

Theology is not self serving... it will always play out in the lives of those with whom you live and interact. Good theology will make your life more enjoyable, as well as make you more useful for the work of promoting God's Kingdom. Our role toward humanity is two-fold: 1) ambassadors – who speak for the God we know, love, and serve; 2) witnesses – to testify to the grace and love of Christ we have experienced... everything else flows out of these two callings as each person is gifted and positioned for God's purposes.

A. Great Theology will always lead to great counsel – always think through your theology in terms of offering counseling.

1. Ultimate Questions you may hear of from friends... how you respond may bring hope and comfort. Here is a man I know... I'll tell his story in a developmental fashion, how would you respond to him with the issues presented stage by stage?
 - a. Stage 1 - I can't pray – I feel disappointed at being at age 40, and my life hasn't turned out as I expected. I expected more from myself, but never had the discipline to achieve it. I now find I have inoperable cancer with a short time to live... I'm disappointed with myself, and I'm disappointed with God.
 - b. Stage 2 - Live or let die – at this point in my life situation, I'm at a loss to decide whether I should fight against the cancer or just succumb to it. Letting go seems easier than being combatant. If I let go it seems that I'm relying on grace, but if I fight and God doesn't heal me... what then? To be honest... if someone just gave me a pill and it would all end quickly and easily, I think I'd take it.
 - c. Stage 3 - Unfinished business – who will care for my infirmed father and my blind brother? Who will speak into the life of my older unbelieving brother? I had expected to get married and have a family... but life just got in the way.
 - d. Stage 4 - Present insurmountable financial needs – hospice for me will run \$150.00 a day, not to mention the ongoing and future needs of my dependent father and brother. I don't have that kind of money... I have no idea where to even get started, so I called you.
2. Approaches to Suffering" – As you thought through the developmental stages in the story above your counsel probably changed. In dealing with people who are suffering, resist the tendency to try to solve their problem. Listen to them and walk into their hurt with them... be real.
 - a. Affirm their fear – fear is real and it is not necessarily a deficiency of faith.
 - i. In Genesis the curse is real – toil, death, and suffering are a part of humanity's fate on fallen earth.

Theology 2.2 – Word made Flesh

- ii. Encourage people not to stuff or throttle their fear... instead face it and explore it with them.
 - iii. When fear is identified and fleshed out – it becomes something we can deal with. As long as it remains general and nondescript it becomes something bigger than it ought to be.
 - iv. When fears are faced in the light of day they are still frightening, but maybe not as overbearing as they were before.
- b. If you can physically alleviate or remove suffering – we should do it.
- i. Jesus demonstrated compassion and alleviated some suffering, but not all of it.
 - ii. Jesus always walked into the mess of other people’s lives with compassion and hope.
 - iii. When we have the opportunity to step into a situation and help alleviate pain and suffering, we should do so in Jesus’ name in accordance with your particular calling and gifting. Sometimes this will involve direct action – going into the place and working to help. Other times it may just mean prayer, or giving resources for others to use.
 - iv. Pain and suffering are a reality of our Fallen world... and many would take the easy way out of avoiding it. However, there are moral and ethical imperatives that need to be worked through before you are faced with the prospects of someone wanting to end their life to avoid suffering. You need to know where you stand on this issue before entering into the possible discussion with another. If you find yourself confronted with this matter before you have thought it through, tell them you will need to think this through before you advise them further. Set a date when that follow up meeting will happen... and strongly consider referral to a Christian counselor who will be better prepared to discuss these issues.
- c. What do you say to disappointment? Mat 10:24-28
- i. V 28 – puts fear in context – the body will die, everybody will die – trust in Him who can preserve your soul.
 - ii. V29 – God knows and understands loss. He knows & understands life.
 - iii. When Abraham died he had obtained only a small portion or fragment of the promises God lavished on him... yet he continued to believe that God is faithful and true. He knew and trusted God... this is faith.
- d. Be mindful to proclaim our hope – clearly, loudly, and often – the world desperately needs hope.
- i. You can’t give what you don’t have – you have to have worked through your own faith issues and to trust God yourself before you can inspire others to similarly trust God. God must be real and intimate to you before you can make Him so to others. To do otherwise is disingenuous... or worse.

Theology 2.2 – Word made Flesh

- ii. Hope is the fundamental counter-agent or antidote to fear.
- iii. Acknowledge the fear... accentuate the hope.
- iv. If you can leave someone who is struggling and suffering with hope... you have done well.
- e. We will all succumb to death – but we should fight for life as long as we are able.
 - i. Where there is life... there is always hope.
 - ii. When death approaches – the reality of hope must increase.
 - iii. Suffering in this world is real – this is temporary.
 - iv. Greater judgment to come is also real – this is permanent.
 - v. There will come a time to let go – when God reveals that your time has come. Jesus gave us this example on the cross – He didn't give up, but at the end He released Himself into God's care when He knew His time had come.
 - vi. Jesus in Gethsemane grappled with suffering and death – and His faith was perfect! Our faith must always be less – but the example applies none-the-less.
- f. In terms of an unbelieving brother being left behind and the needs of dependent family members:
 - i. The faith, courage, and conviction in how a believer faces their end is the final evangelical proclamation one can make to their family and loved ones – and it will have repercussions beyond the immediate family members and friends.
 - ii. Our responsibility to others ends with life – God can be trusted to deal faithfully with unfinished business. Do what you can, then leave the rest with God.
 - iii. Our priorities as Christian leadership must always be to “seek ye first” – the gospel must meet the realities of life to have traction.
 - iv. We may be asked to do more than we feel comfortable about... be careful not to go too far in trying to help. Be real, be genuine, be loving, be hopeful, be compassionate – but realized your limitations. God may need to crush someone before they are ready to trust Him... and that is God's ultimate desire for each person – that we know Him, trust Him, and love Him. Getting there isn't always easy or pretty.

B. Hoekema – Dutch Reformed theologian who wrote the book – Created in God's Image. Thoughts about the book:

1. Regeneration – page 8, end of 2nd paragraph – holds to the effectual gospel call for reformed thinking... Holy Spirit brings regeneration which precedes salvation.
 - a. In Calvinist-Dutch Reformed thinking – man is so fallen and degenerate that he is incapable of hearing let alone responding to God. The Spirit must initiate spiritual resurrection must precede humanity's response to God's call.

Theology 2.2 – Word made Flesh

- b. John Wesley – Methodist Arminian theologian would have argued for “Prevenient Grace” which is more of a calling than regeneration. It is the awakening awareness God gives to all people at some point in their life for which they then have to accept responsibility to receive the grace offered or reject it.
 - c. Hoekema is a very conservative Calvinist theologian – he holds that God is behind all human action. He doesn’t support the notion of free will choices... you are either in or out before you were born... in fact from the beginning of time.
2. Cultural Mandate – forming a Godly Christian Culture on Earth is a goal of Dutch reformed thinking – p 14 beginning 3rd paragraph.
- a. Hoekema argues that God’s command in Genesis to give His blessing for propagation and dominion is in the context of developing a God-Glorifying culture on earth now. In his thinking, we have the responsibility to be forwarding the Kingdom of God on earth.
 - b. Question arises as to whether God’s Call is a ‘mandate’ or a ‘tendency’? A mandate would imply creating a theocracy, while a tendency is more the salting of society and is more in keeping with historical Scriptural precedent.
 - c. What is the responsibility of God’s people?
 - d. How is Grace displayed to the world?
 - e. Apartheid South Africa was formed from a Dutch Reformed theological-social order. However, it was a cruel society that repressed Black humanity. It is not unusual that the ideal we hold in ignorance becomes the snare that we fall into.
3. “Sphere Sovereignty” and “cultural mandate” are classic Dutch Reformed concepts.
- a. Sphere sovereignty suggests that Jesus interacted within the context of a number of spheres of influence.
 - b. Jesus’ authority was demonstrated:
 - i. In the sphere of nature/creation – His command over and control of creation attested to His sovereignty.
 - ii. In the sphere of humanity – Jesus had control over life and death, over illness, no one was able to take His life away, instead He laid it down.
 - iii. In the sphere of the Spiritual world – Jesus commanded demons and had control over angels.
4. Centrality of the Gospel – is the real problem in church thinking.
- a. Guilt, emotion, fear, etc. – while these are real issues and real problems for people, solving them are not the proper motivations for the church.
 - i. Church is not about making your life work better. Pastors who preach self-help Christianity are missing their calling... preach Jesus.
 - ii. Church is not about introducing a new self-help system. While helping is not necessarily a bad thing, it is not the good thing we are called to do. It is too small a vision of the Gospel and of Grace.

Theology 2.2 – Word made Flesh

- b. **Introducing business models and various forms of quantitative analysis are not appropriate for the church.**
 - i. **Qualitative approaches to spiritual transformation and discipleship are more helpful and productive. We are each on a path... a journey of faith, and there are many common sign posts along the way by which we can gauge our personal growth and spiritual development.**
 - ii. **People need relational dependency on Jesus for fundamental life change, all other programmatic approaches may be distracting for the true work of the church... growing individuals as a disciple of Jesus.**
 - iii. **Jesus Christ must be the center of all Christian identity, and the sole focus of ministry... in seminary as well as in the church.**
 - iv. **Reducing the church to an institution where faith and good things can occur is too small a vision for the church. Sadly, this is the standard too many churches operate under.**
- 5. **Hoekema makes an important contribution in emphasizing how important humanity is to God. This is a real strength of this book.**
 - a. **The dialogue of God regarding humanity is on a totally different order than the rest of creation, or even of the Angels.**
 - b. **The breath of God in humanity is another striking difference in regards to the remainder of creation.**
 - i. **This breath links man to God in a fundamental way – breath is life... Spirit is breath.**
 - ii. **The breath promotes the image of God in man – something spiritual was transferred to humanity... though the Fall has diminished this gift, it is there in some latent form, ready to be quickened into life.**
 - c. **Ps 8:4-5 – humanity is made a little lower than God [the word is actually Elohim – meaning God and not angels]. This is another way of saying that humanity is “like God” in some fundamentally different manner than everything else. Scripture raises this issue, but leaves it unresolved... and we shouldn’t try to fill in the blanks. Where Scripture is silent, we should not speak.**
 - d. **What are some of the different aspects of humanity’s description in Scripture?**
 - i. **Man is formed by God from the earth – there is a material aspect and direct connection to earth.**
 - ii. **Breath of God gives a spiritual aspect... we are spiritually aware but we’re bound to earth because that’s who we are.**
 - iii. **God on the other hand is Spirit and not material.**
 - iv. **Our being tied to the earth connects us to all others who are connected to earth – we are holistically joined to creation as well as to God.**

Theology 2.2 – Word made Flesh

- v. Our physical reality has a timeframe – a past, present and future. To God all are equally a state of now. This is a wonder and a marvel... though we can never get our minds around it.
6. Hoekema reinforces the Social aspect of humanity.
- a. Of all the things God pronounced as ‘Good’ in creation, the only ‘not good’ was man being “alone – without an appropriate help-mate” – the word used is a similar term as Paraclete – a strong help that comes alongside.
 - b. Man had animals around him and had purpose and dominion over earth and its contents, but animals were of a different order of matter – they lacked the breath of God. Many people want to treat animals as if they were human... they are not. Though Scripture always teaches that we need to treat animals with respect and compassion.
 - c. Man & woman, family & society are what we were created to live within... this is a reflection of the relational intimacy and health in the Trinity. This relational aspect is one of the ways we are like God.
 - d. Communion alone with God was also inadequate – the “Shema” has 2 parts – love the Lord your God... love humanity as yourself.
 - i. Man alone is not good, man with God alone is still inadequate – God intends relational intimacy to be reflective of the holistic unity within the Godhead – as a reflection of God’s Image of completeness... not in some sick sexual way, but in relational interdependency, vulnerability and connectedness.
 - ii. Loneliness is a major issue for humanity – we do not do well alone for long. Those who remain alone or aloof from others usually go wrong socially as their humanity becomes perverted and self-centered.
 - iii. Fallen creation is a major issue for humanity – we will not remain on fallen earth forever – we’re here on an interim basis... we are bound by who we are living in hope for what we’ll become. A little discussed aspect of God’s grace is in His casting humanity out of the Garden so they wouldn’t eat the fruit of the Tree of Life and live forever in a Fallen state. It is not by coincidence that Jesus is the Tree of Life – and that the Tree of life is for the healing of the nations.
 - e. How much contentment can a person have without other people?
 - i. In Glory – we will be in a new and perfected reality. No sorrow, no sickness or infirmity. No tears, only joy and fulfillment in the presence of God – come Lord Jesus!
 - ii. On fallen earth – we need companionship and community. We were made for this.
 - iii. Loneliness is part of the incompleteness of this current reality.
 - iv. The social aspect of the gospel to visit those in prison [alienated from society], and to care for widows and orphans [those who are the most vulnerable people on

Theology 2.2 – Word made Flesh

earth to which we can add the unborn as the most helpless segment of society] is in response to recognized human need.

- f. The “helper” aspect of woman is a very high calling:
 - i. God is seen as “man’s helper” throughout Scripture – this is to give man confidence.
 - ii. Woman is not a 2nd class citizen – she shares man’s calling, image, purpose, and hope. It is well argued that woman being created last is the apex of God’s creative genius... and one of His greatest gifts to man.
 - iii. The ‘headship’ covering many conservative theologians place upon women keeping them under male domination and in denying them leadership roles, etc., is a misunderstanding of what we were made for. Women are created as equal help-mates... equal but different with men and women complimenting one another in mutual deference and respect.
- g. Being made in the “Image of God” is an extremely high calling:
 - i. We are in effect – God’s mirror, His reflection. When we look at one another we see an aspect of God – Imago Dei. As others look at us as Christians they see an image of Christ... what humanity was made to be – Imago Christi.
 - ii. Humanity at large sees God through the intermediary of God’s people.
 - iii. Humanity was to exhibit and manifest God’s Glory in creation.
- h. As “caretaker” – humanity has a profound role in creation:
 - i. We have been given much authority and freedom in determining what we do in light of our desire to follow God’s will.
 - ii. Leading of the Spirit is not compelled – are we not puppets who God operates [as some of the most conservative reformed theologians might mistakenly convey]. This would be a great evil in God’s economy of spiritual freedom.
 - iii. Yes we are fallen – but we remain in substantial ways God’s image.
 - iv. God has given us authority and responsibility to walk properly with Him:
 - 1. In humility.
 - 2. In profound appreciation of His provisions.
 - 3. To care for those who cannot care for themselves.
 - 4. To share the Gospel to the world.
 - 5. To live as a community of disciples of Jesus.
 - 6. To be God’s representatives [ambassadors] on earth.
- i. We differ from animals in terms of degree:
 - i. We share many things... emotions, use of tools, learning, remembering, training, noble action and self-sacrifice, etc.
 - ii. We have cognitive capabilities beyond animals as we can invent astonishing things; we have means of learning in science, etc far beyond animal capabilities.

- j. We differ from animals in terms of nature:
 - i. We understand the needs of others and are to promote social justice, prevention of cruelty to all creatures, to fairly manage and not waste resources, etc.
 - ii. We understand God's nature because we are a reflection of His Nature.
 - iii. We work for improvement and development, in ways that are different from that of Angels and animals:
 - 1. They can praise God in some fashion; but we have the option to grow in our appreciation of and response to God and others.
 - 2. They cannot initiate actions as free will entities – there is no evidence since Satan's fall that Angels can do other than carry out God's instructions. Obviously, the Bible is not intended to solve every theological conundrum we can imagine... rather it is intended to provide enough substance so we can engage with God in relational intimacy.
 - 3. There is no evidence they can experience God's Grace, although they can surely appreciate Him.
 - 4. Angels are not bound by the material world, but also are not free to act independently within it.
 - 5. Humanity should have the highest view of the sanctity and value of life... and to actively promote social justice in terms of being God's image bearers.
 - 6. Humanity is trusted with dominion over the earth – we are to keep and serve the earth in the same way we are to keep God's commands and serve His will [Gen 2:15]. Gen 2:15 is a management position... not just a maintenance position.
 - 7. As such, Christians should be the standard bearers for conservation, ethical treatment of animals, ecology, sustainable farming and growth, etc.

C. Harmatology [Sin]

- 1. It is in the context of understanding the greatness of humanity that allows us to see the magnitude of the problem of sin. This is a major mistake of the church – first we dumb down who humanity is meant to be in God, and then we dumb down who Christians are meant to be in Christ, and we exponentially multiply the problem by ignoring sin.
 - a. Genesis started really well [God pronounced creation good]... but soon things start to go wrong [the Fall]... then things start to go bad [Cain murders his brother Able]... then things really goes bad [society gets so corrupted God saves a remnant Noah]. Then in Chapter 12 God introduces Abraham and rekindles Hope.
 - i. The 1st 11 chapters show the gradual decline of humanity into sin and degradation. The 1st 3 chapters of Acts offer a summary of this decline and degradation.

Theology 2.2 – Word made Flesh

- ii. Faith, trust, and obedience is the hope God initiates to counter sin starting with father Abraham and culminating in Messiah.
 - b. Eve's understanding of God's instruction was not the same thing God said to Adam... did she get it wrong? Did Adam fail to teach her properly? Scripture doesn't say.
 - i. Eve added to the provision – don't touch... instead of don't eat.
 - ii. Eve lessened the penalty – you will die... instead of you shall surely die.
 - iii. Eve also lessened the grace of God – we may eat of the other fruit... instead of you can eat freely of the other fruit.
 - iv. Satan actually corrects God's command, showing he knew the requirements – 3:4 you will not surely die.
 - v. Satan introduces doubts about God's intent – he planted the seed that God was holding something back that was a good and desirable thing. Left to her own reasoning, she was doomed... and Adam stood by passively while all this was going on, effectively hanging her out to dry. The person he had proclaimed as bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh – a description of such closeness and intimacy in every way including emotional, physical, and spiritual.
- 2. Italianic Justice – God's judgment in twists and turns:
 - a. Satan thought he could destroy humanity. Scripture doesn't say why, but it is clear that Satan was out to subvert God's perfect order. Many theologians conclude that the Fall of Lucifer preceded and gave rise to the Fall of Humanity.
 - b. God turns it around and informs Satan he will be destroyed by humanity, and that what he had intended as a mortal wound for humanity is only a slight wound, and Satan will receive the mortal wound from the seed of humanity – Jesus Messiah.
 - c. Satan will crawl and eat dust.
 - d. Man will die and return to dust.
 - e. Satan intended to usurp a kingdom – earth.
 - f. Jesus resurrection insures the recreation of heaven and earth, and Satan's complete and final failure.
 - g. God not only restores creation, but He joins heaven and earth into a spectacular new place where God's people are free and complete – greater than the original creation, and Satan can't be there.