
Practical Theology

The Pastor and the World, Pt. 1: Using, not Abusing the World

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We must begin by answering the question, “What do I mean by the world?” In the Bible, sometimes “world” means humanity in general, but we are not talking about people. The New Testament also speaks of the world as the sinful, corrupt system of beliefs, values, relationships, and activities of fallen mankind. However, when I speak of the world, I am referring to the material world around us, the resources and objects (Psalm 24:1, “The earth is the Lord’s, and the fulness thereof”).

How we relate to the world springs directly from the doctrine of creation. On the one hand, creation tells us that the world came from God. It is his creation and therefore it is fundamentally good. Genesis 1 opens and closes with these statements:

"In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth ... And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good." Between those verses is the account of the creation of mankind in God's image, with the delegated authority to rule over, use, and enjoy God's world.

On the other hand, the doctrine of creation teaches us that the world is not God. Therefore, we should not

worship creation or confuse God with his creatures or visible images of them. That is precisely the horrible error that mankind has fallen into, as Paul explains in Romans 1. By rejecting the glory of God shining in his creation (Psalm 19:1), we have enslaved ourselves to his creatures by idolizing them.

The very world God created good has become evil to us, not because it is evil, but because we twist it, elevate it and set our hearts on it to be our God. That is what we mean by worldliness. We must resist and overcome this abuse of the world, if we hope to participate in the new creation in Christ.

This is the tension we live in as fallen human beings-between using the world as God's gift and our tendency to abuse it as if it were God. Let's

consider each side of the tension: using the world (based on 1 Timothy 4:1-8) and not abusing the world (based on 1 John 2:15-17).

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