a very significant role in the continuing process of God bringing order to the cosmos."[76] But he stops short of pressing into the role of mankind in bringing order, returning to his focus to the historical Adam instead.

Wilson more clearly identifies a fourth type of order as the peace promised in the gospel. He states, "The good news of peace for all creation is the good news that God in Christ is bringing the world to the wholeness of life that will be enjoyed forever in the new creation."[77] This also points to a reordering of creation, but does not define the end state of creation in those terms, as he associates reordering with exerting power "constrained by the old order of things."[78] Wilson instead argues that one must meekly

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[75] Hartley, *Genesis*, 42.

[76] Walton, *The Lost World of Adam and Eve*, 162.

[77] Wilson, *God's Good World*, 121.

[78] Ibid., 140. This is a difficult distinction to maintain when pressed beyond the philosophical rhetoric however, and Wilson relies on the phrase popularized by John H. Yoder, of "living with the grain" of the universe (see p. 105 footnote), which he uses 13 times.

submit to Christ's rule, learning instead to overcome "our fear and frenzy" of trying to change the outcome that Christ has already made sure.[79]

Highfield delves into this fourth state of order in his discussion on concurrence, which he defines as "God's continued act of creation as it empowers creatures through their action and sustains the effect of their acts."[80] As he does not begin with a discussion of the disorder created by sin, he does not address the reordering of creation after the fall. Rather he chooses to describe God's ongoing governance of the world, stating, "Chaos and nothingness have within them no principles of existence and order. Hence the act of creating must include ordering and directing. Indeed, in our experience creating is exclusively ordering and directing."[81] This ordering and directing fit the fourth state of reordered in the framework of order.

We now have a glimpse at a complete framework for the ongoing work of creation that God began and entrusted to mankind as cultural beings. The non-order to order, disorder to reorder framework offers a biblical framework for culture. This framework begins with non-order in the environment that is "without form and void" (Gen 1:2), which is then separated and filled over the following six days of creation. On the seventh day, the world is complete in its ordered form (2:1-3) and God rests from his work. The account of Genesis 2 describes how God includes man in his work of ordering, concluding with the description of mankind's ability to complete his purpose before God (2:25).

Genesis 3 introduces disorder through the deception of the serpent and mankind's fall into sin. God responds by reordering the creation as a consequence of this sin, but included within that is the hope of a final reordering, accomplished through the

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[79] Wilson, *God's Good World*, 230.

[80] Highfield, *The Faithful Creator*, 216.

[81] Ibid.

gospel, and fulfilled in the creation of a new heaven and a new earth. Thus, non-order, order, disorder, and reorder are the biblical framework for the dynamic movement of God's work in creation and of mankind's work as those created in the image of God.

Conclusion

Non-order, order, disorder, and reorder, are the four, simultaneous states of creation in existence now and are a useful theological framework for understanding God's original and continuing work of creation. This dynamic movement progresses from envisioning to actualizing, and the impulse that powers that movement is the inclination to continue the pattern of work in creation that God began. With the events of the fall, that pattern remains, but that inclination is now affected by sin, as shame is now part of human experience. Where there was only an inclination to openness and truth, one now has an inclination to deceive and hide.

Thus, culture as a consequence of choice is the result of God's inclination to express the nature of the Trinity in creation. This nature includes what God envisions for creation, which is then actualized in creation. The same inclination to move from envisioned to actualized was given to man as those made in the image of the Triune God. As God's nature has not changed, the impulse to create behind that dynamic movement in man has not changed, but it has been misdirected by sin. Before the fall, that inclination was pressing man and woman to fill and subdue, name and have dominion under God's purpose and design. After the fall, the effect of shame now presses them to withdraw and hide, going astray after an order that seems right to them, but that is disorder in the plan of God.

Culture as a consequence of choice is not a force of sin, but it is a force within humanity that has been acted upon by sin. And, since it can be acted upon by sin, it also can be acted upon by the gospel.

CHAPTER 4

CUTLURE AS PRECURSOR TO THE GOSPEL

Introduction

Culture is the consequence of choice. In this sense, what one describes as culture captures the process by which those created in God's image actualize what one can envision of the world. Choice is the essential quality of this movement from envisioned to actualized, as one can envision different consequences for one's choices and actualize the outcome that best suits one's inclination.

Choosing from inclination is first seen when the physical creation was ordered according to what was envisioned by the Triune God. God created mankind in his image, placing them into creation with the ability to create things from what God had made. As part of that creation, man is the actualization of God's nature in his particular ability to envision God's purpose of the world and then choose to carry that out. Thus, God expressed freedom of inclination first in his choice to create, and subsequently in giving mankind the ability to create in the same way he had. But man and woman fell into sin. The serpent's temptation revealed their inclination to place themselves at the center of the order of creation. The consequence of this choice was shame, revealed in mankind's inclination to hide from God and each other. This disorders creation, yet God still affirmed man and woman in their roles as those who were chosen by him to continue the work of ordering creation. Thus, the means to establish order from non-order is maintained, even while disorder is established as a new state of creation.

The pattern of envision to actualization expressed in moving from non-order to order is necessary to understand and apply the gospel, seen in the person and work of Christ and carried into the life of the church.

The Pattern of Culture and the Gospel

Understanding culture as the dynamic movement between envisioning and actualizing allows one to recognize culture as a pattern in process, rather than a specific type of product or result. So too, God's revelation of the gospel depends upon mankind's ability to envision the spiritual reality of creation, sin, and redemption that is presented in Scripture and apply it in actualized, concrete ways. Without moving from envisioned to actualized the Christian faith does not exist. That is not to say that without culture the gospel does not exist, but rather that culture is the means by which the gospel described in the New Testament is comprehend as the actualized expression of the Christian life and the church.

Genesis1-3 provides the themes which are the basis of culture as a consequence of choice. The condition of culture before the fall is expressed in the rest God enjoyed at the completion of creation and the rest man and woman enjoyed together upon the discovery of God's perfect fit with each other. This is a physical expression of God's spiritual Trinitarian nature, expressed in his creation. God chose to give mankind a particular mandate to have dominion over this creation, which goes beyond the ability to create after their kind. As such, mankind must envision things that are not yet created and work to bring them about.

Of particular note is the role of speaking in this work. Man named the animals (Gen 2:19) as God has named the aspects of creation (Gen 1:5, 10). But based on the inclination of his desires, he knows something is missing, the absence of which God describes as "not good" (2:18). When God creates woman from the man, the plurality of being in the Trinity is now expressed in man as male and female (Gen 1:27) and man's first recorded speech is his statement of the goodness of the woman, giving her that name. Now mankind can rest in their completeness (Gen 2:25) as God rested in the completeness of his work (Gen 2:1-3).

Consequences of the Choice to Sin

Mankind's rest in the completeness, and their delight in the goodness of God's creation is questioned by the serpent in the fall. The serpent suggests that the world, as God has envisioned it, is not best and that God cannot be trusted. The man and woman must act to bring about the world they envision in which they are the center. They are not coerced into disobeying, rather act on the inclination of their hearts. But that inclination has now been set in a new direction by a new vision of their role in creation. By choosing to act on this false vision, man and woman unleash the consequences of that choice. They, in effect, make this vision reality by choosing to act upon it, forsaking the ordered world as God had created it.

Sin enters the world by means that have been established by God's good creation. The serpent is a creature God had made (3:1, 1:24) and the is tree part of God's good creation (3:3, 2:9). Mankind's ability to act based on what he envisions is part of his mandate (1:28, 2:5) and his ability to speak and establish meaning for those realities is part of the work God has given him (2:20). Man's and woman's freedom to act according to their inclination has been expressed in their choice to be together (2:23-25). Thus, the means by which man and woman will feel the consequences of their choice to disobey God are already in place and the fall will redirect the momentum of creation.

This dynamic mechanism ensures that the consequences of sin will be immediate and widespread. Graham Cole notes that "the cascading consequence of the primordial disobedience are manifold. The rupture is not simply an external one between God and humankind, but an internal one. There is shame at one's nakedness. Consciousness of the other has become self-consciousness. The first pair has entered the dungeon of self-preoccupation."[1] This "dungeon of self-preoccupation" is an apt description of the effect of the shame of sin and is the world that man and woman have

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[1] Graham Cole, *The God Who Became Human: A Biblical Theology of Incarnation* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2013), 41.

created by their choice to sin. Now, instead of constantly looking outward to God and his vision of the world, mankind instead looks to himself.

While this shift dramatically affects the outcome of the movement from envision to actualization, the means by which that process is carried out remains unchanged. And, even while God is establishing the permanence of this cursed outcome, hope is held out that it will be restored to its rightful focus. Thus, actualizing something that previously was only envisioned is the means by which creation fell into sin, and envisioning something that does not yet exist is the means by which an expectation is created that creation can be liberated from that sin.

Envisioning and Actualization in Romans 1

The New Testament traces this pattern of envisioning to actualization throughout the gospel of Jesus Christ. Examining some key passages which explain the gospel reveals the dynamic movement from envision to actualization, thereby establishing culture as a consequence of choice is a precursor to the gospel.

Romans 1 gives evidence of the ongoing effects of the fall on mankind by describing the effects of sin on mankind's vision of the world. In doing so, Paul argues for the clarity of God's nature expressed through his act of creation (Rom 1:20). Yet the relationship to creation goes further, as Stott notes the parallel themes between Romans 1:20-23 and Genesis 1-3,[2] and Schreiner comments that Paul is making an "argument from the created order."[3] Buy arguing from "the creation of the world" (1:20), Paul is drawing on the movement from envisioned to actualized, and while the knowledge of God from creation is not saving knowledge, it is an argument for the universality of sin.[4]

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[2] *John Stott, The Message of Romans: God's Good News for the World,* 2nd ed.*,* The Bible Speaks Today, (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2001), 70.

[3] Thomas R. Schreiner, *Romans*, 2nd ed., Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament, (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2018), 103.

[4] Ibid., 92.

Knowledge of the "Invisible" God

The argument Paul makes for the universality of sin asserts that humans are accountable for their unrighteous suppression of the truth (1:18). Paul asserts the knowledge of God through the created order is germane in all people.[5] Sin suppresses the knowledge of God's "invisible attributes" (v. 20), therefore mankind must have the ability to know what cannot be seen.

Schreiner expresses this view when he comments on verse 19, that "God has stitched his greatness in the fabric of the human mind so that his majesty is instinctively recognized when one views the created world."[6] Stott presses beyond this when he comments, "The creation is a visible disclosure of the invisible God, an intelligible disclosure of the otherwise unknown God. Just as artists reveal themselves in what they draw, paint and sculpt, so the Divine Artist has revealed himself in his creation."[7] For Stott, this intelligible disclosure is both an affirmation of God's character as moving from envisioned to actualized and an affirmation of mankind's ability to recognize this movement. Stott affirms that mankind can do the same, as he draws on the human activity of moving from envisioned to actualized in art as an illustration of God's work in creation. Thus, Romans 1:18-20 affirms that mankind's ability to envision spiritual realities remains intact after the fall, as people are justly held accountable for failing to comprehend God in creation.

The consequences of mankind's inability to comprehend how God has revealed himself in creation draws upon on the inclination to move from non-order to order. Paul states that the fundamental effect of sin has been a darkening of the human mind (Rom 1:21). This is parallel to the serpent's misdirection of Adam and Eve's

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[5] Schreiner, *Romans*, 93.

[6] Ibid., 94.

[7] Stott, *The Message of Romans*, 73.

impulse to order by promising them wisdom (Gen 3:6), whereas instead they became fools (Rom 1:22). Richard Lints, in his work *Identity and Idolatry: The Image of God and Its Inversion,* comments on Romans 1:21, "The seat of human desire is now settled in darkness."[8]

Paul draws on the language of darkness and emptiness describing the non-order in Genesis 1:2 before the ordering of creation to explain this spiritual disorder.[9] Since the fall, even as mankind continues the ordering work of creation, everything is affected by their darkened imaginations.[10] Idolatry is the product of that darkened vision of himself at the center of the world, and his sin actions in response to that vision continue to disorder the world. His impulse to move non-order to order is misdirected by the darkness of what he envisions for creation. Thus, while seeking to order the world around himself, he creates spiritual disorder through his idolatry.

As those created in the image of God, humans are capable of comprehending God as a spiritual reality and taking action based on what they envision. Although this ability was corrupted by sin, the process by which people's concept of God is expressed in their inclinations and actions remains intact. Humanity is held accountable for those consequences, and Paul justifies that accountability by referencing the movement from envisioned to actualized in the work of God in creation. Since man's view of God was darkened, so was his ability to act on the vision God had for his creation. Thus, culture as a consequence of choice is foundational to understanding fallen creation the disordering effects of the fall on the image of God in mankind.

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[8] Richard Lints, *Identity and Idolatry: The Image of God and Its Inversion* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2015), 111. The role of idolatry as the expression of our misdirected vision of the world is beyond the scope of this work. But, in developing his argument, Lints makes many helpful observations to the functioning of envisioned to actualized.

[9] Light and darkness as themes will be developed later as part of the examination of the movement from envisioned to actualized in other passages in the New Testament.

[10] Lints, *Identity and Idolatry*, 109.

The Incarnation as Envisioned to Actualized in John 1

Since culture as a consequence of choice is an expression of the image of God, the ability to discern spiritual things is dependent on the ability to see spiritual realities. The importance of envisioning to actualization in the image of God is revealed in the definitive image of God which is Christ Jesus.

The starting point for culture as a consequence of choice is the creation of world, introduced in Genesis 1:1. When one encounters the parallel statement in John 1:1, one should expect to find parallel applications to the understanding of culture. The act of creating the world set the parameters of culture. This movement from the spiritual nature of the triune God to the physical reality of the cosmos is accomplished by God speaking, and now the reader is reintroduced to that creative act in the person of Jesus Christ, who "was in the beginning with God" (John 1:1).

Christ At Creation

Christ is identified as "the Word" (John 1:1), who is shown to be the means by which God creates completing the description of the role of the Trinity in creation.[11] Noting the connection between John 1, Genesis 1 and Ps 33:6, Carson notes that "God simply speaks, and his powerful word creates," becoming "the agent of creation." [12] The abundance of Old Testament references to God speaking lead Carson to conclude, "God's 'Word' in the Old Testament is his powerful self-expression in creation, revelation and salvation, and the personification of that 'Word' makes it suitable for John to apply it as a title to God's ultimate self-disclosure, the person of his own Son."[13] Thus, Christ as the Word is the same means by which God expresses his nature in the act of creating the cosmos.

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[11] D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 114.

[12] Ibid., 115.

[13] Ibid., 116.

Christ as The Light of Men

The second connection John makes between God's creative work and the person of Christ is describing him as the Light. John 1:3-5 describes the Word making "all things" (1:3), which includes life itself, and life is represented as light (1:4). This prompts Carson to interpret the phrase "the life was the light of men" in 1:4 to mean, "The self-existing life of the Word was so dispensed at creation that it became the light of the human race."[14]

Against the backdrop of Christ's role in creation, the implications of the creation of light become clearer. The non-ordered state of the cosmos is described by "darkness" (Gen 1:2), and the first word spoken by God is "let there be light" (Gen 1:3). Carson notes, "At no other time other than creation could it more appropriately be said, *The light shines in the darkness*."[15] John's reference to the creation of light precedes his theme of light and darkness (1:6-18), which throughout the fourth gospel will explain how his own creation would "not know him" (1:10), and his own people "not receive him" (1:11).[16] Carson concludes, "John grounds the moral responsibility of the race in the doctrine of creation."[17] Thus, John draws on the human ability to comprehend the movement from spiritual to physical to envision who Christ is and what he must actualize on earth.

The argument in John 1 asserts that the ability to reason from what one envisions in the spiritual realm to how one acts in the physical realm is such that one's failure to comprehend God is evidence of one's self-centered vision of the world. This is the same logic that Paul employs in Romans 1, yet John also points to the ongoing process of coming to understand the light as the essence of one's salvation. Thus, the

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[14] Carson, *John*, 119.

[15] Ibid. Italics his.

[16] Ibid., 120.

[17] Ibid., 124.

ability to move from envisioned to actualized is foundational not only to comprehend the darkness of one's sin, but to hope there is salvation from that sin in the light of Christ.

Christ as Eternal to Temporal

The Word made flesh (1:14) is John's significant contribution to the understanding of God and his relationship with creation.[18] But the spiritual implications of the significance of the person of Christ for one's understanding of culture are still to be developed. Graham Cole, in *The God Who Became Human,* notes the movement of John's prologue "begins in eternity with the Word, and climaxes with this Word's becoming flesh in time."[19] Cole, quoting Michael Williams, observes "'The Word became flesh not in some abstract realm of truth where only minds exist, but in history.'"[20] Thus, the move from spiritual to physical is also from eternal to temporal.

This adds the dimension of time to the discussion of what the incarnation represents in what one can envision about God to what is actualized in Christ. The combination of the physical and temporal brings Cole to conclude, "The abstract Logos now bears a personal name. The implication is staggering and well articulated by R.T. France: 'Now Jesus, as the Word made flesh, is a thoroughly concrete embodiment of the very nature of God.'"[21] This concrete embodiment of Christ in the incarnation is the ultimate expression of the movement from spiritual to physical, eternal to temporal in creation. At creation, God expressed his eternal nature in a temporal cosmos by speaking non-order into order. Christ, as the Word of creation, "has made him known" (1:18). This is "the supreme revelation," Carson observes, surpassing even the revelation of God

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[18] Cole, *The God Who Became Human*, 107.

[19] Ibid.

[20] Ibid., 149.

[21] Ibid., 108.

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through Scripture.[22] Thus, the incarnate Christ is the fullest actualization of what humans can envision about God.

The incarnation is inseparable from the gospel, both in its central role in the history of the events and in the theology of what the gospel claims. The incarnation is also the confluence of several themes which are central to the discussion of culture. Not only is Christ the Word of creation who is now made flesh, he is the promised Messiah, whom Israel had envisioned would actualize the kingdom of God in their midst. In Christ is the promise of one's ability to actualize, or take hold of, what is spiritual and eternal while still in one's physical and temporal state.

John 1:1-18 presents Christ as the supreme revelation of God, a physical actualization of the spiritual nature of the Trinity. John intentionally draws the parallel between creation and the incarnation, in particular identifying Christ as the "Word" by which God created and the "Light" God created by that "Word." The one who is the hope of salvation is presented as the ultimate actualization of the Triune God, and the work he must accomplish is described in terms of disorder to reorder that parallel the work of creation in moving from non-order to order. Thus, culture as a consequence of choice is foundational to comprehend the person of Christ in the gospel and the work that person must accomplish through the gospel.

Christ as Dynamic Movement in Colossians 1

In the Epistle to the Colossians, the work Christ accomplishes during his time on earth is carried forward into the life of the church. In his message, Paul is particularly concerned with false teaching and its effect on the spiritual life of believers.[23] While one cannot identify the content of the false teaching, commentators agree it was "appealing to

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[22] Carson, *John*, 127. See Heb 1:3.

[23] Douglas J. Moo, *The Letters to the Colossians and to Philemon*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 48.

spiritual beings, visions and rules."[24] As such, Colossians provides a framework for how what one envisions of God's purpose is actualized in what one knows of Christ and how one responds to his atoning work for us.

Christ as the Knowledge of God

Christ is fully part of the spiritual nature of the Trinity and the highest expression of the divine nature of God in creation. As such, he uniquely represents the dynamic movement between envisioned and actualized. Unlike the prologue to John, Paul's Epistle to the Colossians speaks of the resurrection and ascension of Christ as already accomplished (2:12, 3:1). Thus, in Paul's portrayal of the risen and ascendant Christ he gives greater insight into how what one envisions of Christ is actualized in one's life in Christ.

Paul begins with a prayer that the believers in Colossae would be "filled with the knowledge of his will" (Col 1:9) and that this knowledge would bear "fruit in every good work" (1:10-14). This is an argument from what one envisions of "knowledge" to how one actualizes that as "work." Paul draws on the role of Christ in creation to explain how this movement from envisioned to actualized will be lived out.[25] Schreiner observes that verse 15 "harkens back to Genesis 1:27" and the creation of Adam and Eve,[26] and identifying Christ as the image of God points to the purpose of his incarnation. Lints comments, "The claim that Jesus is the 'image of the invisible God' (Col 1: 15) is the means to establish that God is renewing, restoring or redeeming his people into his image. As the image of God, Jesus came to 'reconcile to himself all things.'"[27] Beyond

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[24] Moo, *Colossians and Philemon*, 60.

[25] Robert A. Peterson, *Salvation Accomplished by the Son: The Work of Christ* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2011), 489.

[26] Thomas R. Schreiner, *Paul, Apostle of God's Glory in Christ: A Pauline Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2001), 155.

[27] Lints, *Identity and Idolatry*, 120.

asserting there is no power than can prevent him from accomplishing his purpose of redemption,[28] Paul is revealing what the outcome, or objective of that mission will be, which is the renewal of the image of God in creation.

That purpose for renewing creation is identified at the end of verse 16, where Paul states "All things were created through and for him." This shift is indicated by the change in the word "created" to the perfect tense from the aorist used to state "all things were created" (1:16).[29] McKnight observes that "Christ is the agent . . . and the teleological aim towards which all of creation is heading."[30] This reveals a parallel between creation as movement from non-order to order and salvation as movement from disorder to reorder. Thus, what God did in the initial ordering of creation through Christ anticipates Christ's role as reordering creation through redemption.

Christ as Dynamic Movement

Creation simultaneously exists in a state of non-order, order, disorder and reorder.[31] The ongoing work of moving non-order to order in creation is entrusted to mankind. Disorder has come into that work because of sin, but God has begun the work of reordering creation through the work of Christ.[32] This describes a creation in tension and Paul asserts that no one is capable of bringing stability other than Christ, in whom "all things hold together" (1:17). Moo identifies how this phrase "seems to look both directions,"[33] and describes Christ as both fully part of the spiritual world (1:16) and the

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[28] Scot McKnight, *The Letter to the Colossians*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2018), 150.

[29] Moo, *Colossians and Philemon*, 124. In a footnote, Moo states that the change likely "signals a greater emphasis in the last part of the verse on the enduring state of creation."

[30] McKnight, *Colossians*, 152.

[31] See chap. 3 for this discussion.

[32] Moo, *Colossians and Philemon*, 137. Moo specifically connects the "already, not yet" of the Kingdom to Col 1:20.

[33] Ibid., 125.

spiritual community on earth, which is the church (1:18).

The implications of this for creation are clear. Harris notes, "What Christ has created he maintains in permanent order, stability, and productivity."[34] And Moo comments, "the universe owes its continuing coherence to Christ."[35] The stability of the created world in its dynamic movement from non-order to order, and disorder to reorder, is anchored in the unique person of Christ. This relationship encompasses the spiritual and physical, eternal and temporal.

The uniqueness of Christ provides "continuing coherence" to the universe which draws together the temporal, physical realm and the eternal, spiritual realm. In addition to the spiritual powers listed in verse 16, this is stated in verse 19, where Paul asserts, "In him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell." Moo notes that "was pleased" includes the idea of choice,[36] meaning God was acting on his inclination. Schreiner states, "God in his sovereignty chose to have all his fullness reside in Jesus."[37] This is a perfection in the movement from envisioned to actualized that human creativity cannot reach, and in that perfection, it pleases God. Thus, the freedom of inclination of a spiritual, eternal God, chooses Christ to be the expression of his nature in the physical, temporal creation.

Dynamic Movement in the Atonement

Christ's unique role in holding together heaven and earth means that he alone can "reconcile to himself all things" (1:20). While the object of "himself" has been

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[34] Murray J. Harris, *Colossians and Philemon*, in *The Exegetical Guide to the Greek New Testament*, vol. 12, ed. Andreas J. Kostenberger (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2010), 47.

[35] Moo, *Colossians and Philemon*, 125.

[36] Ibid., 131. See footnote on p. 132.

[37] Schreiner, *Paul, Apostle of God's Glory in Christ*, 178.

interpreted as God,[38] or Christ,[39] the peace this reconciliation creates is the same. McKnight observes the parallel between the alienation and hostility of 1:21 and the animosity from "the fall and original sin (Gen 3),"[40] drawing in the lost state of rest of Genesis 2. This "expresses the fullness of God's redemptive design,"[41] not by teaching universal salvation, but cosmic renewal.[42]

The action of this renewal is accomplished by Christ, not in some cosmic realm, but "by the blood of his cross" (1:20). McKnight draws such an implication forward from physical creation to life itself, and concludes, "Paul sees cosmic, universal unity, not in an idea or personification (Word, Wisdom), but in a person."[43] This statement is expanded in 1:22 by the phrase "in his body of flesh by his death," which emphasizes "the physicality of that act."[44] Moo notes Paul's use of "flesh" in Colossians refers to "the physical nature of life here on earth,"[45] and the previous status of that relationship to God is expressed in verse 21 as "alienated and hostile in mind." Thus, in his unique role as fully God and fully man, Christ acted in time in the physical world, and the consequences of that action changed one's eternal, spiritual relationship to God.

Reordering of Creation in the Atonement

The parallels to the consequences of sin in Genesis 3 are noteworthy. Man and woman hide from God, blame each other, and are at enmity with creation (Gen 3:8-20).

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[38] Harris, *Colossians and Philemon*, 50.

[39] Moo, *Colossians and Philemon*, 134.

[40] McKnight, *Colossians*, 164.

[41] Ibid., 167.

[42] Moo, *Colossians and Philemon*, 136.

[43] McKnight, *Colossians*, 153.

[44] Ibid., 175.

[45] Moo, *Colossians and Philemon*, 142.

But in Christ, each of those effects is reversed.[46] Petersen concludes, "Even as the curse was a legal penalty imposed due to Adm's disobedience, so lifting the curse is a penal event owing to the second Adam's obedience."[47] The consequence of the choice made by the first "image of God" plunged his relationship with God and creation into the disorder of darkness of sin and shame. But the hope of reorder is fulfilled in the choice of the second "image of God" to submit to death as the consequence of sin and thus be raised to life. In this act of obedience, Christ made a way for the reordering of all things.

Since cosmic reordering is not universal salvation, some other means must be employed to determine who receives this reconciliation with God. Paul identifies this means with the conditional, "if you continue in the faith" (1:23). This faith is developed in 2:6-12, but Paul describes the life of faith as hope in what believers cannot see (2 Cor 5:7).[48] Believers do not presently "grasp or see" the fulfillment of this hope, but it "rests on the crucified and risen Lord (Rom 4:24-25)."[49]

The faith which sustains the Colossians, and by implication all believers, is choosing to think and act in the created world in light of the change brought about in the spiritual reality of their relationship with God.[50] As Moo concludes, "Paul urges the Colossians to focus on the hope that comes through response to the gospel."[51] Thus, one's ability to envision what is spiritual and then act in the physical is the means by which saving faith sustains one in the hope of the fulfillment of that spiritual reality.

The role of Christ in providing the continuing coherence of the physical

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[46] Moo, *Colossians and Philemon*, 137.

[47] Peterson, *Salvation Accomplished by the Son*, 563.

[48] Schreiner, *Paul, Apostle of God's Glory in Christ*, 272. See also Heb 11:1.

[49] Ibid.

[50] This is accomplished by the work of the Holy Spirit, the theology of which is developed outside of Colossians.

[51] Moo, *Colossians and Philemon*, 145.

creation provides an essential link to the discussion of culture. Christ was the fullest expression of the nature of God in creation. As such, he is the means to reorder creation after the disorder of the fall. His role as redeemer anchors his ongoing role in heaven and on earth, pleasing God by his obedience on the cross. Believer's participation in that redemption is by faith, which Colossians describes as their ability to envision a spiritual reality and then act on that reality in their physical existence. The confidence they have in the outcome is not based on their ability to do this successfully, but on the stability Christ has brought to the relationship between the divine and created realities. Thus, Christ is the means by which what one envisions of one's spiritual reality can be acted upon in creation, with spiritual and eternal consequences.

The Church as Reordered Culture in Colossians 3

Culture as a consequence of choice is also evident in the expression of the gospel in the life of the church, the community of people who, by faith, have believed the gospel. This relationship is visible in the connection between Christ and the church in Romans 1, and the church as the expression of Christ in Romans 3.

The Church Parallel to Creation

Christ, risen and ascendant to the "right hand of God" (3:1), holds all creation together (1:17), but his presence on earth is seen uniquely as "the head of the body, the church" (1:18). Identifying Christ as "head" of the church (1:18) means he "grants and sustains life, creating a new kind of unity among the members.[52] Harris states that "he is . . . its originating cause and the source of its life."[53] This is distinct from his sustaining role in all creation,[54] but the way he gives spiritual life to the church is parallel to the way

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[52] McKnight, *Colossians*, 156.

[53] Harris, *Colossians and Philemon*, 48.

[54] McKnight, *Colossians*, 158.

he gives physical life to creation.[55]

The work Christ did at creation in bringing order from non-order prepares one to understand the move from disorder to reorder that he will do in the church. In describing this parallel, and the implications for redemption on creation, Cole comments, "Chaos has thus given way to cosmos. The process has been an orderly one."[56] Thus the non-order to order of creation is paralleled by the disorder to reorder of redemption expressed in the church.

Redemption Envisioned and Actualized

This work of redemption in the church is accomplished through a renewed ability to move from what one envisions to what one actualizes, the implications of which are now developed in detail in Romans 3. The chapter begins with a call to "focus on the new, heavenly dimension of reality that has dawned with the coming of Christ."[57] Paul expects his readers to take specific action based on the reality he has articulated in chapter 1.[58] He commands, "seek the things that are above" (3:1), making believer's "heavenly status the guidepost for all our thinking and acting,"[59] As the phrase, "set your minds" suggests a "habit of the mind,"[60] this vision of believer's renewed relationship with God will result in an inclination to act in a way consistent with that vision.

The contrast in this new focus is indicated by "earthly" (γῆ), used four times in this letter. The first two, in verses 16 and 20 of chapter 1, describe the whole cosmos as "heaven and earth,"[61] yet in chapter 3, "earth" is contrasted to "things above." This is a

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[55] Moo, *Colossians and Philemon*, 126.

[56] Cole, *The God Who Became Human*, 28.

[57] Moo, *Colossians and Philemon*, 243.

[58] Moo, *Colossians and to Philemon*, 244.

[59] Ibid., 246.

[60] Ibid., 248.

[61] McKnight, *Colossians*, 151. McKnight notes that "heaven and earth" in v. 16 is in parallel

"cosmological parallel to "flesh" (2:11, 13, 23)," conveying that "how one thinks, shapes how one lives."[62] Paul is arguing that envisioning the world in a self-focused way will result in actual behaviors consistent with that focus (Col 3:5-9).[63]

Instead of those self-focused behaviors, Paul states his desire for his readers in 9b and following,[64] drawing on the common NT metaphor to "put off the old self" and "put on the new self."[65] Moo concludes, "Adam, and all that he represents, no longer dictates our thinking or our behavior."[66] The new self is described as "being renewed in the image of its creator" (3:10) as opposed to the image of Adam as the fallen creation. This new image echoes 1:15 and is created by God in those who come to faith through Christ.[67] The effect is that this new self is being shaped "into the image of God, which is Christ himself."[68] Against the background of Genesis 1:26-27, Moo concludes that "redemption is itself . . . a 'new creation.'"[69]

As believers are a "new creation," their new "identity emerges . . . from Christ."[70] This is an expression of how believers now envision their reconciled relationship with God. The extent of this reconciliation is stated in Paul's conclusion, that "Christ is all and in all" (3:11), showing that the "polarities of worldly existence are overcome in Christ, . . . the one in whom and through whom all things 'hold together'"

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with "visible and invisible."

[62] McKnight, *Colossians*, 293.

[63] Moo, *Colossians and Philemon*, 253.

[64] Ibid., 265.

[65] Ibid., 267.

[66] Ibid., 268.

[67] McKnight, *Colossians*, 311.

[68] Ibid., 311.

[69] Moo, *Colossians and Philemon*, 269.

[70] McKnight, *Colossians*, 312.

(1:17).[71] Thus, the culture of the church is formed by the actualized choices made by those who have seen a new vision of their identity in Christ.

Building on the parallel with creation (Col 1), Paul now draws on creation to provide context for the work of new creation that God is accomplishing in Christ (3:1-11). This new creation is at odds with the "earthly" focus of people's fallen, darkened minds and must be replaced with the vision of believer's new identity in Christ. This is the transition from disorder to reorder, which parallels the movement from non-order to order in creation. Thus, the ability of those created in the image of God to move from what they envision to what they create through their choices is central to the concept of salvation and life in the Christian community of the church.

The Actions of A New Identity

The Colossians are now commanded to live in ways that express to each other the new reality of their relationship with God. These commands are motivated by the impulse to reorder after recognizing the disorder of sin. Moo comments on Paul's opening prayer, that "the Colossians are to continue to do what the gospel has already accomplished among them."[72] The creative impulse to move from non-order in Genesis 2 is reflected in the impulse to move from disorder to reorder in Romans 3. Specifically, Romans 3:12-17 identifies how the key characteristics of how the nature of God are revealed in the new creation of the church.

Having "put off" the old identity, Paul continues by describing the derivative actions that believers are to "put on" as a result of this change in focus.[73] The list of positive virtues (3:12-13) concludes with the unifying virtue of "love, which binds

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[71] Moo, *Colossians and Philemon*, 273.

[72] Ibid., 96.

[73] Ibid., 273.

everything together" (3:14).[74] Love is the evidence for inclination of choice between Christ and the Father, expressed in the choice to send the Son to die for a fallen creation (John 14:31).[75] Thus, the church reflects the unity of the Trinity when it is unified by love in its work of reordering its relationships with one another.

The biblical concept of peace begins with the rest God and mankind enjoyed after the work of creation. As God marked the completeness of his creation with rest on the seventh day, so the church is to structure its reordering work toward the Lord's Day and to protect and celebrate the peace it shares (3:15). Thus, the experience of being in a community shaped by the vision of being reconciled with God reflects the state of order in creation before the fall.

The concept of verbal communication is central to God's work to move from what is envisioned to what is made, seen first as the means by which God creates (Gen 1:3) and then carried through into man's role in creation (Gen 2:19). As God ordered the created world by the Word which is Christ, so the church must bring reorder through the word about Christ. Moo observes that Paul uses the phrase "word of Christ" (3:16) "to summarize the authentic teaching about Christ and his significance."[76] McKnight concludes that "word" refers to verbal communication, stating Jesus "is the expressed communication of the Father . . . about God's plan for the world and its redemption through the Son."[77] Thus, the means by which the community of Christ is formed reflects the movement from envisioned to actualized by which God formed creation.

Paul concludes this section by commanding his readers to bringing every word and deed into submission to Christ (3:17), echoing his assertion of the uniqueness of

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[74] McKnight, *Colossians*, 325.

[75] See chap. 2 for this discussion.

[76] Moo, *Colossians and Philemon*, 286.

[77] McKnight, *Colossians*, 329.

Christ as the one in whom "all things hold together" (1:17). McKnight comments that "everything has been transformed in union with Christ."[78] Moo observes, "The totality of our existence must now be lived out with him constantly in mind."[79] Lints states, "The claim that Jesus is the image of the invisible God in Colossians 1 is followed by the description in Colossians 3 that Christ is the very life of the church, and that the ecclesial community thereby is the image of Christ. The church now makes visible that which will only later become visible in Christ at the eschaton."[80] As a result of the vision of a renewed relationship with God, the church is now the unique place in which that new reality can be seen. Thus, the nature of God in Christ is given expression in a unique way in the church.

Colossians 3 draws upon the theological foundation of Christ and his unique ability to make peace between God and sinful creation as the basis of choosing to live in a new way. One's ability, by faith, to envision this new reality makes it possible to choose to act in ways that express that reality. This is uniquely visible in the church as the body of Christ and the community of those who are being recreated in his image. The church is made up of those whose choices actualize the new creation the envision as a consequence of their faith in Christ. As such, the church is the evidence of God's work of reordering after the disorder of the fall. Thus, the culture of the church is a consequence of the choices of its members when they reflect the relationships of the Triune God.

Conclusion

The thesis of this chapter is that pattern of envision to actualization moving from non-order to order is necessary to understand and apply the gospel, seen in the

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[78] McKnight, *Colossians*, 334.

[79] Moo, *Colossians and Philemon*, 291.

[80] Lints, *Identity and Idolatry*, 127.

person and work of Christ and carried into the life of the church.

Culture is a consequence of choice, meaning people are able to envision at least one possible outcome for their choices. In making that choice, to some degree, they actualize what they have envisioned in the created world. In this sense, culture is the expression of the movement from envisioned to actualized and it draws its "order, stability and productivity" from the nature of Christ. Although affected by sin, individuals are still able to move from what he or she envisions to what her or she actualizes through the choices he or she makes. That movement is reinforced in everyday experience by what one experiences as culture. Culture is visible in the consequence of individuals choices to order the non-ordered world.

The ability to understand and believe the gospel depends on one's ability, with the aid of the Holy Spirit, to envision what is spiritual and eternal and act on that in the physical and temporal. This ability is the means by which one feels the guilt of one's sin and understand one's need for Christ as one's Savior. When, by faith, one believes that what Christ did in space and time will change one's state in heaven for all eternity, one reorders the world that was disordered in the fall. One's confidence in one's ability to actualize in creation what one envisions to be one's spiritual reality is reinforced by the stability of culture as part of creation. Thus, culture as a consequence of choice is a precursor for the gospel.

CHAPTER 5

THE CONSEQUENCE OF CHOICE

Introduction

Culture has become a buzzword, but it has also come to occupy an important place in in how one sees and understands the world one experiences. Culture is no longer just an academic concept to study from a distance but has become a means by which one attempts to explain real, and often troubling phenomena that affect one's life in tangible ways. And yet, despite this growing influence in the current conversation, the common concept of culture remains outside of the parameters of biblical theology.

Culture is increasingly being referenced within the church as believers wrestle to explain the challenges of the current time and apply biblical solutions to those problems. In a brief survey of what has being written about culture, authors often import a definition of culture from the academic sphere into the biblical conversation. This is constructive to a degree in that such a definition allows these authors to speak of culture more precisely. But sometimes culture is described as part of a biblical solution in a way that exceeds what an academic definition can support.

The efforts to address issues related to culture would be aided by a biblically functional definition of culture with which to frame the relationship between Scripture and what people experience as culture.

Thesis Statement

This thesis presents a biblical definition of culture as a consequence of choice, providing a framework to harmonize the existing conversations about culture, and offering a perspective on God's purpose for culture as a precursor to the gospel.

Conclusion: A Biblical Definition of Culture

Culture is a consequence of choice. What is described as culture is the cumulative effect of mankind's ability to choose based on what individuals envision a more desirable world to be. The ability to choose is a reflection of God's freedom of inclination expressed in mankind made in his Triune image. The pattern of choosing among the members of the Trinity moves from non-order to order in the pattern of creation. That pattern is transferred to man in the garden before the fall.

With the entry of sin and shame into the world, the vision of God at the center of creation is replaced by a vision centered on man. As a consequence of his choice, mankind's view of God and himself was darkened. This introduced disorder into creation, affecting mankind's ability to fulfill the purpose God had for him within creation. Yet God offers the hope of a reordered creation through the unfolding promise of a Savior.

The gospel centers on the person of Christ as the complete image of God and the means by which God created the world. Christ is the fullest actualization of the nature of God, and the work he must accomplish moves from disorder to reorder in conjunction with the work from non-order to order in creation. Christ's unique place in both the Trinity and creation means he alone can act in creation to change the spiritual reality, and His physical death on the cross changed the nature of believers' relationships with God. How believers see the world is changed when they envision that new reality by faith. Thus, the ability given by the Holy Spirit to envision, and then actualize a new life in Christ is the means by which saving faith sustains the hope of a new spiritual reality.

The movement from non-order to order in creation is related to the movement from disorder to reorder in the choices of believers and given its fullest expression in the church. These actions are animated by a believer's inclination toward the reordered vision of their relationship with God. The church is the unique place in which the fullest expression of that new reality can be seen. When the community of believers acts together in response to that vision, they express the unity of the Trinity.

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Culture is the consequence of individuals' choices to bring order from non-order. Those choices are expressed as a person actualizes the world he envisions, either ordered around himself, or ordered by God. The pattern of creation in Scripture moves from non-order to order, and the message of the gospel reflects that pattern, moving from a world disordered by sin to the fulfillment of a reordered new creation. Those created in the image of God are innately familiar with this function of culture, and this familiarity facilitates the move from disorder to reorder in response to the gospel. Thus, culture as a consequence of choice is a precursor to the gospel.

The Contribution of This Thesis

The definition of culture as a consequence of choice provides a framework to harmonize the existing conversations about culture since the importance of choice is part of the discussion about culture in the authors surveyed. In addition, this definition offers a perspective on God's purpose for culture as a precursor to the gospel through describing the innate sense in which people move from what they envision to what they choose to actualize. The passages surveyed in the New Testament move from the vision of Christ and believer's new identity in him to the actions that appropriately express that identity through the choices a believer makes.

The act of choosing depends upon one's ability to envision in creation something other than what he has. That ability is a reflection of the nature of the Triune Creator who chose to create the world he envisioned, including creating mankind in his image. Man's fall into sin resulted from making himself the center of the world he envisioned and actualizing that choice. Christ is the perfect expression of envisioned to actualized, and the movement from non-order to order is related to the movement from disorder to reorder in the gospel. The church is the actualization of the community envisioned by Christ as the fulfillment of his work of salvation. Thus, culture as a consequence of choice is a biblically functional definition of culture.

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The usefulness of this definition can be better understood through a visual representation of the relationship between the movement from non-order to order, and from disorder to reorder. The movement from non-order to order can be represented by a horizontal line which continues beyond the fall as God reaffirmed mankind's role in bringing order. The state of disorder caused by the fall impacts the order of creation, but also brings with it the promise that creation will be caught up in fulfilment of God's purpose of redemption. This arrangement adds a dimension of reordering to the ordering of creation not in view before the fall.

Reorder

Quadrant 3:
Non-ordered creation,
reordered spiritually.

Quadrant 4:
Ordered creation
reordered spiritually.

Non-order

Order

Quadrant 1:
Non-ordered creation,
disordered spiritually.

Quadrant 2:
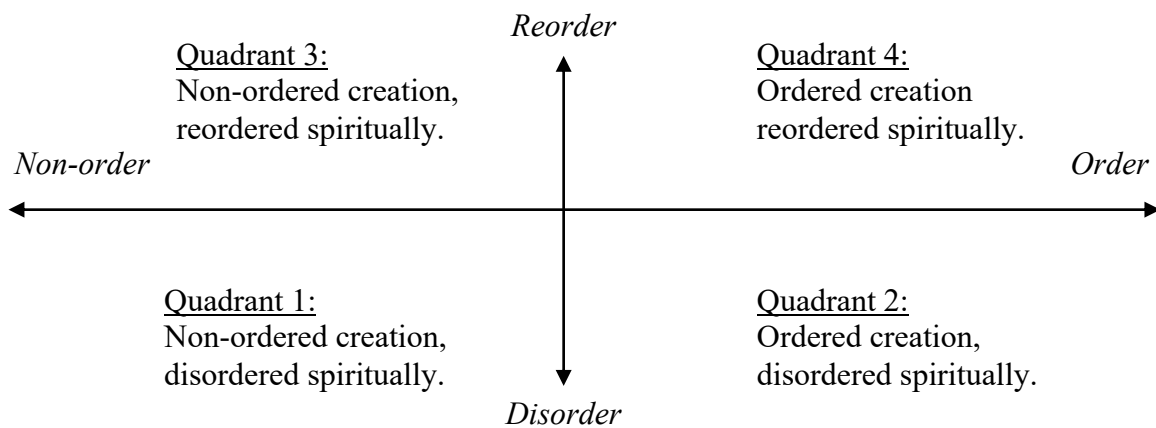Ordered creation,
disordered spiritually.

Disorder

Figure 1. The two axes of non-order to order, and disorder to reorder.

With the arrangement of these two axes, one can now identify the relationship between the two movements and how they relate to each other, creating four general quadrants of cultural influence.

Locating Cultures in the New Testament

These related movements and the quadrants they create can be seen in the various cultures encountered by the spread of the gospel in the New Testament. The combined consequences of the choices of the people in these various regions create a

collective cultural influence into which the choice of the gospel is presented. Various details in the text reveal how the two axes of cultural movement are identified and in which quadrant that culture belongs.

Quadrant 1, for example would fit those described in 2 Peter 2:10-22, as "those who indulge in the lust of defiling passion and despise authority" (2:10). As "irrational animals, creatures of instinct" (2:12), the inclination of these people's hearts is only toward their most base needs. As part of the church (2:20-21) they may have given an outward appearance of the "freedom" of an orderly life (2:19). However, Peter's characterization of their "deceptions" (2:13) and future "darkness" (2:17) are consistent with a disordered faith. In response, Peter encourages his readers to "be diligent to be found by him without spot or blemish" (2:14), reminding them to envision the "new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells" (2 Pet 3:13).
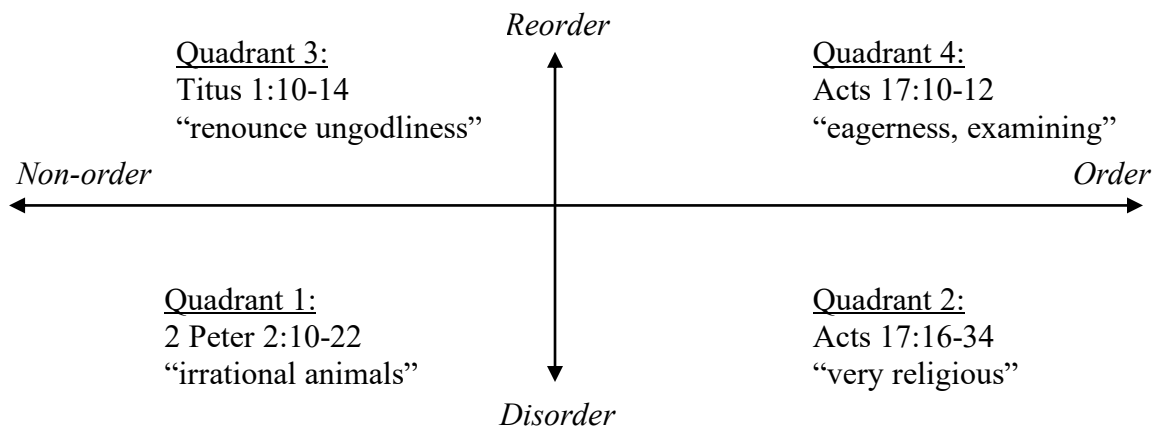

Figure 2. Representative cultures encountered in the New Testament.

Quadrant 2 describes Athens in Acts 17:16-34. Luke describes the Athenian culture as very ordered, since they "would spend their time in nothing except telling or hearing something new" (Acts 17:19-21). Paul acknowledges this order when he

observes, "in every way you are very religious" (17:22). The Athenian culture was highly ordered in its civil affairs, yet it was largely disordered in its knowledge of the true God. Paul recognizes this and uses the order that is present as a precursor to the gospel, referring to the "the unknown god" (17:23) to introduce to them the reordering work of Christ over the disorder of death (17:31-32).

Quadrant 3 could represent the Cretans in Titus 1. Paul quotes one of their own prophets who describes a non-ordered society (Titus 1:12). In contrast to his eloquent reasoning with the Athenians, Paul tells Titus to "rebuke them sharply, that they may be sound in the faith" (1:13). As this command implies, the gospel has begun to take hold as Paul reminds Titus, "I left you in Crete, so that you might put what remained into order" (1:5). The basis of this order is the "hope of eternal life, which God, who never lies, promised before the ages began" (1:2). Titus is to teach "what accords with sound doctrine" (Titus 2:1), proclaiming that "the grace of God has appeared, . . . training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions" (2:11-12). The vision of the fulfillment of God's promise reorders the choices of these believers, helping them live orderly lives in the church and the world (Titus 3:1-2).

Quadrant 4 describes the Bereans, who in in Acts 17:11 are identified as being "more noble than those in Thessalonica; they received the word with all eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so." Luke draws particular attention to "Greek women of high standing" (17:12), implying a type of social order uncommon in the Roman world, and the presence of a synagogue implies a level of preparation for the gospel message (17:10). This noble perspective did not make the Bereans incorruptible however, as the Thessalonians came "agitating and stirring up the crowds" (17:13). The social order and spiritual receptiveness in Berea may have quickly born fruit, but this new spiritual vision was eclipsed for some by a social disruption, as it had been in Thessalonica (17:8).

Implications of Locating Cultures

Such an exercise serves to emphasize that the same gospel is preached in each of these contexts, but with varying approaches. Within each of these cultures, the choice of the gospel, and the consequence of that choice, was framed differently.

For example, with the Athenians in quadrant 2, Paul quotes from one of their "own poets" to press his listeners deeper into their spiritual inquiry (Acts 17:28). But when Paul quotes "a prophet of their own" (Titus 1:12) about the Cretans in quadrant 3, he uses the words to rebuke them. When Paul faces the disruption of the "people and the city authorities" (Acts 17:8) in Thessalonica and Berea, he chooses to move on, leaving the believers in those cities to continue the work of the gospel (17:9). Peter, by contrast does not challenge his readers to confront the "ungodly" (2 Pet 3:7) of quadrant 1, but rather to take comfort in the coming "day of the Lord" when the works done on earth "will be exposed" (3:10).

Conclusion

Culture as a consequence of choice can be viewed on the axes of non-order to order, and disorder to reorder. The non-order to order axis is grounded in creation and relates to the ordering of the physical and social world. The disorder to reorder axis is grounded in the gospel and relates to the reordering of one's relationship with God.

These two axes of movement do not and cannot function independently. Christ entered time and space to die for believer's sins and uniquely joins the spiritual realm to the physical. Because of this, the promise of salvation includes a new heaven and earth, and what Christ accomplished in creation changes believer's status in the new creation. The non-order to order and the disorder to reorder axes form a cultural framework which can help identify the cultural spheres that are formed by culture as a consequence of choice. As such, an awareness of the degree of ordering in the physical and social world is a precursor to effectively proclaiming the reordering power of the gospel.

Viewing the Gospel Through the Cultural Framework

Culture as a consequence of choice is a precursor to the gospel. While the facts and the meaning of the gospel remain unchanged, different entry points into the gospel can be envisioned making new actualizations of the gospel possible. The choice of the gospel is always, "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ" (Acts 16:31), but how that choice is envisioned and actualized in various cultures is influenced by the consequences of choice that have come before the choice to believe on Christ is presented. Some of these patterns of choosing will need to be confronted, as Paul reminds Titus to do in Crete (Titus 1:13). Other patterns of choosing can used to share of the gospel message, as Paul did in Athens (Acts 17:23). Thus, the ability to recognize the ordering effect of previous choices is a significant advantage to how the choice of believing in Christ is proclaimed.

The Current Cultural Framework

Culture functions today in a way that helps categorize and simplify the ever-increasing number and complexity of the choices one faces. It helps individuals and groups function in a world that is constantly providing new and alternative visions of the future and delivering those alternative visions to them with greater ease and clarity. Within this context, the gospel remains a choice, and those who bear responsibility for presenting and interpreting that choice to believers and unbelievers alike should not ignore changes that affect the experience of choosing.

One can place various cultures in this time into similar spheres, and the types of ministry that might be effective in them. For example, some of the neighborhoods of inner cities have suffered under such a societal breakdown, they lack the basic elements of civic order. Such communities would fit quadrant 1, and while there may be an initial openness to the gospel, those ministering in these places must care for these basic needs in order to create opportunities for the reordering effect of the gospel to be seen. By contrast, the culture of the secular academic elite is highly ordered, but also highly resistant to the gospel message, locating it in quadrant 2. Those who desire to share their

faith must establish credibility by excelling within that highly ordered world but must also face the likely consequence of being excluded from that community for identifying with the gospel.

The same framework can be applied to churches. Quadrant 2 would describe liberal congregations which demonstrate a high degree of order, but where the gospel is not preached and the spiritual significance of the sacraments is not honored. Quadrant 3 would describe a church plant which has begun to meet as a small group. The gospel has begun its reordering effect, but the community is still non-ordered in its governance, programs, and facility. Quadrant 4 would describe a mature church, with biblical elders, strong teaching and a developed vision for discipleship, missions and outreach.
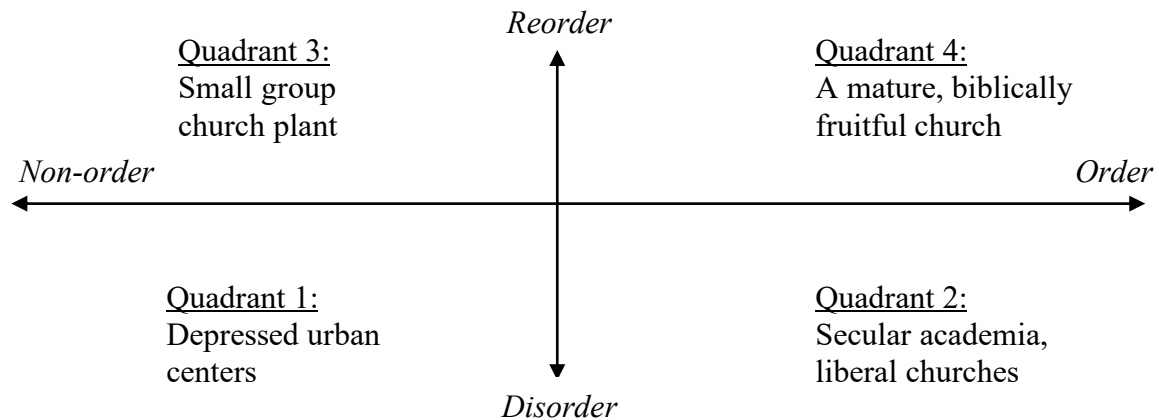

Figure 3. Representative cultures encountered by and in the church today.

This exercise perhaps looks at extreme contexts to make the point that movement towards the biblical vision of a mature, New Testament church is not always in a straight line. From a New Testament perspective, the first priority is preaching the gospel, seeking to move whatever community one is a part of towards reordering. However, movement towards order will also be necessary to facilitate the eventual establishment of a mature church in quadrant 4. Thus, steps must be taken along both

axes in order to reach the objective of a biblical culture as described in Scripture.

The Value of the Cultural Framework

The challenges of these extreme examples are clear in themselves and are not necessarily helped by placing them within a cultural framework. But these extreme contexts serve as a reminder that such situations did not form overnight. The series of changes that result in an educational institution or church embracing liberal theology happen slowly, and over many years. And while an economic situation that affects a community can come about more quickly, the consequences of that choice will play out over a longer period of time in the subsequence choices made by those affected.

The value of the cultural framework may not be in labeling the situation after it has formed, but in recognizing the cumulative consequences which are the result of small choices along the way. The cultural effects of a choice are rarely, if ever immediately apparent, and even if one senses that a culture may be moving in a wrong direction, it is not always clear what to do about it. These small changes are significant because they can reveal the influence of the fall and humanity's resulting inward focus. Thus, if that regressive movement can be identified and arrested, it may be possible to prevent those consequences from becoming established in the culture.

Conclusion

The effects of the fall will pull culture towards disorder both inside and outside the church, and the presence of the gospel through the church can move a larger culture towards reorder. The culture in the church is distinct from what would be encountered as culture elsewhere in society because the movement toward reorder is apparent in the church in a way it is nowhere else. Thus, culture anywhere will have non-order, order and disorder, but only the New Testament church can add the fourth direction of reorder.

Resisting the Cultural Effects of the Fall

The effects of the fall are acting on churches and communities, pressing them towards spiritual disorder and social non-order. This may be through the larger forces of economic or demographic change that break down the existing order in the communities surrounding the churches, or it may be from the effect of consumerism and unbiblical visions of life portrayed through broadcast and social media. It is not uncommon for a church that was once identifiable in quadrant 4 to now find itself regressing to quadrant 3, 2, or even 1. This pressure towards regression creates new challenges for the church and existing models of ministry.

Financially Failing Churches

One particular manifestation of this challenge is when the community that surrounds a church is affected by larger economic forces. As these communities suffer economically, the churches they once supported also suffer. Dayton Ohio is a community that has experienced a series of economic setbacks, recently being identified as a city "that has fallen into economic decline." The Greater Dayton Association of Baptists (GDAB Ohio) has seen the effect of this decline, and a recent report by the Associational Missionary noted "many of our smaller churches are dying."[1] In these cases, an increasing number of pastors are finding it necessary to work outside of the church to supplement their ministry income.[2]

About one third of ministers in the GDAB report relying on outside income,

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[1] Steve Stiglitch, "The Flyer: The Greater Dayton Association of Baptists Newsletter," June 2019, 2, http://www.gdab.org/editor_upload/File/Newsletters/May%20%26%20June%20Newsletter%202019.pdf. The report notes that the overall baptism rate has dropped over 60 percent in the last 25 years, and that 63 of the 99 churches in the association have an average worship attendance of below 100.

[2] "2018 Greater Dayton Association of Baptists Book of Minutes," 127–33, accessed August 31, 2019, http://www.gdab.org/editor_upload/File/2018%20Book%20of%20Minutes%20Website%20Format.pdf. The reported annual budgets for 2018 indicate that few of the 63 churches with an average worship attendance below 100 are able to support a full-time pastor.

although it is suspected that number may be close to half.[3] Specific statistics on

bivocational pastors are not kept by the GDAB, and some bivocational pastors are

hesitant to discuss it because of a stigma of failure.[4] The same estimate of 50%

bivocational pastors is projected for the State Convention of Baptists in Ohio, where the

same concerns exist over the perception of failure.[5] The solution proposed for many of

these communities is church planting, or replanting, also referred to as church

revitalization. Within this context, bivocational ministry is seen as one of the few viable

options for revitalizing failed churches, as funding for full-time vocational church

revitalization is not available.[6]

Bivocational Ministry by Necessity

The challenge of supporting a full-time pastor creates a tension when serving a

church that is failing financially, or when a community is not able to financially support a

church revitalization or church plant.[7] The tension of being bivocational has been

commented on by Brad Brisco, Director of Bivocational Church Planting for the North

American Mission Board. He wrote in a 2017 blog post, "Often the language of bi-

vocational invokes the thought of two distinct vocations. We bifurcate, (divide into two)

or compartmentalize, seeing little, if any, overlap between what a leader does to earn a

living and his or her full-time ministry."[8]

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[3] Steve Stiglich, Associational Missionary, interview with author, Greater Dayton Association of Baptists Office, Dayton, Ohio, June 19, 2019.

[4] Ibid.

[5] Steve Hopkins, The State Convention of Baptists in Ohio, phone interview with author, August 1, 2019.

[6] Ibid. When I asked Hopkins what the greatest need was to develop a bi-vocational model for church revitalization, his response was, "Legitimacy."

[7] Brad Brisco, *Covocational Church Planting*, electronic ed. (Alpharetta, GA: SEND Network, 2019), 26. https://www.namb.net/send-network-blog/ebook-covocational-church-planting/.

[8] Brad Brisco, "Co-Vocational Church Planting: Rethinking Vocation," *NAMB*, September 20, 2017, https://www.namb.net/send-network-blog/covocational-church-planting-rethinking-vocation/.

Brisco observes that this fits within the existing category of "tentmaking," but he associates that term with a decision made out of necessity. Elsewhere he states,

> Historically the phrase *bivocational pastor* has been used to refer to a leader who served a church that was unable to compensate a pastor with a full-time salary. Therefore, the pastor would work a second or third job to supplement what the church could provide. In many cases, this was out of necessity rather than preference. Often the language of "tentmaker" (the Apostle Paul's trade described in Acts 18) has been used to define this type of church planter.[9]

This perspective could contribute to the stigma of failure felt by bivocational pastors in Ohio and warrants a reexamination of the account of Paul's tentmaking.

Paul's Tentmaking Ministry in Corinth

The single reference to Paul's work as a tentmaker is found in Acts 18:3, where he is described as visiting Aquila and Priscilla, "and because he was of the same trade he stayed with them and worked, for they were tentmakers by trade." Some debate exists over exactly what is meant by this term,[10] but the text is clear that Paul worked a trade at the same time as he "reasoned in the synagogue every Sabbath, and tried to persuade Jews and Greeks" (18:4). The implication is that Paul ends this trade, as 18:5 states, "When Silas and Timothy arrived from Macedonia, Paul was occupied with the word," or as the NIV reads, "Paul devoted himself exclusively to preaching."

While this is the only time Paul's particular trade is mentioned, he makes repeated mention of his working with his hands (Acts 20:24, 1 Cor 4:12), and labor and toil that he and his companions "might not be a burden to any of you, while we proclaimed to you the gospel of God" (1 Thess 2:9, see 2 Thess 3:8). Peterson asserts the Greek population in Corinth "tended to despise manual labor, which makes Luke's matter-of-fact record of Paul's practice here unusual."[11]

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[9] Brisco, *Covocational Church Planting*, 20–21.

[10] Gerald F. Hawthorne, Ralph P. Martin, and Daniel G. Reid, eds., *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 1993), 925.

[11] David G. Peterson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand

But Paul makes no attempt to downplay this activity in his own writing. Rather, in 1 Corinthians 9 he makes it the centerpiece of a long defense of his apostleship. In examining this defense, Carson observes, "The charge against Paul, it appears, is that he refuses support ("the right to food and drink" 9:4) from the Corinthians."[12] He goes on to explain that "in much of the first-century Hellenistic world, traveling teachers were assessed, in part, by the amount of money they could take in."[13] Since Paul was refusing to accept this support he was proving his own incompetence, and had "denigrated himself yet further by doing manual labor."[14]

Paul makes it clear in the following verses that he was entitled to earn his living from the ministry of the gospel (9:6-12a), only to assert "But we did not use this right. On the contrary, we put up with anything rather than hinder the gospel of Christ" (9:12b). Carson states, "From Paul's perspective, accepting money from these people while he was planting a church among them might prove detrimental to the integrity of his witness and the credibility of the gospel, so he voluntarily gave up his right to support."[15] He goes on to note that Paul does not impose this standard on all other church planters, as he "insists that in the normal way of things those who work in the religious arena should be supported out of the fruit of their work"[16]

Far from being a tentmaker "out of necessity rather than preference"[17] as Brisco would define the word, Paul chooses to not be supported, "knowing this decision

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Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 508.

[12] D. A. Carson, *The Cross and the Christian Ministry: Leadership Lessons from 1 Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2003), 126.

[13] Ibid.

[14] Ibid.

[15] Ibid., 127.

[16] Ibid.

[17] Brisco, *Covocational Church Planting*, 21.

will cost him an enormous amount of additional time effort, labor, and misunderstanding."[18] Thus, Paul forsook his right to be supported, separating himself from the culture of itinerant teachers in Corinth, with the purpose of more effectively communicating his message and more fully discharging his calling as an apostle.

Covocational Church Planting by Choice

To put this decision back into the cultural framework, Paul perceived the highly ordered nature of Corinthian society, but he also saw the way that social order contributed to the spiritual disorder by surrounding public teachers with socially ambitious patrons. Since his commission was to preach the gospel, he chose to separate himself from that order, the consequence of which was to suffer the derision of those he was trying to reach. But this choice gave him the ability to preach the gospel "free of charge" (9:18), not allowing anyone to deprive him of that boast (9:15). Thus, Paul chooses to work against the movement from non-order to order to create a better context for his ministry of moving people from disorder to reorder through the gospel.

Paul's explanation for his tentmaking ministry raises the possibility that similar decisions could be made today after evaluating the cultural context of a ministry. Although Brisco does not draw on Paul's explanation for his tentmaking, he does observe, "More church planters are *choosing* to plant bivocationally. They are making this decision out of the conviction that bivocational church planting actually provides a more desirable way to plant a new church, rather than on the basis of limited funds."[19]

Brisco discusses the broader challenges faced by church planters today and the need for contextualization in the communities in which they hope to work.[20] He

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[18] Carson, *The Cross and Christian Ministry*, 128.

[19] Brisco, *Covocational Church Planting*, 21. Emphasis his.

[20] Ibid., 26.

encourages church planters to gain "an accurate understanding of the social, economic, physical and spiritual climate" of the community they are targeting, and determine the "methods and models"[21] that would be most effective. He states, "covocational planting provides the opportunity for funding entities to embrace more sustainable church planting practices."[22] This assertion would be consistent with the need to move non-ordered communities toward order within the cultural framework.

The main thrust of Brisco's argument, however, is toward restoring the disciple-making focus of church planting. He states, "Planters need to see themselves more as church planting missionaries, than as pastors starting worship services."[23] Brisco's vision for covocational church planting would overcome the financial barriers to this approach. He asserts that business and ministry callings "are actually interlinked and equal," expressing the relationship between the created and creator. He notes "that in the Incarnation of Jesus, God revealed something about Himself—that He is with and for creation," and by implication, those in the church "are to be with and for the world."[24] Thus, Brisco defines his vision in terms consistent with the cultural grid, the objective of which is to create suitable contexts in which to present the choice of the gospel.

Envisioning Bivocational Ministry

The idea of covocational church planting makes a renewed effort to address the challenges faced by those seeking to plant churches in financially depressed communities. While Brisco speaks in terms that echo the cultural framework, he does not draw his conclusions into ministry contexts other than church planting. This leaves open the question if covocational ministry is appropriate in other ministry contexts. Would this

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[21] Brisco, *Covocational Church Planting*, 88

[22] Ibid., 26.

[23] Ibid., 25.

[24] Ibid., 50.

apply to the small churches in Dayton, Ohio, that are being affected by the changes in the communities around them, and find themselves unable to support a full-time pastor?

In *The Tentmaking Pastor: The Joy of Bivocational Ministry*, Denis W. Bickers describes that very scenario. He looks back over his nearly twenty years of bivocational in ministry at Hebron Baptist Church in Madison, Indiana, and describes his burden for small churches for whom "limited resources and a lack of leadership sometimes limit what they are able to do."[25] Bickers explains that Hebron was once a "strong church with a significant ministry in the rural community in which it is located. The community was forever changed, however, when the army purchased most of its land for a munition testing facility."[26]

When Bickers began serving as a bivocational pastor ten years later, many in the church were close to giving up hope.[27] Throughout the rest of the book, Bickers relates the advantages and the disadvantages of bivocational ministry and answers the range of questions it raises from his own experience. This scenario fits well into a quadrant 4 to quadrant 3 regression, and bivocational ministry appears to have been the solution for Hebron Baptist Church.

Outside economic forces are not the only reality acting upon churches, as sometimes the effects of prosperity can be a greater threat to the spiritual health of a community. For example, a wealthy church could pay its pastor well, but with that generosity might come the expectation that the pastor not preach on passages that would make the wealthy congregants uncomfortable. In such a case, a pastor with an additional source of income might feel somewhat insulated from this pressure, and able to say with Paul he is "preaching the gospel . . . free of charge" (1 Cor 9:18).

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[25] Dennis W. Bickers, *The Tentmaking Pastor: The Joy of Bivocational Ministry* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 2000), 10–11.

[26] Ibid., 62.

[27] Ibid., 9.

Another type of challenge may come in a well-ordered church which is lacking biblically qualified elders and is instead run by deacons and trustees. A pastor who desires to change that structure may well come up against the authority of the very men who set his salary and manage the ministry budget. Despite these leaders' good intentions, their qualifications might come from their secular experience and not their biblical perspective. In such a situation, choosing to be bivocational would lessen that pastor's dependence on their support. In addition, the experience gained by working outside the church could provide insight into their perspective and perhaps that shared experience would create common ground for moving the church forward.[28]

Conclusion

The practical implications of bivocational ministry can be imagined in these scenarios, and the explanation Paul gives for his motive in tentmaking offers a biblical basis for such a choice. But these are difficult decisions to make, and each situation will have unique challenges that must be assessed. Culture as a consequence of choice offers a biblical framework to this discussion, drawing in the themes of God's purpose for creation in conjunction with his purpose in salvation. Thus, the biblical cultural framework offers a more theologically informed way to evaluate various opportunities to counter the regressive cultural effects of sin.

An Opportunity for Positive Cultural Movement

Much of ministry is opposing the effects of sin and the fall on culture, yet the promise of the movement from non-order to order in creation is that such movement is consistent with God's purpose to make all things new (Rev 21:5). This raises the question of whether the current cultural climate has created opportunities for positive cultural

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[28] Bickers, *The Tentmaking Pastor*, 121. Bickers observes the engagement of his leaders and the camaraderie they enjoyed, which he attributes in part to his bivocational role.

movement from non-order to order that can be used in service of the gospel movement from disorder to reorder. The positive and negative effect of communication technology has already been briefly mentioned, and there would be much to discuss around the use of visual media in worship services and social media in other areas of ministry. Such discussions, while interesting and profitable, are beyond the scope of this thesis.

This question can be answered to a degree within the parameters of what has been defined so far as bivocational, or a biblical tentmaking ministry. A primary concern raised about bivocational ministry is the divided nature of such a minister's attention.[29] What vocations in today's cultural climate afford a greater amount of freedom to those serving bivocationally while still providing for the needs of a pastor and his family? As already noted, the effect of the internet and always connected devices on the spiritual health of the church has been mixed, and the effect of the internet on some forms of business in small towns has been negative. But this same technology has created opportunities for small business and entrepreneurship that previously would have required substantial capital investment or proximity to a population center,[30] making these new opportunities more suitable for bivocational pastors.

Starting or owning a business can require a significant outlay of time and energy, and owning a business could result in a greater burden of responsibility and thus a deeper divide of a ministers heart and mind.[31] But there are also significant overlaps between the approach required to start a business, and the mindset of a church planter. These overlaps also apply to a pastor with a reason to consider bivocational ministry.

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[29] Brisco, "Co-Vocational Church Planting: Rethinking Vocation." Bickers devotes chap. 6 to the limitations of time, and the need for balance in work, ministry and life.

[30] George N. Root, "Internet's Effect on the Global Market and Small Business," accessed November 15, 2019, https://smallbusiness.chron.com/internets-effect-global-market-small-business-10019.html.

[31] Bickers, *The Tentmaking Pastor*, 76. After working in a factory, Bickers now owns his own business.

Faith Entrepreneurs

Research into the role of faith in the motivation of some entrepreneurs has identified something that ministry and entrepreneurship have in common, which is the need to envision a more desirable future for a group of people and take steps to actualize that vision. This ability to see opportunities has been studied in the role of religiously motivated entrepreneurs. In a recent article in *Journal of Business Venturing Insights,* a team of researchers "introduce religion into the theory of entrepreneurial action because of its unique contribution to knowledge, motivation, and behavior."[32]

Smith et al discuss the entrepreneurial process of evaluating opportunities and the likelihood of success and observe, "these imagined scenarios . . . can be influenced by religious beliefs."[33] They note other research has concluded, "An entrepreneur who is deeply involved in Christianity, participates regularly in church groups, and reads extensively about Christianity may generate entrepreneurial opportunity beliefs that integrate their religion that are not desirable to others."[34] Smith et al identify how these motivations "may lead to the implementation of religious beliefs and practices (e.g. prayer meetings), and may shape the culture and identity of the organization."[35]

Smith et al identify four specific religious outcomes observed in these organizations. The first is providing financial resources for themselves, their families, employees, and investors, often with a commitment to "support religious work based on the concept of tithing."[36] The second is service of others, including solving problems of "education, health, and poverty for some of the poorest and marginalized people in the

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[32] Brett R. Smith et al., "Why Believe? The Promise of Research on the Role of Religion in Entrepreneurial Action," *Journal of Business Venturing Insights* 11 (June 1, 2019) 3.

[33] Ibid., 7.

[34] Ibid., 4.

[35] Smith et al., "Why Believe?," 5.

[36] Ibid.

world."[37] The third outcome is a means for those in the organization to share their faith by seeking "to provide evidence of Christianity through the way it operates, moving beyond ethical decision-making."[38] And the fourth is "honoring God," asking the question, "'What is good for the world, according to its Creator?'"[39] Thus, Smith et al have identified the ability of entrepreneurial action to move a community toward order that is in line with the reordering effects of the gospel.

Conclusion

These four outcomes demonstrate a significant overlap with Brisco's strategy to gain "an accurate understanding of the social, economic, physical and spiritual climate" of a community.[40] Smith et al have identified measurable indicators of a God-centered vision of the world that is actualized in economic, physical, social, and spiritual ways. As they observe, "The more one identifies with a particular religion, the greater the degree to which he or she will internalize the goals, ends, or desires it endorses."[41]

This assessment leaves open the possibility that a pastor with a desire to serve a community could choose an entrepreneurial venture specifically to align with the needs of that church. Where the ability of a church to move individuals towards order may be limited, a well-chosen business venture could affect that movement more quickly. The combination of faith entrepreneurship and bivocational ministry suggests there are ways to direct the outcomes of a business toward the objectives of a church, gaining added value from work for the gospel. Thus, efforts to create cultural order can contribute to the effectiveness of the reordering work of the gospel.

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[37] Smith et al., "Why Believe?," 5

[38] Ibid.

[39] Ibid.

[40] Brisco, *Covocational Church Planting*, 88.

[41] Smith et al., "Why Believe?," 7.

The Cultural Framework in the Church Today

The historical events of the life, death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ are forever fixed in history. And the message of the gospel is built upon those events and set down in the unchanging Word of God. But the church's effectiveness in communicating and applying that message is dependent to a degree on the cultural context of those it is commanded to reach. The societal changes discussed by the authors surveyed in this thesis represent new cultural contexts for the gospel, and the pace of this change has created challenges to existing models of ministry.

The challenge of these new cultural contexts is captured by Derek Tidball in his introduction to *The Message of the Cross*. Tidball writes,

> In every new generation the message of the cross needs to be expressed anew for effective communication. But great care needs to be taken in doing so, so that our reinterpretation does more than merely reflect the culture of our day. Our preaching of the cross will often be necessarily counter-cultural, and must faithfully represent the revelation of our God rather than gratify the fashions of society. Our task is not to mirror our culture but to convert it, and the cross calls us to do that in the most radical of ways.[42]

Tidball's statement resonates with Carson's assessment that "Paul is more concerned to demonstrate that he ministers out of a transformed will—out of a passion to serve, not out of a begrudging compulsion."[43] Begrudging compulsion can take a variety of forms, including feeling the need to satisfy the expectations of a cultural context.

Together, these statements suggest that the evidence of a transformed will and a passion to serve are envisioned differently in various cultural contexts. Culture provides insights into how the choice of the gospel has been presented in the past, and culture is a necessary precursor that helps apply the gospel to new challenges presented by new cultural contexts. The precursor to applying the cultural framework is understanding the biblical argument that culture is a consequence of choice.

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[42] Derek Tidball, *The Message of the Cross: Wisdom Unsearchable, Love Indestructible*, The Bible Speaks Today (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2001), 33.

[43] Carson, *The Cross and Christian Ministry*, 128.

Applying the Cultural Framework

Culture as a consequence of choice and the biblical cultural framework offer a helpful perspective to meet new challenges to communicating the gospel. By using the cultural framework to identify a particular cultural climate, the regressive effects of the fall can be understood in light of the choice of the gospel. And, using the cultural framework helps identify opportunities for cultural movement that have a positive effect on the presentation of the gospel, and ministry choices one can make in light of that.

When these two effects are plotted on the cultural framework, the result is a general movement from quadrant 1 to quadrant 4. This movement (the large arrow in Figure 4) represents the combined effect of the movement from non-order to order, and disorder to reorder. The two smaller arrows in quadrants 2 and 3 represent the additional measures one might undertake to facilitate the general movement towards quadrant 4.

Quadrant 3:
The outgrowth of social order from the gospel.

Reorder

Quadrant 4:
The benefits of social order with the gospel.

Non-order

Order

Quadrant 1:
The necessity of social order for the gospel.

Quadrant 2:
The barriers of social order to the gospel.
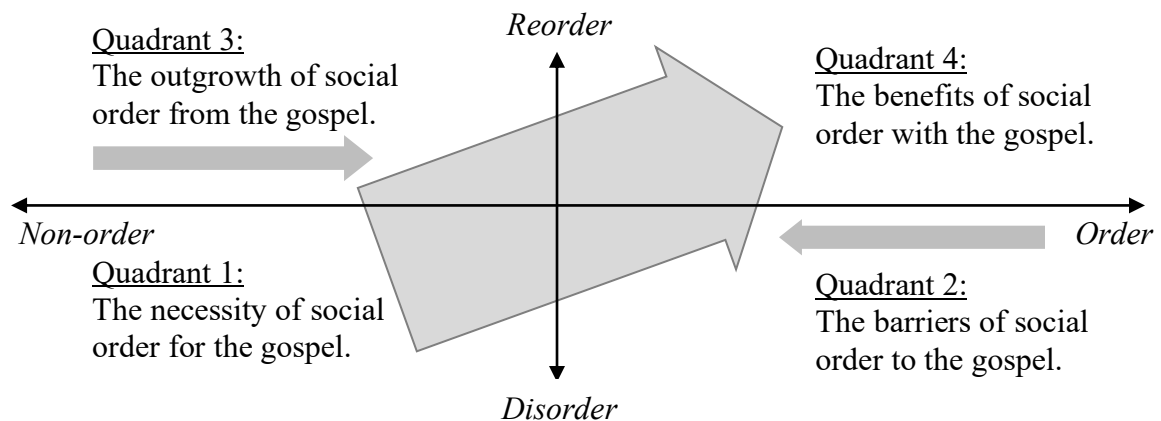
Disorder

Figure 4. The direction of cultural influence for the gospel.

Quadrant 3 would require additional effort towards adding social order to the reordering effect of the gospel. This could include a church planter's efforts toward community development that are not explicitly faith based, and bivocational ministry to support a church planter and improve the financial and social well-being of some in the

community. Quadrant 2 would represent moving away from order to a more receptive place for the gospel. This could include choosing not to continue unbiblical structures of church government, or a decision to give up one's right to earn a living from the gospel to remove oneself from the expectations of those who provide financial support. Thus, the general movement towards God's design for the church may require actions that are overly cultural, or overtly counter-cultural.

Conclusion

Tidball notes that "our task is not to mirror the culture, but to convert it."[44] One can sense the influence of Niebuhr in this view of culture. But one could go further than Tidball and state that culture as a consequence of choice calls the church to create culture, and fully utilize the means by which God has equipped the church for that task. As Crouch observes, "The church, after all, is a culture-making enterprise itself."[45] The tools of culture making are well known to the church, including visual art, music, education, organization, and architecture. But the purpose of culture making is often lost when the focus is on the product of these methods, and not the process that believers must undergo in choosing to actualize what they envision God's creation should be.

Culture as a consequence of choice is a reminder that the final product is up to the one "who has made everything beautiful in its time" (Eccl 3:11). The responsibility of those created in God's image is to allow the framework of culture to guide their choices as they actualize the vision of the new creation given through new life in the Spirit. By doing so, believers are able to contribute to the final act of creation in service to the Triune God who states, "Behold, I am making all things new" (Rev 21:5).

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[44] Tidball, *The Message of the Cross*, 33.

[45] Andy Crouch, *Culture Making: Recovering Our Creative Calling* (Grand Rapids: IVP Books, 2013), 92, Kindle.

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ABSTRACT

THE CONSEQUENCE OF CHOICE:
CULTURE AS PRECURSOR TO THE GOSPEL

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This thesis presents a biblical definition of culture as a consequence of choice, providing a framework to harmonize the existing conversations about culture, and offering a perspective on God's purpose for culture as a precursor to the gospel.

Defining culture as a consequence of choice offers a framework to relate culture to Scripture. To choose, one must envision what could be and take steps to actualize it. Evidence of this choice is seen in the Trinity, expressed in creation and present in the fall of man. The centrality of choice continues through the biblical account of the person and work of Christ, and into the definition and life of the church.

This cultural framework reveals the cultural climates that will influence how the choice of the gospel can be presented to greatest effect. Thus, culture as a consequence of choice is a precursor to the gospel.

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