

The Pastor and the World, Pt. 2: Use the World as God's Gift

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A stunning truth revealed in the Garden of Eden is that God not only created the world to meet our needs but also to give us pleasure. The Lord God did not feed Adam and Eve with dry crusts of bread but surrounded them with luscious fruit, beautiful trees, sparkling rivers, and land containing gold and gemstones (Genesis 2:8-15). So, Paul declares that the living God "giveth us richly all things to enjoy" (1 Timothy 6:17).

John Calvin (1509-1564) said, "God provided food... not only to provide for necessity but also for delight and good cheer." He then asked whether God would make flowers so beautiful and fragrant if he did not intend us to enjoy them with our eyes and noses. Pierre Viret (1511-1571), a friend of

Calvin, wrote, "God has not only provided in these things for the necessities of mankind, but also for their desires and pleasures, and has desired to join together an excellent beauty with profit and usefulness."

So, if you are a believer, how are we to use the world as God's good gift?

First, we can use the world with a heart of gratitude. Paul's words to Timothy give us practical directions on how we are to use this beautiful, profitable, pleasurable world. In 1 Timothy 4:4 Paul says, "For every creature of God is good, and nothing to be refused, if it be received with thanksgiving." If we view the world as God's creation, then every good thing is a gift from heaven above (James 1:17). So we should always look beyond the gift to the Giver.

Calvin said, "All things were created for us so that we might recognize the Author and give thanks for his kindness toward us." Gratitude understands the giver to be a greater treasure than the gift. We must not use God to get more of what we want; we must use the world to get more of God.

Psalms 148 calls upon every part of the world to praise the Lord because he made it. The psalmist

provides us with a catalog of God's creation: the heights of heaven and the hosts of angels dwelling in them; the sun, moon, stars, and clouds above us in the firmament; sea monsters in ocean depths or the fire, hail, snow, vapors, and storms that sweep over the dry land; mountains and hills, fruit trees and cedars; wild beasts and cattle, creeping things and flying birds; kings, generals, and judges of the earth; young men and maidens, old men and little children.

He says, "Let them praise the name of the Lord: for his name alone is excellent; his glory is above the earth and heaven" (vs. 13). Creation moves us to praise the Creator because the cause is always greater than the effect. God's glory transcends everything the world can offer us.

Gratitude is love returned for love bestowed. True thankfulness is a childlike response of love to the Father who has so greatly loved us in Jesus Christ. It views all of creation through gospel eyes, seeing the world as the handiwork of the God who "sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins" (1 John 4:10). We respond by saying: "We love him, because he first loved us" (1 John 4:19). In this, as John Owen (1616-1683) explained, God's children have communion with their heavenly Father. They receive His gifts by faith in Christ, and "they make

suitable returns unto him." They use the world with a heart of gratitude.

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