

Thanksgiving: Jesus is teaching us how to enter the Kingdom of God. **"Jesus answered, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God." (Joh 3:5 ESV)**

Please do not forget to pray for all the shut-ins and isolated brothers and sisters in our congregations C. Campbell (Fredericton) and J. Steffes (Caribou, Me), Mr. Ross Bathurst, P. Ward (Saint John) and others.

ACTIVITIES FOR THE MONTH OF MARCH 2020

Times of worship services: Moncton – 10:30 AM every Sunday

- Time of worship services in **Saint John** – Sunday, **March 8 and 22** at 2:30 PM.
- **Communion-** On 1st and 3rd Sunday – **Moncton**
and 2nd and 4th Sunday - **Saint John**
- **Address:**
 - Moncton— 70 King St. —Sage building, second floor;
 - Saint John—50 Newport Cres., Portland United church.

The next Discipleship groups: Wednesday March 18 @ 7:30 home of Mr. and Mrs. Vautour

Local Website: Should you have forgotten the password to enter **"For members only"** on the www.worshipim.ca website, please do not hesitate to contact Mr. Vautour.

Prayer request from Robert and Michelle (GCI Saint John) are requesting prayer for their daughter Charlotte. She and her husband live in Poland where she teaches. Recently, they visited Florence in Italy. Before they left, they were tested for the corona virus. They were symptom-free at that time. They are concerned because Charlotte is pregnant with their first child.

Prayer request for Mrs. Vautour's sister and husband, Joanne and David who are quarantine on the Grand Princess Cruise ship off the coast of San Francisco because of coronavirus. Also please pray that God will put a stop to the spread of this virus worldwide.

From Mr. Steve Posiak, GCI regional Dir. Western Canada dated March 5, 2020.

Hi Everyone,

Bill is in Ohio for a RD meeting with his USA counterparts and asked me to forward this email from Roger to you regarding preparation for the Coronavirus. As mentioned in the article, here are a few things we should start to do even now to prepare.

- Get in the habit now of washing your hands often. Might be good for congregations to set up a hand sanitizer station when people come in. Start using it now to get in the habit.
- Practice bumping elbows instead of shaking hands or hugging
- Let the congregation know to be ready to cancel services if someone contracts the virus.
- Remind members that we do not need to let fear guide our actions.
- Whatever happens, we are secure in Christ's hands.

Please pray for the leaders of this world who have to tackle enormous problems – problems that will only be fully resolved at the second return of Jesus. *"1 ¶ First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people, 2 for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way. 3 This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Savior," (1Ti 2:1-3 ESV)*

Please pray for all the Christian churches in Canada, that we may all grow in the grace and knowledge of our Saviour Jesus.

Prayers for GCI across the world: that we will walk in God's will for us and that we will see, understand and participate in his work as He guides the leadership, Mr. Williams, GCI Director, Mr. Bill Hall, Canadian Director and all the others in leadership wherever they may be.

The Role of Grace in Marriage with Max Lucado – excellent presentation

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iuo-zGChYGY&feature=youtu.be> (58 min)

A THEOLOGICAL ETHIC, part 1 **(GCI Surprising God Blog)**

Posted: 05 Mar 2020 03:52 PM PST

*This is the first post in a series on theological ethics. It's adapted from the lecture "What is a Theological Ethic?" by **Grace Communion Seminary** President Dr. Gary Deddo.*

How can we as pastors, teachers, parents and grandparents help those in our care learn to *think like Christ*, particularly in matters of ethics? The answer is that we help them develop a **theological ethic** -- a way of thinking (and behaving) that is grounded in and flows from one's knowledge of God (theology). But what does that look like, and why is it important? We will seek to answer these questions through the course of this series of posts.

Defining a theological ethic

The theological ethic presented here is thoroughly biblical. Rather than picking out selected individual verses (proof-texting), it seeks to take into consideration the whole of the *biblical narrative* -- the entire history of God's interaction with his creation. Because the focus of that story is the person and work of Jesus, this theological ethic involves taking on *the mind of Christ* (Isaiah 40:13 and 1 Corinthians 2:16) which means developing a *Christian worldview*.

With that mindset, followers of Jesus learn to *perceive all reality as being from Christ*. From the vantage point of their reconciliation in Christ, they look back to the Fall then back to creation. They see, as the apostle Paul affirms, that creation was *in Christ, through Christ and for Christ*. They see that Christ came to save us from our fallen state, corrupted and captive to evil and threatened with destruction and even threatened with falling into non-being. From that vantage point they then look at the present -- life in the "present evil age" between the times of Christ's first and second advents. In this present reality they enjoy the first fruits of reconciliation, taking up their vocation as members of Christ's body, the church, which is *in* but not *of* the world, resisting evil. Finally, they look past the present to our ultimate hope -- the consummation of all things when Christ returns to establish fully his rule and reign over all the cosmos, the time when evil will be no more.



Creation

Fall

Reconciliation

Redemption

(adapted from "The Big Story of Scripture" at ChristianityToday.com)

Perceiving reality (past, present, future) in this way, our actions, decisions and priorities begin to be formed within the four scenes of the biblical narrative: Creation, Fall, Reconciliation, and Redemption (illustrated above). This is the framework of reality as seen from God's perspective -- a reality that reaches from Ultimate Origin to Ultimate End. From this vantage point, we live out our discipleship in relationship to our Reconciler and Redeemer. This theological ethic (or call it a Christian worldview) accounts for each scene in the narrative, viewing the situation or issue at hand in light of the unfolding of the history of the cosmos in accordance with God's providential, good purposes put forth in Jesus to re-head (re-unite) all things under Jesus Christ (Ephesians 1:10, NET) [1].

The entire story is about the grace of God

God's plan and purpose to re-head all things in Christ is about the grace of God that comes to us from the good and gracious triune God in myriad ways, though always through Jesus. Creation itself is an act of God's grace in the sense that it is good and freely given (not earned or deserved). That God has only good purposes for his creation is also a

grace. We see this in the creation accounts in Genesis, where we find creation rescued from the undifferentiated darkness of chaos and disorder. God's grace then unfolds as God gives creation a multi-dimensional structure with ordered inter-relations between a host of parts: sun and moon; regions of water, earth and their various inhabitants; with the arrangement of created things in accordance to their kinds, then ordered within those kinds (e.g. male and female); and ordered within their regions (birds of air, fish of the sea, etc.).

When all these spheres of creation are properly interacting or relating, we find *fruitfulness* -- life leading to more and abundant life. All this reflects the goodness and grace of God. His creation is good -- very good, the fruit of the relations of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit: God the Father, speaking through the Word, with the Spirit brooding over it all to bring about a living creation.

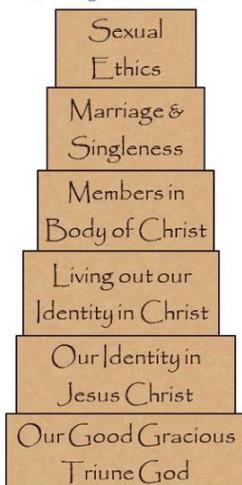
Sadly, the good creation of the gracious triune God fell -- became alienated from God -- resulting in disorder and discord. But God anticipated this event and provided for the reconciliation, restoration and reordering of the created cosmos through the One who would be the offspring of Eve, the One who would crush the head of the deceiving, evil serpent. We later learn in Scripture that this One is Jesus, born of Mary, the second Eve. His birth is not the end of the story, for the ultimate restoration and perfection of God's good creation comes through Jesus' life, ministry, suffering, death by crucifixion, burial, resurrection, ascension and sending of the Holy Spirit. And there is yet more to come, which we learn about in the eschatological passages of the New Testament, culminating in what we are told in the book of Revelation.

Living in accordance with a theological ethic

So that's a theological ethic --- more precisely a Christian theological ethic. But how do we live it out in daily life? The answer is that we do so by *thinking with the mind of Christ*, which means taking fully into account the four scenes in the aforementioned biblical story. Grounded in that narrative, with its focus on who God is and therefore who we are in relation to God, we note the Bible's many commands and directives related to ethics. Though we understand that these instructions are not arbitrary, we note that they are given in a particular *context*, namely that of the outworking of the grace of God in creation, the fall, our current state of being reconciled and being sanctified, and in hope of ultimate redemption (the aforementioned four scenes in the biblical narrative).

Within the context of this narrative framework, the Bible addresses what it means to be a human being who lives in right relationship with others, in ways that glorify God. In Scripture we find a rich, multi-levelled unfolding of what it means to be a human being created according to Jesus Christ, the image of God, and of our being recreated according to that image as members of the body of Christ in hope of ultimate redemption. That revelation, when put together within the narrative framework, fills out the *indicatives of grace* (who we are in Christ, our identity), which gives rise to the *imperatives of grace* (God's instructions concerning ethical behavior). This grace-based, Christ-centered revelation then shapes our thinking concerning all matters of ethics. Below is an example of this shaping as it pertains to sexual ethics.

The Foundations of a Christian
Theological Sexual Ethic



Let's unpack the diagram above, one level at a time:

- **Level 1:** We begin at the bottom of the diagram with the essential foundation -- the triune God, who we know to be good and gracious. This is where all truly theological reasoning begins. We are reminded here that all human beings were created by this God, according Jesus, the God-man who is the true image of God.
- **Level 2:** Here we are reminded that we humans have our being, our identity in Jesus. In him we have our belonging, meaning, significance, security and destiny. Jesus (whether we know it or not) is our life.
- **Level 3:** Here we see that we are to live out of (in accordance with) our identity in Christ, an identity given to us as a gift of grace. This living involves how we relate with both God and people; it involves our relationship with ourselves and everything else.
- **Level 4:** Here we see that we live out our identity in Christ as members of his body, the church. Ethics in all areas of life involves

living in community.

- **Level 5:** Here we see that it is within the structure established by the first four levels that we then (and only then) identify as being married or unmarried (single).
- **Level 6:** At this level, which is built upon (and so grounded in) all that underlies it, we arrive at a comprehensive theological sexual ethic.

The commands, instructions and exhortations found in the New Testament make little sense unless viewed from the perspective indicated by this diagram with its six levels -- a perspective that speaks to God's intentions for humanity, including the reconciling work of Christ in answer to the fall. It is in accordance with this theologically formed ethic that

we are able to practice in matters pertaining to sexuality what the apostle Paul calls *the obedience of faith* (or *the obedience that comes from faith*).

What is truly ethical is that which reflects in a human way the glory that belongs to the triune God. The ethical directives and standards given in Scripture might seem arbitrary when viewed apart from this context. But seen within this framework, they make sense, for they have to do with the goodness and grace of God, which upholds, orders and renews the structures of the fallen relationships in which we now live as they hold out the promise of the fulfillment of God's intentions with the coming of the renewed heavens and earth.

Human pride unchecked tends to regard God's will as a violation of human rights and freedom. But the Holy Spirit leads us to proclaim God's good will (his ethics) on the basis of their theological foundations -- a foundation that points to the indicatives of grace (our identity in Christ). Indeed, the only hope of rightly understanding God's ethical directives is knowing who the Commander is: Creator, Redeemer, Perfecter of all that is. We hinder, even undermine faithful obedience to God's good will when his commands are not presented within this theological context, and so the need for developing a theological ethic (a Christian worldview). In future posts in this series, we'll examine the rationale and application of this ethic in greater detail.

[1] The NET Bible provides the following footnote on the phrase "head up" found in Eph. 1:10, NET:

The precise meaning of the infinitive ἀνακεφαλαιώσασθαι (anakephalaiōsasthai) in v10 is difficult to determine since it was used relatively infrequently in Greek literature and only twice in the NT (here and Rom 13:9). While there have been several suggestions, three deserve mention: (1) "To sum up." In Rom 13:9, using the same term, the author there says that the law may be "summarized in one command, to love your neighbor as yourself." The idea then in Eph 1:10, NET, would be that all things in heaven and on earth can be summed up and made sense out of in relation to Christ. (2) "To renew." If this is the nuance of the verb then all things in heaven and earth, after their plunge into sin and ruin, are renewed by the coming of Christ and his redemption. (3) "To head up." In this translation the idea is that Christ, in the fullness of the times, has been exalted so as to be appointed as the ruler (i.e., "head") over all things in heaven and earth (including the church). That this is perhaps the best understanding of the verb is evidenced by the repeated theme of Christ's exaltation and reign in Ephesians and by the connection to the κεφαλή- (kephalē-) language of 1:22 (cf. Schlier, TDNT3:682; L&N 63.8; M. Barth, Ephesians [AB 34], 1:89–92; contra A. T. Lincoln, Ephesians [WBC], 32–33).

GCI principle website and Moncton Websites—www.gci.org, www.worshipim.ca, www.facebook.com/GCIMoncton; For a wealth of helpful articles about God, grace and his plan for salvation, who we are, etc., please see the GCI.org website.

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