

# ESCHATOLOGY AND PROTOLOGY, CHRIST AND CULTURE: MARRIAGE AS A BIBLICAL TEST-CASE<sup>1</sup>

*by Marcus A. Mininger*

## 1. Framing the Subject: Two Impulses and Two Extremes

THE TOPIC OF CHURCH and kingdom in relation to one another is complex and multi-faceted. More than just one topic, it really involves a cluster of different, contributing subtopics in combination with one another, which is part of why it has always been so challenging for the church. To grapple with church and kingdom rightly, a person must first seek to think rightly about many individual subtopics, all of which are challenging in themselves, and then seek to combine those various subtopics rightly to form a bigger picture—and all from a biblical vantage point.

The considerations offered below seek to focus especially on one of those important subtopics within the larger question of church and kingdom, namely how the present creation order and our cultural endeavors within it relate to the consummation of God's kingdom in and through Jesus Christ. However, this subtopic of Christ and culture is still quite broad and synthetic, far too complex to be handled in detail in one lecture. Because of this, the focus in what follows will primarily be upon one test-case, namely the cultural institution of marriage.

Before turning to this test-case directly, though, it may be useful to frame our considerations in a particular way, namely by identifying two natural, reflexive impulses that I think are more or less inherent to Christian piety, impulses which most Christians experience to some degree or another and which we also see reflected in various ways throughout church history when people grapple with matters of Christ and culture. I begin, then, by describing these two religious impulses, and I purposefully state them positively rather than negatively for the time being in hopes of marking out at least some area

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1. The substance of this article was first delivered as a lecture at Mid-America's Alumni Conference on April 9, 2014. It is reproduced here in largely the same form as when it was first delivered orally, the chief difference being a slightly longer concluding section, which time would not allow at the Conference.

for constructive agreement among Christians in what has clearly been a difficult and divisive topic both through the centuries and today.

On the one hand, then, the first impulse, again I think common or ordinary in Christian piety, is to grasp that becoming a Christian involves a complete change for me, affecting everything about me and everything that I do; that Christ's work is so impactful as to involve a complete reversal or new direction that leaves nothing unaffected in my life. When I come out of darkness into light, out of death into life, it changes my life so profoundly as to have a comprehensive significance. Moreover, this is so not only for me individually but for the whole life of every Christian with me. Having experienced the radical, unique, self-giving love of my Savior, I now give everything I am and everything I have to him. Christians who have experienced life-from-the-dead, saving grace tend, I think, to have such an impulse in their response to being saved.

On the other hand, there is also another reflexive impulse that is common in Christian piety, which I expect most Christians resonate with as well, which is to understand that my eternal hope and inheritance is secure in Christ, whatever may befall me in this life; that my hope depends upon Christ's own power, not mine, and so it is not threatened by my lot in this life or by my degree of success or failure in this world. This impulse is especially evident in the strong martyr tradition of the Christian faith, which teaches that, even if I lose everything upon this earth—my job, my possessions, my family, my life—and even if earthly kingdoms and cultures rise and fall, still God's purposes remain undeterred. And again, this is true not just for me individually but of all my fellow believers with me. God will triumph in and through our hardship, and my inheritance, our inheritance, remains safe in Christ, come what may.

On the one hand, then, Christ changes everything, so that we offer everything to and live entirely for him in this world. On the other hand, the cause of Christ is not thwarted, even if everything in this world is abandoned or lost and all my efforts in it fail. Christ impacts everything, then. And yet our lives and our inheritance do not depend on how things go with this everything, either.

Beyond simply describing such common notions in Christian piety, though, I think it is also clear upon further reflection that both of these reflexive religious responses to Christ have a clear biblical basis. In other words, it is not just common for Christians to think in these ways, it is in essence correct.

So, on the one hand, we see comprehensive descriptions of Christ's lordship in Scripture, such as in Colossians 1:16-18: "By him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him...and in him all things hold together. And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the

beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent." Such statements about Christ's lordship also lead to comprehensive descriptions of service with all that we are and do. Colossians 3:17 says, "And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him." Colossians 3:23-24 states, "Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward. You are serving the Lord Christ." Or again in 1 Corinthians 10:31, we read, "So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God." Nothing is the same in Christ, even my cultural activity. Whether eating or drinking, whether in word or deed, everything is through him, unto him, in his name, and with thanksgiving.

Then, on the other hand, we also see statements throughout the New Testament that describe a kind of Christian detachment from our fate in this world, its economy, its activities, and the results that may or may not come from them due to opposition, sin, or our own weakness. So Colossians 3, which earlier we saw describing comprehensive service unto Christ, also says, "If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God" (vv. 1-3). In a similar vein, Jesus himself taught us that two different economies exist side by side at the present time, one earthly and one heavenly, and that there is no transfer from the currency of the one to the currency of the other. Moreover, the earthly economy is marked by its temporary nature, and because of this it is not our ultimate concern as his disciples. He said, "Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also" (Matt. 6:19-21). Clearly, then, so much of what we do in the present creation order is fragile and not enduring. Treasures on earth cannot, therefore, have our ultimate loyalty and love. Similarly, we see that, while 1 Corinthians 10:31 says that we are to eat and drink unto the Lord, Romans 14:17 also states that, "The kingdom of God does not consist in eating and drinking, but in righteousness, joy, and peace in the Holy Spirit." And again, pointing in the direction of the great martyr tradition mentioned earlier, the book of Hebrews recalls the native joy of converts whose permanent hope was undiminished by the destruction and loss they experienced in this world: "Recall the former days when, after you were enlightened, you endured a hard struggle with sufferings, sometimes being publicly exposed to reproach and affliction, and sometimes being partners with those so treated. For you had compassion on those in prison, and you joyfully accepted the plundering of your property,

since you knew that you yourselves had a better possession and an abiding one" (Heb. 10:32-34).

Now to be sure, the passages just quoted are diverse, and each requires its own patient reading. They all have their own immediate contexts. They answer somewhat different kinds of questions one from the other and use different terms and categories to do so. So putting the full picture together in all its detail is not easy. The job of the exegete is always multifaceted, and this is one more reminder of the difficulty and complexity of trying to address Christ and culture or church and kingdom as a whole.

Nevertheless, while these passages may bring various questions and complexities to mind, it is still sufficiently clear in the aggregate that both of the Christian impulses described above have a broad biblical basis undergirding them, at least in some general way. In fact, many other passages could also be listed to support them each.

Now, as we reflect on these two aspects of Christian piety, I think we have a fresh sense of the tension that surrounds Christ and culture. All is done for him in every area of life. Yet everything is somehow dispensable if it were taken from me. Every aspect of life is under his kingship. Yet much of our engagement in the present world order involves things that are merely temporary, not that in which our eschatological inheritance itself consists. How, then, do we bring these two things together?

Indeed, if we go on to reflect more widely on the history of the Christian church, we can see that the tension between these two impulses has proven vexing for those who have gone before us. In fact, many positions on Christ and culture could simply be evaluated as gravitations toward one of these two strands of biblical teaching to the partial neglect or near exclusion of the other. On the one side, there have been those for whom the impact of Christian faith upon this life and the present world order predominates, even to the point that such an impact seems to be the entire goal of Christianity itself. In an extreme example, a social gospel, various forms of which certainly still exist today, reduces Christianity to the improvement it brings within our present experience and culture, even to the exclusion of belief in a literal supernatural return of Christ. On the other side, though, there have also been those for whom detachment from present culture predominates, even to the point of casting involvement in the affairs of this world as unspiritual or morally harmful. In an extreme example, monastic asceticism used a kind of metaphysical dualism to cast involvement in this material world as something to minimize or avoid as much as possible, driving a wedge between the present creation order and the work of saving grace in a highly dualistic fashion. Moreover, between such extreme examples lies a whole spectrum of views that are less extreme by degree but still gravitate toward one impulse or the other, to the detriment of a proper biblical balance.

In recent times, of course, a lot of discussion has been generated by new formulations of a two-kingdom theology within Reformed circles, and that view can also be situated along this spectrum. While recent formulations by different two-kingdom proponents certainly differ by degree, essential to the model itself is the effort to negotiate the tension of the Christian life by separating common life in this world and spiritual life in the church into distinct kingdoms, each with their own rulers and laws. In using this exact model, though, Christ and culture can become quite separated, such that “The social and cultural realm” is contrasted with “The religious realm, the church.”<sup>2</sup> The former is devoid of religious particularity and its activities are rightly pursued by all people, including believers and unbelievers, on a common basis, whereas the latter is distinguished by its religious particularity and concerns “salvation and eternal life.”<sup>3</sup> Such a description creates considerable separation between general cultural endeavors, in which all people participate under natural law, on the one hand, and the religious life of the church, which is distinctively Christian and governed by Scripture, on the other. As well intended as this formulation no doubt is, especially in order to protect the church from undue preoccupation with matters that might distract it from its central purposes, still the specific nature of the division proposed here is something that many, including myself, do not find satisfactory according to Scripture.

And yet, even as many are quite concerned by such recent two-kingdom formulations, especially as they seem to entail significant bifurcation between Christ and culture, we can also recognize in the grander scheme of things that there are in fact dangers on *both* sides of the theological spectrum. On the one side, there is the danger of a narrowing or constraining of Christ’s universal lordship and of the nature of my service to him by seeing some parts of my life detached from or not done directly unto him. And yet there is also, on the other side, the danger of worldly Christians and a worldly church that sets its mind not on things above but on earthly things, whose life does consist in cultural, economic, or political progress in the present world order, with the kingdom seeming to rise or fall with Christian success or failure in them. We might think, for example, of a theonomic reconstructionism or a culturally defined postmillennialism.<sup>4</sup> Indeed, whatever we may judge to be the more immediate crisis

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2. See David VanDrunen, *A Biblical Case for Natural Law* (Grand Rapids: Acton Institute, 2006), 26-35, esp. p. 35.

3. *Ibid.*, 28.

4. For a formative discussion of the structural problems with maintaining such an immanentistic hope, see Richard B. Gaffin, Jr., “Theonomy and Eschatology: Reflections on Postmillennialism,” in *Theonomy: A Reformed Critique*, eds. W. S. Barker and W. R. Godfrey (Grand Rapids: Academie Books, 1990), 197-224. Also of great importance lying behind Gaffin’s work is the two-age structure of Paul’s eschatology as

in our own theological circles at the moment, it is still important to maintain biblical balance *both* in articulating what views may be problematic *and* in seeking to articulate a biblical alternative. In fact, if we are only alert to or on guard against one or the other extreme, rather than to both, then we too may be in danger of some form of imbalance, of failing to grapple with both sides of the rich biblical picture of Christ's working in this age and in the age to come.

All that I do, I do under and for Christ. Yet all that I have and do, I can gladly part with as well, if it pleases Christ.

## 2. A Concrete Test-Case: Eschatology, Protology, and Marriage

In the midst of this palpable tension that we experience as Christians in the present world order, and in the midst of considerable disagreement among Christians about how to navigate through it, what we might wish for as we read Scripture is a specific, concrete example mapping out how to involve ourselves in culture as Christians and how such involvement does and does not relate or contribute to God's kingdom purposes. It might be nice, for example, to have a book or chapter of Scripture devoted to how Christ impacts plumbing or how to do math as a Christian (or how not to, if that were the case). How exactly should working heartily unto the Lord as a baker or city-planner look differently for a Christian, united to the exalted Lord Jesus Christ, than for a non-Christian, who lives in rebellious unbelief? What does serving Christ with all that I am look like in any such specific endeavors, and how does being ready to abandon everything for Christ's sake bear on such as well? The desire for some concrete guidance or example here is natural, I think, because the topic touches upon so many concrete and everyday aspects of our lives.

In point of fact, though, such concrete examples are difficult to come by in Scripture. At Mid-America Reformed Seminary, we are very familiar with the redemptive-historical nature of Scripture, that Scripture is not a mere collection of systematic loci or a handbook for living. It is, rather, in the main, a record of the grand history of redemption, narrating the accomplishment of salvation for all of God's people climaxing in Christ.<sup>5</sup> Bound up with this recognition about

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outlined by Geerhardus Vos, *The Pauline Eschatology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1953).

5. The seminal work defining redemptive-historical interpretation or the discipline of biblical theology, as I use it here, is Geerhardus Vos, *Biblical Theology: Old and New Testaments* (ed. J. G. Vos; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1948). For a shorter, thought-provoking lecture defining a redemptive-historical perspective on Paul's gospel, see Herman N. Ridderbos, "The Redemptive-Historical Character of Paul's Preaching," in *When the Time Had Fully Come: Studies in New Testament Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1957), 44-60.

Scripture's principle subject-matter is the related fact that Scripture is so often focused in what it says upon the once for all accomplishment of salvation in history and the corporate imperatives that flow from this for all of us, more than on detailing what pertains to individual circumstances or providing guidance tailored to specific situations. So it is, then, that we do not find a chapter in Scripture on how to be a Christian merchant, leather-worker, or New Testament professor, as such. To be sure, we do not want to be reductionistic in how we characterize Scripture. Various specific circumstances and aspects of human culture are commented upon directly in Scripture, and in ways that are normative for all. Still, when we begin to collect and survey the biblical data on how to live as a Christian in our day-to-day interactions with this world, it is not easy to find the kind of sustained or well-rounded examples that we might wish were provided for us to help put flesh on the broad principles we wrestle with concerning Christ and culture.

Despite the relative scarcity of such concrete examples, though, one topic bubbles up to the surface from the pages of Scripture that can be of use to us here, namely the way Scripture describes the cultural institution of marriage. Upon reflection, we can see that the subject of marriage makes an especially useful test-case regarding Christ and culture for several reasons. First, marriage is something common to all peoples throughout history, including both believers and unbelievers, so it has very broad relevance for considering human culture. As much as something like bioethics might be prominently under discussion today, or as much as something like statecraft often garners a great deal of attention when considering the church and kingdom, many modern bioethical questions were not being asked in the same form in the ancient world and relatively few people actually serve directly in civil government in the grand scheme of things. But marriage, by contrast, is something that all of us either participate in ourselves or observe closely in a regular way around us, making its practicalities and details quite vivid for God's people in a general and daily way. Second, the origins of marriage are rooted in the original creation order itself, and this is commented upon directly in Genesis 2. Unlike many other aspects of culture, then, consideration of marriage helps us go all the way back to protology, or first things, where God's design for life in the present world order begins to be articulated. The fact that marriage is spoken of directly in Genesis 2 also helps us temporarily set aside some of the unique ways in which culture was discussed and engaged during the Old Testament theocracy that do not apply directly to God's people in the New Testament period. The movement from the Mosaic economy to the New Testament period is its own, important topic with its own challenges, but considering an example from the original creation order helps bracket the peculiarities of that topic for the time being, providing greater focus in what follows. Third, marriage is also a subject of

some heightened interest in the New Testament, including in descriptions of eschatology, or last things, and the realization of God's purposes in Jesus Christ (among many examples, see Rev. 19:6-9).<sup>6</sup> Surveying biblical teaching on marriage therefore helps us take cognizance of the entirety of redemptive history, from creation to consummation. Fourth, New Testament interest in marriage includes *both* its use as a prominent image for describing Christ's objective work on our behalf *and* concern for practical Christian obedience in marriage (the combination of these in Ephesians 5:22-33 is part of what especially recommends it for further consideration below). On balance, then, the subject of marriage in Scripture has both incredible span, redemptive-historically speaking, and daily and universal concreteness, ethically speaking. For these reasons, marriage occupies a strategic position within the larger organism of biblical revelation, which thereby recommends it for use in a case-study on Christ and culture.

Having identified our basic area of interest, then, what I wish to do from here is to offer a modest, constructive proposal on the basis of just this one test-case, but one which I think has implications for other areas of life as well and can help provide a broad biblical perspective on the admittedly complex and challenging topic of Christ and culture. Of course, by looking at just one test-case, we certainly cannot either broach or solve every problem. Indeed, the vagaries and challenges of Christ and culture are far more diverse and complex than we can delve into here.

At the same time, though, while focusing only on just one important aspect of culture has its limitations, this approach also has its distinct benefits, particularly as it allows us to display something of the overall simplicity of the Bible's essential perspective on life in this world. After all, in the end, the question of Christ and culture is the question of how I and we should serve Christ in this life, even in common, everyday matters, which all of God's people, not just the learned, must engage. Partly because of this, the perspective that the Bible offers about Christ and culture is, I think, clear and simple enough for covenant children to understand *in nuce*, even while it is broad and profound enough to guide all of us in the most complex challenges of life as well. Therefore, even though focusing on just one test-case has its limits, what we see in Scripture about marriage can still help distill some fundamental elements in a biblical perspective on culture, which can also guide us in diverse kinds of culture involvement in the present world order.

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6. The person who speaks most often of marriage in the pages of the New Testament is no doubt Jesus himself, who not only taught about the practice of marriage but also used marriage (with the attendant topics of bride, bridegroom, attendants, wedding feast, engagement to be married, etc.) quite frequently as a point of comparison for describing aspects of God's eschatological kingdom and its coming, both now and in the future.

### 2.1. Not negative, neutral, or “common,” but inherently Christ-centered

The text that I want us to reflect on together, initially, as we explore the nature of marriage, is Paul’s famous passage in Ephesians 5:22-33. Our interest in this text, though, is not just for its practical instruction on marriage, which is always so useful to return to, but especially for the broad perspective it takes on creation, on the one hand, and Christ, on the other, or on the present creation order and our life in it, on the one hand, and on Christ’s climactic, eschatological union with his people, on the other. In short, this text brings both eschatology and protology into a specific relation that is of considerable paradigmatic importance for us. As translated in the ESV, Paul writes:

<sup>22</sup>Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. <sup>23</sup> For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior. <sup>24</sup> Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands. <sup>25</sup> Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, <sup>26</sup> that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, <sup>27</sup> so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish. <sup>28</sup> In the same way husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. <sup>29</sup> For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church, <sup>30</sup> because we are members of his body. <sup>31</sup> “Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.” <sup>32</sup> This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church. <sup>33</sup> However, let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband.

The first thing we see quite quickly from this text is how Christological Paul’s instructions about marriage are. From the outset, his first imperative to wives is to submit to their own husbands *as to the Lord* (v. 22). The immediate reason given in verse 23 also concerns the parallel between husbands and wives, on the one hand, and Christ and the church, on the other: wives are to submit to their own husbands as to the Lord *because* (ὅτι) the husband is the head of the wife *as also* Christ is the head of the church. Right out of the gate, then, Paul establishes a close comparison between two realities: the wife-husband relationship and the church-Christ relationship. More-

over, this comparison continues to remain at the forefront all throughout the passage. In verse 24, wives should submit in everything as the church submits to Christ. In verse 25, husbands are to love their wives according to this same parallel, namely as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her. The work of Christ for the church is then described using carefully chosen body-language in verses 26-27, which allows Paul to continue drawing application to marriage in verse 28: “in the same way [οὕτως],” he says, husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. In verse 29, husbands should nourish and cherish their wives. How? Just as Christ does the church. Why? Because we are members of his body. All throughout the passage, then, one of the constant features is this tic-tacking back and forth between the husband-wife relationship and the Christ-church relationship, from the latter of which Paul repeatedly draws reflection both about the nature of marriage and about how to act in it. At base, the relationship between Christ and the church as his body, which other passages in Paul show is defined by a Spiritual union between them,<sup>7</sup> is the constant reference point for understanding the relationship between husband and wife in marriage, which is defined here by a sexual, one-flesh union.

Now, to be sure, the Christological nature of Paul’s instruction in this passage is well-known, whether or not it is something that we truly meditate on and live out as we should. But while the general outlines of this Christological argument are no doubt familiar to us, the specifics of Paul’s theologizing here warrant more careful reflection for their profundity and how they bring creation and Christ into a specific relationship, especially in verses 31-32.

First and foremost, we must see that Paul grounds his view of Christ and the church in creation itself. In verse 31, he quotes Genesis 2:24, describing the original institution of marriage in the pre-Fall creation state for Adam and Eve: “Therefore, a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.” Now, in itself, the fact that Paul would appeal to the original creation order to help explain something about marriage is not surprising. He appeals to creation and even this passage itself on other, similar matters elsewhere (e.g., 1 Cor. 6:16; 1 Tim. 2:13), and other biblical authors appeal to the creation order (including Gen. 2:24 itself) concerning marriage too (e.g., Mark 10:6-9 and parallels). Clearly, the original establishment of marriage at creation helps us understand the nature of marriage and how to act in it. But what

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7. In other words, a union created by the Holy Spirit. The fact that union between Christ and the church is created by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in believers is apparent in verses like 1 Corinthians 6:16-17 and 12:12-13. The former of these passages also shows very clearly how Paul (like many in his time period) saw an abiding analogy (that is, a God-designed similarity) between being “one body” or “one flesh” through sexual union (as pertains in marriage) and being “one body” through Spiritual union (as pertains with respect to Christ).

Paul does in Ephesians 5 is actually a bit more complex than that. What is unusual about Paul's argument here is not so much how he finds help understanding marriage through the original creation order but how he finds help understanding the *Christological nature* of marriage through it as well.

In fact, what Paul specifically comments upon and derives from Genesis 2:24 has *more* to do with the Christological side of his whole argument than the marriage side, *per se*. Notice that what specifically prompts him to cite Genesis 2 in the first place is a statement about Christ in verse 30: "for we are members of his [Christ's] body."<sup>8</sup> Then notice even more tellingly that the interpretative conclusion Paul draws from his citation of Genesis 2 also focuses on the Christological side of things, in verse 32: "This mystery is great," he says, "but I am speaking with respect to Christ and the church." In other words, Paul's interest in Genesis 2:24 is not merely to establish something general about marriage as a human institution, if you will, but more particularly to establish something about Christ and the church, which is exemplified or prefigured in what God says about marriage already from the very beginning. The two becoming one flesh in Genesis 2:24 already contains a "mystery," that is, something not yet seen in history.<sup>9</sup> What is already pointed to or foreshadowed in Adam and Eve's being one flesh in the garden is the church being one body with Christ in the fullness of time, through the outpouring of the eschatological Spirit after Christ's resurrection. In short, then, Paul cites Genesis 2 to show that marriage itself is, inherently and from the outset, Christological in its nature. It is a visible, bodily reality that is created by God in order to point toward and speak about an invisible, Spiritual reality accomplished through Jesus Christ.

What also must be grasped here, then, is that the relationship of marriage to Christ is not secondary or extrinsic for Paul. The connection is not presented merely as a pedagogical tool, an interesting analogy come up with for illustrative purposes. Paul does not say, "It might help you to think of your relationship to Christ sort of like a marriage." Nor is it a connection that only existed or was created after the fact, as a later development. Rather, the relationship between

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8. Paul's placement of the quotation in the argument pairs it most directly with a statement about the church in verse 30, not a statement about husbands or wives as such. In fact, the content of verse 29 is also largely about Christ and the church. The quotation would have had to be placed following verse 28 to make the connection to the husband-wife relationship appear as the primary point of the quote. Along with the placement of the quotation, the fact that Paul includes the prepositional phrase "for this reason" (*ἀντὶ τούτου*) in his quotation (unlike when he quotes the same passage in 1 Corinthians 6:16) only enhances its close connection to the content that precedes in verse 30. The inferential effect of including the phrase "for this reason" in one's quotation can also be seen when Jesus quotes Genesis 2:24 (though with somewhat different application than Paul was making) in his argument regarding divorce in Mark 10:5-9.

9. On the concept of "mystery" in Paul, see further below.

Christ and marriage is inherent in the design of the original creation state itself. For Paul, the Genesis passage itself speaks of Christ and the church precisely when it speaks of marriage. God designed marriage already from the beginning as something to point forward to Christ and the church. The husband-wife pairing was always, inherently designed as a visible representation of something greater than itself, something eschatological.

In fact, this language I am using of marriage as a “visible representation of” or an analogue to Christ is quite appropriate to our passage because of how Paul himself speaks about Genesis 2:24. His explanation sees something like typology there. This becomes especially clear when we reflect on his use of the category of “mystery.”

Paul’s letters speak of things that were or are “mysteries” with some frequency (see Rom. 11:25; 16:25; 1 Cor. 2:1, 7; 4:1; 13:2; 14:2; 15:51; Eph. 1:9; 3:3, 4, 9; 5:32; 6:19; Col. 1:26, 27; 2:2; 4:3; 2 Thess. 2:7; 1 Tim. 3:9, 16). Ordinarily what this term refers to is something about the eschatological fulfillment of God’s purposes that was at one time not visible in history but has now been manifested.<sup>10</sup> So, earlier in Ephesians 3, he describes the mystery not seen in previous generations, that Gentiles are fellow heirs with Jews, members of the same body. Paul says that this aspect of God’s plan for redemption was not expressly visible before but has now been made known. Elsewhere in Romans 16:25, Paul describes the gospel of Jesus Christ’s incarnation and resurrection as a mystery, kept silent from long ages past, but now made known to all nations. In general, then, a mystery is something about God’s eschatological work in history that was for some time invisible but only later accomplished and seen.

Against the background of this general description of mysteries in Paul, though, we must notice a crucial difference about the mystery described in Ephesians 5. This mystery in Ephesians 5 is not something Paul said was merely hidden in God’s secret plan. Rather, the “mystery” in Ephesians 5 is something contained in a specific, concrete reality in the Garden, namely marriage. Paul does not say here that something about God’s eternal plan was once invisible but has now become visible. Instead, he says that something concrete and visible in history, namely the one-flesh union between Adam and Eve in marriage, also pointed forward to something invisible that was greater than itself, namely the one-Spirit union between Christ and the church. This mystery is great, Paul says in effect, but you cannot read Genesis 2:24 correctly without seeing how it refers not only to Adam and Eve in the first instance, but also *through* this to Christ and the church at the same time. The two realities are, from the be-

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10. For a careful discussion and definition along these lines of what Paul usually means by “mystery,” see Herman N. Ridderbos, *Paul: An Outline of His Theology*, trans. J. R. de Witt (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), 46-47.

ginning, inseparable inasmuch as God prepared the one as an analogue or visible representation of the other.

In this way, the interpretation of Genesis offered in Ephesians 5 resembles typology. By God's design, the lesser, protological reality realized in the Garden is purposefully designed as a visible analog or picture pointing to the greater, eschatological reality realized in Christ. We can see, then, how Paul's description of the great cultural institution of marriage in Genesis 2 resembles what we might say about the typology bound up in something like the old covenant tabernacle and its ministry. By design from its inception, it pointed forward to Christ and his eschatological ministry in heaven.

By implication, then, the institution of marriage is by no means neutral or unrelated to Jesus Christ, nor has it ever been. It is not adequately described as something "natural," if by "natural" is meant something that is generic, first existing apart from Christ and then only later or secondarily brought into relationship to him. Marriage is also not properly understood as something "common," if that means something in which all people can properly participate according to its nature regardless of their loyalty or likeness to the Christ to whom it is inherently designed to point. No, marriage is by nature Christocentric, not as an add-on or an optional, second way to view it, but in itself and by original design. You cannot rightly understand either the nature of marriage or how to conduct yourself in it apart from Christ and Christ-likeness. Wives should submit to their husbands as to the Lord. Husbands should love, nourish, and cherish their wives. Why? Because what God first created in the Garden was designed that way, to speak about and show forth the riches of the Christ who would come and has now come as the head of his body the church.

This relationship between eschatology and protology is exactly why Paul's argument runs the way it does: he grounds instruction about marriage in the Christ-church connection, and he grounds the Christ-church connection in the Garden of Eden. It is mysterious, but these connections are there by design from the beginning.

So we see here (as can also be seen elsewhere, e.g., Col. 1:15-18) that creation has never existed in a generic, Christ-less way. Protology is inherently connected to eschatology for Paul. The cultural institution of marriage and human conduct in it has never existed in a vacuum, apart from its purpose to broadcast the union between Christ and the church that would come about and has now come about in the fullness of time.

What ground is there, then, for taking this piece of human culture and calling it "common," or saying it is part of an unreligious portion of our lives? If marriage is Christocentric from the garden, mysteriously picturing Christ's eschatological work even before Christ had come, then what basis is there for saying that people can properly conduct themselves in it merely on the basis of a "natural

law” whose content does not include Christ? In short, Paul’s description of marriage completely subverts any such bifurcation regarding the creation—that very creation that God made through Christ and for Christ. Creation is not eschatological and Christocentric as an afterthought. It is inherently so in its totality. Protology and creation did not come first, and then eschatology and Christ only afterwards. Rather, the eschatological goal of Christ and the church were first (Eph. 1:3-6),<sup>11</sup> and marriage was designed in relation to them, to point toward them.

And this, I think, highlights a pattern in Scripture that is true of many cultural realities besides just marriage itself. Throughout creation, God has created visible realities in which we presently participate that are meant to foreshadow and help us understand as-yet-invisible, eschatological realities of the final creation order. In fact, the new creation is always described and pictured in comparison to the things we see in the present creation.<sup>12</sup> This is true with marriage. But it is also true of many other things. How do I understand what the heavenly city, the new Jerusalem looks like, if not on analogy to the cities that I know of here and now? How do I understand what the great supper of the Lamb will be like, if not on analogy to the meals and banquets that I eat here and now? How do I conceptualize what the heavenly Mount Zion is like, if I know nothing of earthly mountains? Such examples could be multiplied many times over. Creation certainly creates the context for understanding recreation.

Moreover, this analogical relationship between what we enjoy in this present age and in the life of the age to come should provide great meaning and direction for us as we create and participate in all sorts of cultural expressions at present. Because my marriage points to Christ and the church, I do not abandon it or shove it aside. I do

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11. John Murray rightly speaks of an aspect of union with Christ that preceded creation, namely the predestinarian bond according to which God “chose us *in Christ*” (Eph. 1:3-4; see discussion in *Redemption Accomplished and Applied* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1955], 162). Since this predestinarian bond between Christ and his people existed already “before the foundation of the world” (Eph. 1:4), it clearly preceded the institution of marriage in the Garden and therefore constitutes part of the conceptual background for saying that protological things already had eschatological things in view from the beginning. In particular, Eph. 5:31 shows that the Spiritual union that has now been effected between Christ and the church in the fullness of time in history was already prefigured, by God’s design, in Adam and Eve’s one-flesh Garden union. To say such is not an anachronism. This was the “mystery” already contained in the Garden.

12. This specific point, as well as the positive relation between protology and eschatology in general, upon which the rest of this section reflects below, is set forth with helpful nuance and qualifications by Geerhardus Vos in a sermon on Heb. 11:9-10 (see “Heavenly-Mindedness,” in *Grace and Glory: Sermons Preached in the Chapel of Princeton Theological Seminary* [Carlisle, Pa.: Banner of Truth, 1994], esp. pp. 112-116). The balanced and nuanced content of that sermon, which in many ways constitutes a kind of reflection on Christ and culture, provided the initial direction many years ago for what appears in the present lecture, taken as a whole.

not demean it, or say it has no relation to my expression of Christian faith. Rather, my eschatological yearning for Christ helps me to value and enjoy my marriage all the more and to seek to beautify it, to make it a good and fitting picture of Christ's self-sacrificial love, rather than a shabby or false one. I do not have a lower view of marriage as a Christian but a higher one, and I invest myself in it more fully (if I myself am called to be married), not as a mere human or a member of a "common" kingdom, but specifically as a Christian, as one who understands and gives myself over to (rather than resisting and denying) the true nature of marriage from the beginning—something designed to picture Christ.

Similarly, the same logic ought also to apply in other areas of human culture. Because the cities we live in provide a picture or analogue to our eschatological dwelling in the new Jerusalem where human fellowship with God and each other will reach its apex, we should seek as much as we are able and have opportunity to beautify the cities we presently inhabit, to make them more fitting, if still quite incomplete and imperfect, representations of the ultimate garden-city described in such passages as Revelation 21. After all, what other goal should I have for the city I live in than to have it give expression to the ultimate purpose of a "city" as such and so to resemble the perfect city, insofar as possible in a sin-stained world? Or again, because the bread I bake in my bakery provides a rich analogue or picture of Christ as the bread of life, the true bread from heaven, would I be less concerned or more concerned to produce beautiful, nourishing, pleasing bread in my bakery as a Christian? And on and on we could go.

In each case, what we are saying is that the biblical worldview commits everything we have and everything we are to Christ. There is nothing neutral or separate. Being a Christian is not unrelated to my everyday life and work in this world. Rather, it enriches it at every turn and informs how I participate in it, not despite but precisely *because of* the eschatological goals that the Bible sets forth. Being united to Christ motivates me and directs me because the things of this life are inherently designed to point us upward and forward to the full consummation of all things in him. Nothing we do is common, neutral, or non-religious. Everything we do in this life is done unto Christ and in light of the eschatological future that is not yet fully seen but is indeed pointed towards by so many aspects of life in the present world order.

## 2.2. Not permanent in itself: a sub-eschatological pointer

Up until now, we have seen something of the inherently Christological nature of marriage in Ephesians 5, which helps combat an unbiblical bifurcation between Christ and a crucial cultural institution established at creation. If marriage is itself inherently Christological,

then it certainly has great meaning and import, not just for more general reasons but for specifically Christ-centered ones. It is something that we invest ourselves in heavily, if we are married, not primarily because we derive great enjoyment from it as human beings or because it fulfills various needs, but especially because it gives expression to who Jesus Christ is in relation to the church. I sacrifice more readily and more fully for my wife, not because that is gentlemanly or helps make things work more smoothly, but because I know Christ, want to be like him, and want to show forth something of his eschatological union with the church in a beautiful way here and now. My marriage is a religiously charged relationship, informed by my (and my wife's) eschatological longing.

At the same time, though, reflection on the nature of marriage also points out something else about the relationship between Christ and culture, namely how the two are still distinct at our present time in redemptive-history. In particular here, even as we guard against a kind of unbiblical bifurcation between Christ and human cultural, we must also not forget the potential problems that can be found on the other side, in an unnuanced or undifferentiated identification of the eschatological cause of Christ with the progress of human culture in this age, such that the consummation of human marriages, the building of human families, the development of human cities, or other cultural activities be thought to bring in the eschatological kingdom or to constitute its coming as such.

Of course, we could debate among ourselves the extent to which such an unnuanced view is a real or only a potential problem in our day. Certainly it has been a prominent problem at some times in the past, as noted earlier with reference to a social gospel. But we could also think of less extreme examples in our own day, such as theonomic reconstructionism or a culturally defined postmillennialism containing an almost entirely immanentistic hope.

In fact, though, as we look closer to home at the churches we ourselves represent, I think that some of what we see suggests that the impulse bound up with this-worldly views of the advancement of Christ's kingdom (or at least of unclarity on this topic) is more of a problem than we might at first be inclined to think.

One indication of a problem in this area might be seen in how much our churches do or do not identify with the martyrdom theology of the New Testament, or how much we are or are not ready to experience severe persecution and the wholesale loss of the benefits of human culture for the sake of Christ. Especially in the prosperity and the relative outward peace we experience in a Western democratic context, we may well wonder how many of us really *would* be willing to identify directly with our brothers and sisters in other countries who are being imprisoned or killed, or to give up houses, family, possessions, and even our own life and yet to confess with the Hebrews that we do in fact have another inheritance, and an abiding

one. In our relative ease, it is much easier to identify Christ's purposes directly with the enjoyment of cultural advances than in a context where such advancement or enjoyment is hardly afforded to Christ's people.

Another indication that a problem with flatly identifying the causes of kingdom and church exists today might be how much the church of our day does or does not prize the ministry of the gospel in its distinctiveness even more than other, more general forms of Christian service in the world. For example, we might ask whether Christians today are more ready *for specifically theological reasons* to sacrifice for the sake of gospel preaching rather than to go on vacation, build a building, or support humanitarian relief efforts. As good and right as all of those things can certainly be—even in some cases a necessary part of Christian service—are such endeavors of equal standing and urgency within the kingdom's purposes as the task of preaching? Are our people as ready to dig deeply and give sacrificially to the cause of church planting or to the training of men for the ministry of Word and sacraments as they are to contribute to other things of mere temporary affect in this world?

Or again, are the people in our churches clear on why various forms of service in this age, while all done unto Christ, nevertheless differ in the ways and extent to which they contribute to or advance Christ's eschatological rule? Are they clear that some forms of service, like the gospel-ministry, produce results that are lasting and directly eschatological in nature (giving people the water of Christ that wells up to eternal life [John 4:14]), whereas other, more general forms of service done unto Christ, like providing clean drinking water, bring about results that are good but still temporary in themselves (after which they will simply thirst again [John 4:13])? I submit to you that, if we answered this last question primarily on the basis of what the young men in our churches aspire to do when they grow up and whether they have been taught to eagerly desire what Paul calls the "greater gifts" (in essence, to desire eagerly to be ministers of the Word [1 Cor. 12:31; 14:1, 39]), then we will find a sobering reality staring us in the face.

And so, in light of these, admittedly incomplete, heuristic questions, it is important that, even while we recognize the problems involved in separating any portion of life from Christ's lordship, we also need to stay alert to the danger of an unbiblical conflation of human cultural activities or advances with God's kingdom purposes, one which has lost sight of what the Bible repeatedly describes as the difference between that which is permanent and that which is impermanent in the present creation order.

Here again, reflection on the nature of marriage is very useful. To be sure, my marriage points to and reflects the eschatological reality of Christ and the church, as all marriages of all time are designed to do from the beginning. To be sure, all men everywhere should live out

their marriages unto Christ and under his lordship. And to be sure, all the sacrificial service that I perform in my marriage (as in other aspects of life) will by God's grace be the occasion for eschatological reward. And yet, even while all of this is true and even while marriage is inherently Christocentric in its design, still the Bible is equally clear that marriage itself is not a constitutive part of the eschatological kingdom order, nor does it usher in the kingdom. It is rather a good, Christocentric but *temporary* part of this age only. Yes, as difficult as this may be for some of us to reconcile ourselves to—and there is nothing in this world that I enjoy more than being married to my best friend and soul-mate for the last 16 years—neither marriage nor the one-flesh sexual union that helps define it will carry over into the eschaton. Jesus says this quite clearly in Matthew 22:30: “In the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven.” In similar fashion, Paul says in 1 Corinthians 6:13, “Food for the stomach and the stomach for food, but God will destroy both one and the other.” And in context, it is clear that “stomach” and “food” are euphemisms referring indirectly to sexual appetite, on the one hand, and that which satisfies it, on the other. Neither of these will pertain to the resurrection body. Christians in general, and certainly Reformed Christians, have generally recognized this.

However, even as we recognize this in itself, the significance of this fact for understanding Christ and culture also bears some further reflection. The profound goodness and Christocentricity of marriage, even the portrait it paints of our eschatological union with Jesus Christ, mean that we understand it and participate in it specifically as Christians, not in a neutral or generic way. And yet that does not make marriage permanent or constitutive of the kingdom in itself. Instead, we are faced once again with the typological nature of marriage, that this crucial institution, so central to life and culture in this age, produces something rich and meaningful but is still designed to give way to and be replaced by the new, greater eschatological reality toward which it points when Christ returns. We must grapple, then, with the fact that, on the one hand, marriage itself is Christocentric, not neutral, and yet, on the other hand, this inherently Christ-centered institution is also completely temporary, a part of the present creation order, not the eschatological one. While pointing to union with Christ and helping us understand and give expression to something of our future hope, it is also not constitutive of that hope itself, nor does it bring it about.

In fact, Paul's teaching about marriage in 1 Corinthians 7 brings its temporary nature into sharp relief in ways that are quite challenging to the way most of us tend to think. He says that marriage is permitted for Christians, and in fact is needed by those who burn with sexual passion, but that abstinence from sex and marriage is actually to be preferred, if God grants the ability for such (vv. 1 and

7). But we must note carefully here why this is so. It is not because marriage is evil. It is not because marriage involves you in something morally deficient or sub-Christian. It is certainly not because marriage is material, rather than immaterial. It is simply that marriage is by nature temporary and an arrangement that increases one's involvement in and burden with things that are merely temporary, which Paul says that we would do well to limit if possible. The unmarried man is anxious about the things of the Lord, how to please the Lord, but the married man is anxious about things of this world, how to please his wife (vv. 32-33).

And again we may ask what exactly Paul's point is? Is he saying that marriage is "worldly" in the sense of its not being a truly Christian enterprise and not a true form of service to Jesus Christ? No. Rather, his appeal again has to do with his eschatology. The time of this present age has grown short, he says in verse 29, and the present form or arrangement (*σχημα*) of this world—the present world order or economy, we might say—is passing away (v. 31). It is for this eschatological reason that our involvement with things that pertain only to this world order must be carefully weighed, simply because they are temporary and because the greater things which they anticipate and point toward are so close to hand for those living in the time when the resurrection of Christ as firstfruits of the eschatological harvest has already taken place (see 1 Cor. 15:20, 23).

We see here, then, that discussions about Christian involvement in culture do not *end* with the insistence that Christ is Lord of all things, because some of the things that Christ is Lord of and that please him in themselves—that even speak about and portray him to us indirectly in visible form—are still temporary and soon to pass away. So it is that the same apostle who ascribes such beautiful Christocentricity to marriage as a sort of type or representation of Christ and the church in Ephesians 5 can also recommend abstaining from it, seeing it as something to forego—with no loss to the kingdom's advancement—in favor of more undivided attention to that which is permanent and lasting in itself in 1 Corinthians 7. We might spell this out concretely by saying, for example, that voluntary singleness for the sake of more undivided service as a minister of the gospel is surely something that we should value highly, or even aspire to, if God gives the gifts that enable us to do so. And this is so *even though* such abstinence entails voluntary *non-engagement* in a good and beautiful form of Christian culture in the present time. What makes such voluntary non-engagement beneficial, though, is if it exchanges involvement in a form of service that is good *but temporary* for forms of service that produce something permanent and lasting in themselves. The Christian is faced with something of a tension, then, which will not be fully resolved until Christ returns.

Beyond all of this, we also need to consider once again how this aspect of what Scripture teaches about marriage also applies to many other aspects of life in this present creation order. Not just marriage, but other aspects of our present cultural expressions, though good gifts from God in themselves, are also merely temporary. In 1 Timothy 6:6-8, Paul makes a broad and sweeping statement about the wealth and possessions we attain through our labor. "Now there is great gain in godliness with contentment, for we brought nothing into the world, and we cannot take anything out of the world. But having food and clothing, with these we will be content." So the same apostle who said to do all labor heartily unto the Lord also says that the economic result of that labor is merely temporary, in itself, not eternal. To be sure, Paul knows that some Christians, by virtue of their diligent labor unto Christ, will indeed become rich in this present age. Such wealth is a blessing from God, who gives good things to enjoy, as verse 17 says. And yet those same riches are uncertain, not lasting, and should be used generously to do good works (v. 18), thereby storing up lasting treasure in the world to come (v. 19). Once again we see the same contrast between that which is good but temporary—a part of this age only—and that which is greater because it lasts into the age to come.

Similarly, the book of Hebrews teaches quite clearly about the impermanence of earthly cities, those epicenters of so many cultural activities in the present age. Hebrews 13:14 states categorically that here on earth we have no enduring city, but we seek the city that is to come. In context, the city to come is the heavenly Jerusalem, which Hebrews 11:10 says is built by God and not man. Of course, living in an earthly city and enjoying its cultural endeavors is not at all wrong. We have said before that the goodness, beauty, and fellowship found in earthly cities are like signs foreshadowing the greater, heavenly city of our eternal inheritance. And yet those signs are themselves temporary, not eschatological. So it is that the same believers who could joyfully endure the confiscation of their goods, as described in Hebrews 10, can also join Christ in cultural shame outside the city gate (Heb. 13:12-13), knowing that what they lost is only a temporary dwelling place, not their permanent inheritance that God himself has prepared for those he loves, which is "heavenly" (Heb. 11:16).

Here again we can see a comparison between cultural realities like marriage and cities, on the one hand, and God's purposes for the old covenant tabernacle, on the other, about which the book of Hebrews also speaks at such length. Far from being negative or neutral, the tabernacle was a wonderful part of the old covenant, which spoke clearly of Christ and played an important role during a specific period of redemptive history. But its goodness and Christ-centeredness still did not make it permanent or an ending point. Nor did its establishment help build or contribute to the heavenly tabernacle, as such.

Rather, it was intended from the start to give way to something distinct, greater, and lasting, just like with marriage and earthly cities. Here then we once again observe something of the “typological” nature of human culture, inasmuch as aspects of human culture both point forward toward eschatological realities but are also intended to give way to them.

Clearly, then, the temporariness of marriage also applies to many other aspects of culture in the present creation. We seek the peace and prosperity of the city while we live there, specifically as Christians and because of our eschatological longing for the perfect city life with Jesus Christ and his people in the age to come. But if we lose the earthly city, if it is destroyed, if persecution drives us out of it—whatever may befall us in the earth right now, indeed if our very lives are taken from us, what is lost is not a constitutive part of what we are working unto Christ for, not a part of our eschatological inheritance itself, but only a good, yet temporary foretaste of the same. Conversely, if my daily vocation is *not* to help the earthly city as such but to bring people an inheritance in the future eschatological city by preaching the good news of Jesus Christ, that is the difference between doing something good with results that are in themselves temporary and doing something better because it has more directly lasting or eschatological results.

We must say, then, that earthly wealth, earthly cities, earthly bread, and so many other good gifts that we enjoy in the present world order all provide rich and meaningful pictures of God’s ultimate purposes for this creation. Therefore these things should whet our appetites for the fulfillment of this creation’s hope through the realization of God’s transforming power to bring about the fuller, final world order that is still to come for it and for us. When we create and participate in such temporary things, we do so specifically as Christians, unto Christ and under his lordship, giving expression to our eschatological expectation of the rich, lasting, concrete inheritance that he himself will bring about on this earth, when it is cleansed and renewed. Nevertheless, our decision to involve ourselves with these things unto Christ’s glory must still be weighed carefully in light of their temporary nature and the far greater, lasting nature of the eschatological world order that is coming, when so many things here on earth, like marriage, will pass away.

### 3. Concluding Reflections

The topic of Christ and culture has always been and no doubt remains a difficult one. What I have said above certainly will not change that. Indeed it cannot do so with regard to a topic that involves inherent tensions only to be resolved in the future when Christ returns. Having said that, though, the goal has been to sketch out

certain fundamental parameters of biblical thought that can function as a guide.

Toward that end, basic to what has been said above has been a concern for eschatology. The Christian worldview enriches and directs life in this world not simply because of its protological belief in an original world order but especially because of its eschatological belief in an ultimate goal for which all has been created, toward which all is purposefully moving, and in light of which all of life is lived in the meantime.<sup>13</sup> This focus on eschatology has helped generate both of the main points made above regarding marriage and culture in general.

On the one hand, by approaching protology and human culture in light of eschatology, we are thereby encouraged to see the ultimately positive relation between the first creation order and the last, as the former is inherently designed to point forward to the latter and the latter is described in Scripture (albeit opaquely, 1 Cor. 13:13) on comparison to the former. Recognizing this fundamentally positive relation helps us point out various important ways in which the cultural tasks to which God calls each of us are not just good in a general way but in fact Christ-centered. Engagement with these tasks is therefore not neutral or common, guided by general principles unrelated to Christ; it is rather a fundamentally religious activity, to be done as Christians unto our Lord and in light of our eschatological hope. In this way, we can avoid an unbiblical bifurcation between Christ himself and the rest of our lives, instead rendering all of our lives to the Lord in gratitude for his life-changing grace. Christian marriage is no oxymoron, then. Rather, Christian marriage is just marriage as God originally designed it, a blessed bodily union that purposefully prefigures the eschatological union of Christ and the church.

On the other hand, approaching protology and human culture in light of eschatology also presses upon us the inherently eschatological question concerning what is provisional and what is ultimate or final. In this way we confront another, fundamentally important biblical distinction between that which is temporary and that which is permanent. If the protological order and the eschatological order are related positively in Scripture, in the ways sketched above, they are also clearly distinguished from one another. While marriage points toward Christ's eschatological enthronement, it is also not permanent. Therefore, foregoing marriage for more undivided attention to that which is eternal is desirable, if my gifts and calling enable such.

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13. A concern for the topic of natural law, while legitimate in itself, will always be insufficient for understanding human culture, it seems to me, especially insofar as it is so often investigated largely in isolation from Christ as first (the pre-existent one by and for whom all things were created) and last (the eschatological Lord through whom the eschaton is realized).

Exploring the distinction between good protological things that are only temporary and better eschatological things that are eternal thereby helps us to avoid unbiblical conflation of the two. This, rather than attempting to delineate two separate kingdoms of God, will help us follow the repeated biblical injunctions to set our hearts not on what pertains to this world only but rather on the world order which is to come (e.g., Matt. 6:19-21; 2 Cor. 4:18; Phil. 3:18-21; Col. 3:1-4; Heb. 11:13-16).

On balance, then, when it comes to human culture, the relation between eschatology and protology can be understood somewhat along the lines of typology. The type is a good and valuable gift from God in itself, but it is also not permanent. It points forward to something even greater. In light of this biblical balance, it is possible to appreciate the legitimate concern of many Christians who gravitate toward either end of the theological spectrum regarding culture. Put negatively,<sup>14</sup> those who wish to guard against a secularization of culture that is unrelated to Christian calling and Christ's lordship, and those who wish to guard against worldly Christians and a worldly church preoccupied with that which is temporary, can both be seen to have legitimate concerns.

When reflecting on the positive value of human culture, then, we can say that life in this present world order should be filled with lots of pointers to the age to come, and increasingly so as hardworking Christians purposefully apply themselves to various cultural tasks done unto the Lord Christ, according to their opportunities and callings. Here is a venue for the full use of God-given creativity, ingenuity, and skill in all areas of creation and diverse walks of life. Through their everyday work, Christians give expression to their eschatological hope as aspects of life in this present creation increasingly come to reflect and so testify about the permanent realities of the age to come that are otherwise unseen at the present time (2 Cor. 4:18). Such an effort accords with the very nature of the present creation order, in which things protological are purposefully designed to point ahead (albeit dimly) toward things eschatological.

At the same time, though, such a positive view of human culture carries its own tensions (and even dangers), to the extent that so much of what is good in the present world order is still only temporary. Institutions such as marriage and civil government will pass away. The products of our hands are subject to rust, decay, theft, and destruction. Such good and beautiful things therefore only point towards our lasting inheritance, but do not themselves comprise it. If we mistake the two, are we not in danger of walking by sight rather than by faith (2 Cor. 5:7)?

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14. These are ways of stating the negative concerns (that is, concerns regarding what to avoid) that often underlie the two Christian impulses stated positively in section A above.

In light of this, the Christian life is necessarily filled with tensions and choices, which must be made in light of individual circumstances, gifts, callings, and opportunities. Here we face many questions. There are questions of stewardship: what is the best use of our time, money, and efforts? If I have money to give, I must weigh whether to give to something good but in itself temporary or to something better because permanent. There are questions of religious temptation: where is my treasure and therefore my heart? No matter how much or how little I have, I must be wary of setting my affections on what will not last as an end in itself or as that in which my life or happiness consists. There are questions of individual calling: am I gifted and do I desire a good task like baking bread, or the even greater task of giving men the bread of life? Here I must pray for discernment, but also for a heart that eagerly desires what pertains directly to the life of the world to come. How then should I live in the meantime? How should I encourage my son to live, as he grows older? Such questions must partly be answered on the basis of individual opportunities and callings. But they must always be addressed as an eschatologically informed choice concerning what is temporary and what is permanent, according to the Lord's design.

In closing, it has sometimes been remarked in derogatory fashion that Christians are too heavenly minded to be of much earthly good. I hope it is clear from the foregoing that this should not necessarily be so, at least not in the way intended, though it partly depends on individual situations, gifts, callings, and opportunities. On the one hand, if I as a Christian am called to be married or to bake bread or to make candles or to govern cities, then my heavenly-mindedness should greatly enhance my full-orbed, sacrificial, Christ-centered service and goals in such endeavors. In this, I may be of much good to this earth and its enterprises, even as I testify to my future hope. On the other hand, though, if I have a choice between involvement in things that are *merely* earthly and giving myself or my earnings to that which is in itself directly lasting in the age to come, then I will no doubt end up being far less earthly good than my non-Christian neighbors, who have no hope beyond this world, would like me to be. Here again is the tension of the Christian life, as we live it between Christ's first and second comings.

May God grant, then, that we will know how to view marriage and all temporary aspects of life always in reference to Christ, to participate in them in ways that speak well of Christ, and to long for that fuller future fellowship with Christ to which marriage and other temporary things graciously point and by which they will one day be surpassed.