

FAITHFUL TO THE WORD

Systematic Theology Series

ANTHROPOLOGY

The Doctrine of Humanity

Created, Fallen, and Redeemable — What It Means to Be Human Before God

UNIT 7

The Cultural Mandate and Human Vocation

Lesson 21

Work as Worship

The Theology of Vocation

“Every Lawful Calling Is Sacred Before God”

Key Texts: *Genesis 2:15; 3:17–19; Colossians 3:23–24; 1 Corinthians 10:31; Ephesians 6:5–8; Revelation 22:3*

“Whatever you do, do your work heartily, as for the Lord rather than for men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance. It is the Lord Christ whom you serve.”

Colossians 3:23–24, NASB 1995

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Introduction

Lesson 20 established the cultural mandate as the comprehensive commission given by God to the image-bearing creature at its creation — the vice-regal charge to fill the earth, to subdue it, and to exercise delegated dominion over every living creature and every domain of the created order. Lesson 21 turns from the mandate as a whole to one of its most intimate and most personally relevant dimensions: the theology of vocation, the doctrine that every lawful calling in which the image-bearing creature exercises the cultural mandate's commission is a sacred calling, a calling from God, to God, and for God, that carries the full dignity and the full accountability of the vice-regal stewardship that the *imago Dei* implies. The question that drives this lesson is the question that every person in the congregation faces every Monday morning: does my work, the specific, ordinary, often frustrating, sometimes exhilarating work that occupies the largest portion of my waking hours, have any theological significance? Is it an expression of my calling as a creature made in God's image, or is it merely the economic necessity that funds the specifically spiritual dimensions of my life?

The answer that the biblical testimony provides is unambiguous and theologically comprehensive: your work matters to God. Not merely the work of pastors and missionaries and the full-time Christian workers who inhabit the specifically ecclesiastical dimensions of the church's mission, but the work of the farmer who tends the soil, the teacher who instructs the young, the physician who heals the sick, the engineer who designs the infrastructure, the artist who creates the beautiful, the merchant who trades the goods, the parent who nurtures the child, and the magistrate who governs the community. Every lawful calling in which the image-bearing creature exercises the cultural mandate's commission is a sacred calling, and the Reformation's recovery of this truth is one of its most practically important and most theologically significant contributions to the church's life. The medieval church's distinction between the sacred callings of the priest, the monk, and the nun and the secular callings of every other human activity was not merely a sociological error; it was a theological one, and the Reformation's correction of it by the doctrine of vocation is a recovery of the biblical account of the human creature's calling in the created order.

This lesson proceeds in six sections. We begin with the pre-fall institution of work as a creation gift, establishing that work is not a consequence of the fall but a feature of the original very good creation. We then examine the fall's complication of work: how the curse on the ground transformed the character of the work without eliminating its goodness or its theological significance. The third section examines the Reformation's doctrine of vocation and its specific content: the recovery of the biblical truth that every lawful calling is sacred, the theological arguments for the vocation doctrine, and the pastoral implications of the Reformation's recovery. The fourth section addresses the sacred-secular divide directly: the medieval error that the Reformation corrected, the specific theological argument that dismantles it, and the pastoral implications of holding every lawful calling as sacred. The fifth section examines the specific biblical texts that most directly ground the theological framework of work as worship: Colossians 3:23–24, 1 Corinthians 10:31, and Ephesians 6:5–8. We close with the eschatological dimension: work in the new creation, the eternal vocation of the redeemed, and why the theology of vocation is a hope-generating doctrine rather than merely a duty-affirming one.

A note on the scope of the lesson: the theology of vocation is a topic that could fill a series of its own, and the treatment provided here is necessarily focused on the foundational theological convictions that the doctrine requires rather than on the comprehensive pastoral application that it generates. The lesson's goal is to equip the student with the theological framework, work as a creation gift, the fall's complication without revocation, the Reformation's recovery of the vocation doctrine, the dismantling of the sacred-secular divide, and the eschatological hope of eternal vocation, from which the pastoral applications of the doctrine can be drawn for the specific vocational contexts that the congregation's members inhabit.

I. Work as a Creation Gift: The Pre-Fall Institution of Human Labor

Genesis 2:15 and the Theological Significance of the God Who Works

A. *Work Before the Fall: The Garden Vocation*

The most important and the most frequently overlooked datum in the biblical theology of work is Genesis 2:15: “Then the Lord God took the man and put him into the garden of Eden to cultivate it and to keep it” (NASB 1995). The verse places the institution of human work firmly and unambiguously in the pre-fall garden, before sin entered the world, before the curse on the ground, before the introduction of toil and futility and mortality into the human creature’s engagement with the created order. Adam was given work to do before he fell. Work is not a punishment for sin; it is a feature of the original very good creation, a component of the human creature’s pre-fall vocation as the image-bearing steward of the created order entrusted to his care.

This single datum has profound and far-reaching theological implications. It means that the desire to escape work, the fantasy of a life without labor, the cultural valorization of leisure as the highest form of human existence, is not the expression of a spiritually elevated ideal but of a theologically confused one. The creature who was made to work, who received work as one of the first gifts of the very good creation, who was placed in the garden specifically to cultivate and to keep it, is not fulfilling her highest calling when she is at rest but when she is at work, engaged in the specific vocational expression of the image-bearing commission that the Creator designed her to exercise. The retirement culture’s ideal of the permanent vacation is not the biblical vision of the redeemed creature’s flourishing; it is the expression of a desire to escape the very activity for which the creature was made.

The specific character of the pre-fall work as described in Genesis 2:15, the *abad* (cultivate) and the *shamar* (keep) of the garden, was established in Lesson 20 and is recalled here for its theological weight in the vocation doctrine. The *abad*’s connection to the vocabulary of divine worship and service establishes that the pre-fall garden vocation was itself a form of worship: the image-bearing creature’s cultivation of the garden was an act of service to the God who created it and entrusted it to the creature’s care, as surely as any act of liturgical worship. And the pre-fall character of the work, before frustration, before toil, before the thorns and thistles of the cursed ground, was the work of a creature whose labor was genuinely fruitful, genuinely satisfying, and genuinely aligned with the Creator’s good purposes for the created order. The very goodness of Genesis 1:31 applied to the creation in which this work was set and from which it cannot be separated.

B. *The God Who Works: The Theological Model for the Creature’s Vocation*

The most profound theological ground for the doctrine that human work is sacred is not the pre-fall institution of work in the garden but the character of the God who designed it. The God in whose image the human creature was made is the God who works. Genesis 1 is the most sustained account of divine work in the entire biblical canon: six days of creative labor, each day’s work declared good by the Worker who made it, the whole creation declared very good at the completion of the work, and then the rest of the seventh day in which the Worker rests and reflects on the work He has accomplished. The Creator’s work is not an unfortunate necessity that the infinitely powerful Being engages in reluctantly; it is the expression of the Creator’s character, the specific activity through which the divine creative energy is expressed in the making of a universe that reflects the divine wisdom, goodness, and beauty.

The implication for the theology of human vocation is immediate and far-reaching: the human creature who works is doing what her Creator does. The farmer who cultivates the soil is exercising, in the creaturely sphere, the same creative and developing energy that the Creator exercised in the divine sphere when He formed the earth and called forth its vegetation. The artist who creates a painting is exercising, in the creaturely sphere, the same capacity for beauty-making that the Creator expressed when He “planted a garden toward the east, in Eden” and made every tree “pleasing to the sight and good for food” (Genesis 2:8–9). The scientist who investigates the structures of the natural order is exercising, in the creaturely sphere, the same penetrating intelligence that the

Creator expressed when He designed the laws and the structures that govern the created order. Every dimension of human creative, developing, governing, and sustaining work is a creaturely participation in and reflection of the Creator's own creative, developing, governing, and sustaining work, and it is therefore, in principle, a form of the creature's imitation and worship of the God who made her in His own working image.

The rest of the seventh day (Genesis 2:2–3) has an equally important implication for the theology of vocation: the Creator who works also rests, and the rhythm of work and rest that the Sabbath institution establishes for the human creature is grounded in the Creator's own pattern. The Sabbath is not merely a provision for the human creature's physical recuperation; it is a theological statement about the proper rhythm of the image-bearing creature's existence, the rhythm that honors the Creator by imitating His own pattern of work and rest, that refuses to collapse the human vocation into either the idolatry of overwork (the self-defining labor that makes work an end in itself rather than a means of glorifying the Creator) or the self-indulgence of sloth (the avoidance of the work for which the creature was made). The theology of vocation is held within the rhythm of the Sabbath, and the Sabbath is held within the theology of the image-bearing creature's vocation.

“Then the Lord God took the man and put him into the garden of Eden to cultivate it and to keep it.”

Genesis 2:15, NASB 1995

II. The Fall's Complication of Work: Toil, Futility, and the Persistence of Goodness

Genesis 3:17–19 and the Theological Account of Why Work Is Hard

A. *The Curse on the Ground and the Transformation of Work's Character*

Genesis 3:17–19 is the most direct biblical account of the fall's impact on the human creature's work: “Cursed is the ground because of you; in toil you will eat of it all the days of your life. Both thorns and thistles it shall grow for you; and you will eat the plants of the field; by the sweat of your face you will eat bread, till you return to the ground, because from it you were taken; for you are dust, and to dust you shall return” (NASB 1995). The passage is addressed to Adam in his vocational capacity, it is the judgment on the man who is specifically the cultivator of the ground, the one whose *abad* was the tending of the garden. The fall's consequences for work are comprehensive and specific: the ground that was designed to receive the image-bearing creature's *abad* and to respond with fruitfulness now resists the creature's cultivation; the toil that the creature must bring to the work has been intensified by the creation's resistance; and the mortality that the covenant of works' sanction threatened has been introduced into the vocational situation, so that the creature who works will one day return to the very ground she has been laboring to cultivate.

The theological significance of the fall's impact on work is not merely that work has become harder, that the physical demands of labor are more intense and the psychological frustrations of the vocational life are more acute in the post-fall world than they were in the pre-fall garden. The deeper theological significance is the introduction of futility into the vocational situation: the creature who cultivates the ground will find that the ground resists her; the creature who builds the structures of human culture will find that the structures are impermanent and that decay and entropy work against the achievements of the cultural mandate; and the creature who labors toward the goals that the vocational calling sets before her will find that the goals are never fully achieved, that the best of what the creaturely work produces falls short of the vision that inspired it, and that the mortality that the fall has introduced into the human situation ensures that the worker herself will be removed from the work before the work is finished. Paul's description of the creation as “subjected to futility” (Romans 8:20) is the most theologically precise account of what the fall's curse has introduced into the world of work: not

the elimination of work's goodness but the subjection of the work and the worker to the persistent, pervasive frustration of futility.

The pastoral implication of this theological account of the fall's impact on work is both honest and hopeful. It is honest because it does not pretend that the post-fall vocational experience is what the pre-fall garden vocation was, that the frustrations, the failures, the wasted effort, the inexplicable setbacks, and the grinding toil of the fallen world's work experience are merely the subjective distortions of a negative attitude that a more spiritually positive disposition could correct. The fall's curse on the ground is real; the futility is objective, not merely psychological; and the pastor who ministers to the working people in her congregation will do them a disservice by promising them a toil-free vocational experience if they will only trust God more fully. It is hopeful because it establishes that the toil and the futility are consequences of the fall rather than features of the creation, which means they are temporary. The same creation that groans under the futility of the fall is the creation that waits in eager expectation for the liberation that the new creation will bring; and the worker who labors in the frustrated conditions of the fallen world labors in hope of the restored, unfrustratable, eschatological vocation that the new creation will provide.

B. *Work's Goodness Is Not Revoked by the Fall*

The most theologically important datum about the fall's impact on work is what the fall did not do: it did not revoke the goodness of work. The curse of Genesis 3:17–19 is the curse on the ground and on the conditions of the work, the toil, the thorns, the frustration, the futility, not on the work itself. Work remains a creation gift; it remains the expression of the image-bearing creature's vocational commission; it remains the specific activity through which the cultural mandate's charge is exercised in the created order. The post-fall work is more difficult, more frustrating, and more subject to the distortions of the fallen human will than the pre-fall garden vocation was; but the post-fall work is not thereby rendered theologically meaningless, spiritually irrelevant, or inherently secular. The goodness of the creation gift persists through the fall's complications, just as the *imago Dei* persists through the fall's damage and the cultural mandate persists through the fall's distortions.

The biblical narrative's account of post-fall human work supports this affirmation: immediately after the fall, Genesis 4 describes the founding of the first city (v. 17), the invention of animal husbandry (v. 20), the development of musical instruments (v. 21), and the discovery of metalworking (v. 22), a remarkable array of cultural and technological development that the fall has not prevented and that the narrative describes without condemnation. The fallen human community continues to exercise the cultural mandate's developmental commission even in the conditions of the fallen world, and the products of that exercise, the city, the music, the tools, are genuine goods even when they are also susceptible to the distortions that the fallen human heart introduces into every dimension of the cultural mandate's exercise. The same creativity that Genesis 4 displays in the development of human culture will be exercised, across the full span of human history, in the production of every form of art, science, technology, and governance that the human community has generated, always with the mixture of genuine good and fallen distortion that the post-fall exercise of the cultural mandate consistently exhibits.

The theological framework for understanding the post-fall goodness of work is the doctrine of common grace: the divine sustaining of the goodness of the creation's gifts and of the human creature's capacity to exercise them, even in the conditions of the fall, for the preservation of human life and the maintenance of the created order's basic structures of order and fruitfulness. The farmer's crop grows despite the curse on the ground because the Creator sustains the basic fertility of the earth that His own creative act established. The artist's work achieves genuine beauty despite the fallen human heart's susceptibility to self-glorification and distortion because the Creator sustains the image-bearing creature's capacity for beauty-making that He designed her to exercise. The goodness of work in the post-fall world is not the goodness of an untarnished creation but the goodness of a creation that the Creator sustains in its basic goodness even while the fall's damage subjects it to the futility and the distortion that the curse has introduced.

III. The Reformation Doctrine of Vocation: Every Lawful Calling Is Sacred

Luther and Calvin's Recovery of the Biblical Account of Work's Theological Dignity

A. *The Medieval Distortion and the Reformation's Correction*

The medieval church's theology of vocation was organized around a fundamental distinction between the sacred and the secular that had no adequate biblical grounding: the distinction between the "religious" callings of the priest, the monk, and the nun, who were understood to have left the worldly sphere behind in order to pursue the specifically spiritual life of the cloister, and the "secular" callings of the farmer, the merchant, the soldier, and every other member of the laity, who were understood to be engaged in the necessarily lower and spiritually less significant activities of the worldly sphere. On this account, the layperson's highest spiritual aspiration was to imitate the religious life as closely as possible by participating in the church's sacramental system, the Mass, confession, penance, and the veneration of the saints, while the specifically religious calling of the monk or nun represented the fullest and most direct expression of the Christian life. The monastic ideal was the spiritual ideal, and the daily work of the layperson was valued primarily as the economic foundation that made the monastic and priestly callings financially possible.

The Reformation's recovery of the doctrine of vocation was Luther's most practically revolutionary theological contribution, and it changed the way ordinary people in the sixteenth century understood the significance of their daily work with a profundity that is difficult to overstate. Luther's central claim, expressed in his treatise *To the Christian Nobility of the German Nation* (1520) and throughout his writings on Christian freedom and calling, was that every lawful calling is a calling from God, to God, and for God, and that the cobbler who makes good shoes to the glory of God is serving God as truly and as fully as the monk who sings the Office in the cloister. The specific form of the service differs; the theological dignity of the service does not. Every person in every lawful vocation is called to exercise that vocation as a form of service to the Creator and love to the neighbor, and the person who does so is, in the full theological sense, worshiping God in and through her daily work.

Calvin developed the doctrine of vocation with the same theological convictions as Luther but with a greater emphasis on the comprehensive scope of the Christian's vocational responsibility across every domain of the cultural mandate's commission. For Calvin, the Christian's vocation was not merely the specific employment she happened to occupy but the comprehensive calling to exercise the image-bearing stewardship of the cultural mandate in every dimension of her creaturely existence: in her family, in her civic community, in her professional occupation, and in the community of faith. The Calvinist tradition's engagement with science, education, governance, and the arts as expressions of the Christian's vocational responsibility, the tradition that produced the Geneva Academy, the Reformed universities, the Puritan theologies of work and commerce, and the Neo-Calvinist accounts of sphere sovereignty, is the fruit of Calvin's comprehensive account of the Christian vocation that Lesson 20's treatment of the cultural mandate and this lesson's theology of vocation together establish as the biblical framework.

B. *The Theological Arguments for the Vocation Doctrine*

The Reformation's vocation doctrine rests on three converging theological arguments that together provide its biblical and theological grounding. The first is the creation argument: if work is a creation gift given to the human creature before the fall, then the theological dignity of work is grounded in the goodness of the creation rather than in the specifically ecclesiastical character of any particular form of work. The farmer's labor in the field has the same theological dignity as the pastor's labor in the study because both are expressions of the same creation gift, grounded in the same *imago Dei*, and exercised in the service of the same Creator who designed the human creature for both. No form of lawful work is inherently more sacred or more spiritual than any other on the basis of its subject matter; the theological dignity of the work is determined by the character with which it is exercised and the God to whom it is offered, not by the specific cultural domain in which it occurs.

The second theological argument is the neighbor argument: every lawful vocation is an expression of love to the neighbor that God has commanded. Luther's striking account of the way God feeds the hungry through the labor of the farmer, clothes the naked through the work of the weaver, and heals the sick through the skill of the physician captures this dimension of the vocation doctrine with characteristic force: the neighbor is served by the work of every person in every lawful calling, and the service of the neighbor is the service of the God who commanded the love of the neighbor as the second of the two great commandments. The baker who bakes good bread is, in the full theological sense, exercising the love of neighbor that the law requires and that the gospel produces in the heart of those who have been transformed by its grace. The vocation doctrine is not merely the theology of the individual's relationship to her work; it is the theology of the whole community's vocational interdependence as the network of neighbor-service through which the Creator provides for the needs of the human community.

The third theological argument is the lordship argument: if Christ is Lord of every square inch of the human creature's existence (as Lesson 20's treatment of Kuyper's declaration established), then every dimension of the Christian's vocational life falls under His lordship and is to be exercised in His name. Colossians 3:23–24's instruction to do every work "heartily, as for the Lord rather than for men" is the specific New Testament expression of this lordship argument: the slave's work, the most apparently insignificant and the most apparently secular form of the first-century vocational existence, is transformed in its theological character by the recognition that "it is the Lord Christ whom you serve." If the slave's work is service to the Lord Christ, then every form of lawful work in every vocational calling is equally service to the Lord Christ, and the theological dignity of the work is the dignity of service to the One who is Lord of every domain of the creation.

"Whether, then, you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God."

1 Corinthians 10:31, NASB 1995

IV. Against the Sacred-Secular Divide: All Lawful Work Is Holy

The Biblical Dismantling of the Most Persistent Error in the Theology of Vocation

A. The Sacred-Secular Divide Defined and Diagnosed

The sacred-secular divide is the most persistent and the most practically damaging error in the Christian community's theology of vocation, and it is an error that the Reformation addressed with theological force but that the evangelical and Reformed tradition has never fully escaped. In its most common contemporary form, the sacred-secular divide does not express itself in the medieval distinction between the monastic and the lay callings but in a more subtle and more pervasive assumption that the specifically ecclesiastical and evangelistic dimensions of the Christian's life are theologically significant in a way that the ordinary work of the daily vocation is not, that the Sunday morning worship, the evangelistic witness to the neighbor, the engagement with the church's ministry programs, and the personal devotional practices of prayer and Scripture reading are the specifically spiritual activities that God cares about, while the Monday-through-Saturday work of the lawyer, the plumber, the accountant, and the stay-at-home parent is merely the economic support system that makes the specifically spiritual activities financially possible.

The diagnostic of the sacred-secular divide in the contemporary church is both theological and practical. Theologically, the divide perpetuates the medieval distortion by implying that the Christian's primary calling is the evangelistic and ecclesiastical calling, and that the vocational calling of the daily work is secondary and spiritually insignificant except insofar as it provides the economic foundation for the evangelistic calling's exercise. This is not the biblical account: the Christian's primary calling is the calling to glorify God in every dimension of her creaturely existence, which includes the full breadth of the cultural mandate's vocational domains, not merely the

specifically ecclesiastical and evangelistic dimensions. Practically, the sacred-secular divide produces in the congregation a chronic theological poverty about the meaning and the significance of the daily work that leaves the majority of the congregation's time and energy, the Monday-through-Saturday vocational life that constitutes by far the largest portion of the average Christian's waking existence, theologically unaddressed and spiritually undervalued.

The root of the sacred-secular divide is not merely a misunderstanding of the theology of vocation; it is a distorted account of where God is present and where His purposes are being served. The sacred-secular divide implicitly confines God's presence and His purposes to the specifically ecclesiastical and evangelistic domains, as if He were more present in the Sunday morning worship service than in the Tuesday afternoon business meeting, more concerned with the pastor's sermon preparation than with the engineer's design work, more engaged with the missionary's proclamation than with the farmer's cultivation of the ground. But the God who declared the whole creation very good, who created the human creature to exercise the cultural mandate's vocational commission across every domain of the created order, and who sustains every dimension of the creation's ongoing existence by the word of His power (Hebrews 1:3) is no less present in the vocational domains of the cultural mandate than in the specifically ecclesiastical domains of the church's gathered worship and mission.

B. *The Biblical Account of Every Lawful Calling as Sacred*

The biblical dismantling of the sacred-secular divide rests on the same foundation as the Reformation's recovery of the vocation doctrine: the creation argument, the neighbor argument, and the lordship argument together establish that every lawful calling is sacred in the full theological sense of the term. But the specific biblical texts that most directly address the question in the New Testament are worth examining carefully, because they do not merely assert the theological dignity of all work in the abstract but address the specific vocational situations of specific persons in the first-century church and establish the theological framework for understanding those situations.

Colossians 3:23–24 is addressed to slaves, the most apparently secular, the most apparently economically coerced, and the most apparently theologically insignificant form of the first-century vocational life: "Whatever you do, do your work heartily, as for the Lord rather than for men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance. It is the Lord Christ whom you serve" (NASB 1995). The "whatever you do" is as comprehensive as it sounds: every task, every duty, every dimension of the slave's work that fills the vocational day is to be done "heartily, as for the Lord." The slave's work is transformed in its theological character by the recognition that it is service to the Lord Christ, not merely service to the earthly master who happens to be the proximate authority over the slave's labor. If this is true for the slave's labor, the form of work that most obviously lacks the characteristics that the sacred-secular divide would associate with significance and dignity, then it is true for every form of lawful work in every vocational calling.

Ephesians 6:5–8 reinforces the same theological framework in the parallel passage: "Slaves, be obedient to those who are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in the sincerity of your heart, as to Christ; not by way of eyeservice, as men-pleasers, but as slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart. With good will render service, as to the Lord, and not to men, knowing that whatever good thing each one does, this he will receive back from the Lord, whether slave or free" (NASB 1995). The "as to Christ" and "as to the Lord" of the passage establish the theological framework with unmistakable clarity: the slave's work is done as to Christ, in the sincerity of the heart that recognizes the work as service to the Lord rather than merely to the earthly master. And the final phrase, "whatever good thing each one does, this he will receive back from the Lord, whether slave or free", establishes the universal application of the principle: the theological dignity of work done as to the Lord applies to every Christian, whether slave or free, regardless of the specific vocational form that the work takes.

V. The Biblical Framework: Colossians 3:23, 1 Corinthians 10:31, and Work as Worship

The New Testament's Most Comprehensive Account of the Theology of Vocation

A. Colossians 3:23–24 and the Heartily-as-for-the-Lord Principle

Colossians 3:23–24 has already been examined for its specific application to the slave's vocational situation, but its theological content rewards a more careful and more comprehensive examination than its specific context might suggest. The principle it establishes, do your work heartily, as for the Lord rather than for men, is the most comprehensive and the most practically applicable single statement of the theology of vocation in the New Testament, and its specific elements deserve careful attention.

The word “heartily” (ek psyches, ἐκ ψυχῆς, literally “from the soul”) describes the quality of the engagement that the vocation doctrine requires: not the perfunctory compliance of the person who is doing merely enough to satisfy the external requirements of the vocational obligation, but the wholehearted, fully committed, personally invested engagement of the person who is doing the work as an act of personal devotion to the Lord who is the ultimate recipient of the work's offering. The “from the soul” character of the work is the character of worship: the same wholehearted engagement that the Shema's “with all your soul” requires of the worshiper is the character that Colossians 3:23 requires of the worker. Working from the soul is worshiping through the work, and the theology of vocation's account of work as worship is most precisely expressed in this single phrase.

The phrase “as for the Lord rather than for men” identifies the ultimate recipient of the vocational effort and thereby establishes the theological framework within which the daily work is carried out. The earthly employers, clients, students, patients, and customers who receive the products of the worker's labor are the proximate recipients; the Lord is the ultimate recipient, and it is the recognition of the ultimate recipient that transforms the character of the work. The physician who treats patients “as for the Lord” brings to the work a quality of care, precision, and personal investment that the recognition of the divine ultimate recipient requires; the teacher who teaches “as for the Lord” brings to the classroom a quality of preparation, presence, and personal engagement that the recognition of the divine ultimate recipient requires; the businessman who conducts commerce “as for the Lord” brings to the marketplace a quality of integrity, justice, and care for the neighbor that the recognition of the divine ultimate recipient requires. The “as for the Lord” principle does not transform the specific content of the vocational work; it transforms the character and the motivation with which the work is done.

B. 1 Corinthians 10:31 and the Comprehensive Scope of the Doxological Principle

1 Corinthians 10:31 provides the most comprehensive single statement of the theological principle that underlies the entire vocation doctrine: “Whether, then, you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God” (NASB 1995). The verse appears at the conclusion of a section addressing the specific practical question of eating meat offered to idols, a question that seems, on the surface, to be about a specific first-century ceremonial concern. But the principle Paul draws from the specific case is universal and comprehensive: whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God. The “whatever you do” and the “all” together establish the comprehensive scope of the doxological principle: there is no dimension of the Christian's creaturely existence, including the most ordinary and the most apparently mundane dimensions of the daily vocational life, that is exempt from the requirement to be done to the glory of God. Eating and drinking, the most routine of all creaturely activities, are included; which means that the entire range of human activity, from the most routine to the most elevated, is to be offered to God as an act of worship.

The doxological principle of 1 Corinthians 10:31 is the New Testament's most comprehensive account of what the abode of Genesis 2:15 looked like in its original theological character, and of what it is designed to look like when the image-bearing creature exercises it in the power of the Spirit's renewing work. The pre-fall garden vocation was the creature's service to the God who created it, done from the soul in the wholehearted recognition that the

work was offered to the Creator as an act of worship and stewardship. The post-fall exercise of the vocation doctrine, doing all to the glory of God, whether eating or drinking or whatever else, is the renewal of that pre-fall character in the conditions of the fallen world, enabled by the Spirit's work of renewing the image toward the true knowledge, righteousness, and holiness that the original creation had and that the eschatological state will perfect. The person who does all to the glory of God is the person whose life is, in the full theological sense, worship, the offering of the whole creaturely existence as a living sacrifice to the God who created it and redeemed it.

The practical application of the doxological principle to the vocational situation is both demanding and liberating. Demanding, because "doing all to the glory of God" is a standard that the fallen human creature cannot meet by her own resources, that requires the Spirit's ongoing work of renewal to become even partially achievable in the present life, and that will not be fully achieved until the eschatological state where the fallen conditions of the present vocational life have been removed. Liberating, because the recognition that the whole vocational life, not merely its specifically ecclesiastical and evangelistic dimensions, is the arena of the doxological offering removes the anxiety of the sacred-secular divide's implicit hierarchy and replaces it with the freedom of the person who knows that every dimension of her creaturely existence is equally offered to and received by the God whose glory is the goal and the framework of the whole.

"With good will render service, as to the Lord, and not to men, knowing that whatever good thing each one does, this he will receive back from the Lord, whether slave or free."

Ephesians 6:7–8, NASB 1995

VI. The Eschatological Dimension: Eternal Vocation in the New Creation

Why the New Creation Will Be an Eternal Calling, Not an Eternal Vacation

The most hope-generating implication of the theology of vocation is the eschatological one: the vocation of the image-bearing creature does not end at death. The eschatological new creation that the biblical testimony describes is not the eternal rest of those who have been permanently released from the vocational obligations of the present life; it is the eternal vocation of the redeemed who exercise the perfected cultural mandate's commission in the conditions of a renewed cosmos where the fall's futility and distortion have been fully and finally removed. Revelation 22:3's statement that "His bond-servants will serve Him" (NASB 1995), using the word *latreuo* that describes the worship and service of God, establishes that the eschatological state involves the active, ordered, worshipful service of the redeemed: not the passive contemplation of those who have nothing left to do but gaze at the glory, but the active, creative, developing, governing service of those whose vocational capacity has been perfected by the Spirit's work and whose vocational commission has been renewed in the conditions of the new creation.

The eschatological vision of the eternal vocation transforms the way the theology of vocation relates to the present life's vocational experience. If the work of the present life is a foretaste of the work of the eternal life, if the farmer's cultivation and the artist's creation and the teacher's instruction and the builder's construction are preliminary exercises of the vocational capacity that will be perfected and eternally exercised in the new creation, then the work of the present life carries an eschatological significance that the sacred-secular divide's account of secular work as spiritually insignificant cannot approach. The work that feels most futile in the conditions of the fallen world, the work that is frustrated by the curse's resistance, that falls short of the vision that inspired it, that returns to dust along with the worker who produced it, is work that is connected, by the eschatological hope of the new creation, to the eternal vocation in which the futility will be removed and the vision will be fully realized.

The theology of vocation's eschatological dimension is not a consolation prize for the frustrations of the present life; it is the forward horizon that gives the present life's work its ultimate significance.

The specific forms that the eternal vocation will take are not fully specified in the biblical testimony, the new creation's specific vocational content exceeds the capacity of the present imagination to comprehend. But the biblical testimony's consistent affirmation of the continuity between the present age's vocational exercise and the new creation's perfected vocation provides the framework: the same image-bearing creature who was made for the cultural mandate's commission, who exercises that commission in the frustrated conditions of the fallen world, and who is being renewed by the Spirit toward the image's eschatological perfection will exercise in the new creation the fully perfected, unfrustrated, eschatologically complete expression of the same commission. The farmer who longed to see the harvest unspoiled by the curse will see it; the artist who caught glimpses of the beauty she was trying to create but could never fully express will create it; the teacher who labored to transmit understanding to minds that resisted it will see understanding received and applied without limit. The new creation is not the end of the vocational life but the beginning of its eternal fullness. "Well done, good and faithful servant ... enter into the joy of your master" (Matthew 25:21, NASB 1995): the eschatological commendation is not the commendation of those who have escaped the work but of those who have exercised the work faithfully, and the joy into which they enter is the joy of the One whose own work declared the creation very good and who will declare the redeemed creation more than very good in the eschatological consummation of His vocational purpose for the creature He made in His own working image.

"His bond-servants will serve Him; they will see His face, and His name will be on their foreheads."

Revelation 22:3–4, NASB 1995

Theological Terms and Definitions

Term	Definition
Vocation	From the Latin vocare, “to call.” The theological concept that every lawful work or calling in which the image-bearing creature exercises the cultural mandate’s commission is a calling from God, to God, and for God, a sacred calling that carries the full dignity and accountability of the vice-regal stewardship that the imago Dei implies. The doctrine of vocation holds that every lawful calling, the farmer’s cultivation, the artist’s creation, the teacher’s instruction, the magistrate’s governance, is equally sacred before God and equally significant as an expression of the image-bearing creature’s stewardship of the cultural mandate’s commission. The vocation doctrine was recovered by Luther and Calvin from the medieval church’s distortion of the concept into a two-tier hierarchy of sacred (religious) and secular (lay) callings.
Sacred-Secular Divide	The theological error that divides human activity into the spiritually significant “sacred” sphere (specifically ecclesiastical, liturgical, and evangelistic activities) and the spiritually insignificant “secular” sphere (daily vocational work, civic engagement, and cultural activity). In its medieval form, the divide distinguished between the “religious” callings of the priest, the monk, and the nun and the “secular” callings of the laity. In its contemporary evangelical form, it distinguishes between the specifically spiritual activities (Sunday worship, evangelism, Bible study) and the ordinary work of the daily vocation. Both forms misrepresent the biblical account of the cultural mandate and the vocation doctrine by confining God’s presence and purposes to the specifically ecclesiastical domain.
Luther’s Doctrine of Vocation	Martin Luther’s recovery of the biblical truth that every lawful calling is a calling from God, expressed most fully in his treatise To the Christian Nobility of the German Nation (1520) and throughout his writings on Christian freedom. Luther’s central claim was that the cobbler who makes good shoes to the glory of God serves God as truly as the monk who sings the Office in the cloister, because every lawful vocation is a form of service to the Creator and love to the neighbor. Luther dismantled the medieval sacred-secular hierarchy by grounding the dignity of all lawful work in the creation mandate rather than in the specifically ecclesiastical character of the work.
Heartily-as-for-the-Lord Principle	The vocational principle of Colossians 3:23–24: “Whatever you do, do your work heartily (ek psyches, from the soul), as for the Lord rather than for men.” The principle establishes two dimensions of the theology of vocation: (1) the quality of the engagement (wholehearted, from the soul, the same engagement that characterizes genuine worship); and (2) the identity of the ultimate recipient (the Lord, not merely the earthly employer or client). Together they define the character of work done as an act of worship: the wholehearted offering of the vocational effort to the Lord who is its ultimate recipient and its ultimate judge.
Doxological Principle (1 Corinthians 10:31)	Paul’s most comprehensive statement of the theology of vocation: “Whether, then, you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.” The principle establishes the comprehensive scope of the doxological requirement, “whatever you do” and “all” together including every dimension of the Christian’s creaturely existence, from the most routine (eating and drinking) to the most elevated. The doxological principle is the New Testament’s most direct account of what the abiding

	of Genesis 2:15 looked like in its original theological character and of what it is designed to look like when the image-bearing creature exercises it in the power of the Spirit's renewing work.
Common Grace (Vocation)	The divine sustaining of the goodness of the creation's gifts and the human creature's capacity to exercise them, even in the conditions of the fall, for the preservation of human life and the maintenance of the created order's basic structures of order and fruitfulness. Common grace grounds the goodness of post-fall work: the farmer's crop grows despite the curse on the ground because the Creator sustains the basic fertility of the earth; the artist's work achieves genuine beauty despite the fallen human heart's susceptibility to distortion because the Creator sustains the image-bearing creature's capacity for beauty-making. The goodness of work in the post-fall world is the goodness of a creation that the Creator sustains in its basic goodness through common grace.
Eternal Vocation	The eschatological dimension of the theology of vocation: the new creation will not be an eternal vacation (the permanent cessation of work) but an eternal vocation (the perfected, unfrustratable exercise of the image-bearing creature's commission in the conditions of a renewed cosmos). Grounded in Revelation 22:3's statement that "His bond-servants will serve Him" (latreuo, worship/service) and in the biblical testimony's consistent account of the new creation as the perfected expression of the cultural mandate's commission. The eternal vocation is the fullness of the vocational life that the present age's work anticipates but cannot achieve in the conditions of the fall's futility and distortion.
Neighbor Love and Vocation	The second of the Reformation's three theological arguments for the vocation doctrine: every lawful vocation is an expression of love to the neighbor that God has commanded. Luther's account of the way God feeds the hungry through the farmer, clothes the naked through the weaver, and heals the sick through the physician grounds the vocational calling in the second great commandment's requirement of neighbor love. The person who exercises her vocation faithfully and well is, in the full theological sense, loving her neighbor through the specific form of service that her vocation provides, and the love of the neighbor is the love of the God who commanded it.
Futility of Work (Post-Fall)	Paul's description of the creation's condition under the fall in Romans 8:20: "subjected to futility." Applied to the theology of vocation, the futility describes the persistent frustration that the fall's curse on the ground introduces into the human creature's exercise of the cultural mandate: the crop that resists cultivation, the project that fails to achieve its vision, the building that decays, the institution that is corrupted, and the worker who is removed from the work by mortality before the work is finished. The futility is not the punishment of spiritually unfaithful workers but the objective condition of the created order under the fall's damage, a condition that the new creation will remove in the eschatological restoration of the cultural mandate's unfrustratable exercise.
Sabbath and Vocation	The theological relationship between the Sabbath institution (the seventh-day rest grounded in the Creator's own rest after six days of creative labor, Genesis 2:2–3) and the theology of vocation. The Sabbath establishes the proper rhythm of the image-bearing creature's vocational existence: six days of work followed by one day of rest, reflecting the Creator's own pattern and establishing the theological framework within which the work is understood. The Sabbath is not

the negation of work but its context: the rest that refreshes the worker for the next week's work, the worship that reorients the worker's understanding of the work's ultimate recipient, and the eschatological sign of the eternal rest and the eternal vocation that the new creation will bring.

Practical Application

A. *For the Mind: What Must We Believe?*

We must believe that every lawful calling in which we exercise the cultural mandate's commission is a sacred calling, a calling from God, to God, and for God, that carries the full theological dignity of the vice-regal stewardship that the *imago Dei* implies. This conviction is not a pleasant addition to the theology of work that makes the Monday-morning commute feel more meaningful; it is a direct and necessary implication of the creation narrative's account of the human creature's vocation and the Reformation's recovery of the biblical doctrine that the medieval sacred-secular hierarchy had obscured. The farmer and the pastor, the scientist and the evangelist, the magistrate and the missionary, all exercise sacred callings before the God who designed the human creature for the full breadth of the cultural mandate's vocational commission, and none has a higher calling than the other in the sight of the God whose glory is the goal of all.

We must also believe the eschatological dimension of the vocation doctrine with specific and energizing precision: the new creation will be not an eternal vacation but an eternal vocation, and the faithful exercise of the present life's vocational calling is the preliminary rehearsal for the eternal vocation that the eschatological state will bring in its fullness. This conviction transforms the frustrations of the present life's work, the toil, the futility, the inadequacy of every vocational achievement compared to the vision that inspired it, from occasions for despair into occasions for eschatological hope: the work that the fall prevents from achieving its full potential will be done in full in the new creation, and the worker who labored faithfully in the frustrated conditions of the fallen world will hear the eschatological commendation of the Master who assessed the work's faithfulness rather than its visible achievement.

B. *For the Heart: What Must We Feel and Desire?*

Let the theology of vocation produce in you the specific quality of doxological engagement with the daily work that Colossians 3:23's "heartily, as for the Lord" describes. The work that is done from the soul, in the recognition that its ultimate recipient is the Lord rather than the earthly employer, carries a quality of wholehearted personal investment that the work done merely to satisfy external obligations cannot match. The person who is convinced that her daily work is offered to and received by the God who made her for exactly this purpose, who designed her with the specific gifts and the specific opportunities that her specific vocation exercises, will bring to that work the quality of attention, of care, of personal commitment, and of creative engagement that the doxological principle requires and that the sacred-secular divide's account of secular work as spiritually insignificant cannot produce.

Desire also the specific quality of neighbor-love that the Reformation's account of the vocation doctrine produces: the recognition that the faithful exercise of the vocational calling is itself an act of love to the specific neighbors who receive the products of the work. The physician who heals, the teacher who instructs, the farmer who feeds, the builder who houses, the magistrate who protects, each is expressing in the specific medium of her vocational labor the love of neighbor that the second great commandment requires. Let the awareness of the specific neighbors who are served by the specific vocational labor produce in the worker the specific quality of care and attention and excellence that the love of neighbor requires.

C. *For the Hands: What Must We Do?*

- Read Colossians 3:22–4:1 in full. What is the specific vocational context Paul is addressing (the slave-master relationship of the first-century household), and how does the theological principle he applies to that specific context, "do your work heartily, as for the Lord", transcend its original application to become a universal vocational theology? Identify three specific features of your own daily vocational work, three specific tasks, responsibilities, or relationships that constitute the ordinary content of your vocational day,

and apply the “heartily, as for the Lord” principle to each. What specifically changes in the character of each task when it is done from the soul as service to the Lord Christ rather than merely to the satisfaction of the earthly obligation?

- Evaluate the preaching and teaching of the congregation you serve against the theology of vocation’s standards. Does the congregation’s regular teaching address the Monday-through-Saturday vocational life of the majority of its members with the theological seriousness that the doctrine of vocation requires? Is the farmer’s work, the teacher’s work, the business person’s work, and the parent’s work treated as vocational callings of equal theological dignity to the pastor’s work and the missionary’s work? Identify one specific initiative, in the content of the regular preaching, in the structure of the congregation’s formation programs, or in the communal culture of the community’s life together, that would most effectively communicate the full scope of the vocation doctrine to the congregation.
- **Read Paul Stevens’s *Doing God’s Business: Meaning and Motivation for the Marketplace* (2006) or Gene Edward Veith’s *God at Work: Your Christian Vocation in All of Life* (2002).** Both are accessible and theologically grounded treatments of the Reformed and Lutheran vocation doctrine respectively, and either will provide the practical pastoral tools for communicating the theology of vocation to a congregation that has been formed by the sacred-secular divide’s account of daily work. For the historical and theological depth of the doctrine, Gustaf Wingren’s *Luther on Vocation* (1957) remains the most authoritative account of Luther’s vocation theology available in English.
- Identify one specific member of the congregation whose daily vocational work most directly expresses the cultural mandate’s commission in a domain that the congregation rarely addresses theologically: a scientist, an artist, a politician, an engineer, a businessperson, or some other vocation whose work is exercised in a domain that the sacred-secular divide would typically classify as secular. Commit to a specific pastoral engagement with that person that explicitly addresses the theological significance of their specific vocational calling, the specific way in which their daily work is an expression of the image-bearing commission, a form of service to the Lord Christ, and a contribution to the neighbors who receive its products. Reflect afterward on what the engagement reveals about the congregation’s current engagement with the theology of vocation.
- Spend time this week in prayerful reflection on the specific vocational calling you exercise, whether as a pastor, a teacher, a parent, an administrator, or whatever combination of callings constitutes your present vocational life. For each dimension of the vocational calling, ask: Am I bringing to this work the “heartily, as for the Lord” quality that Colossians 3:23 requires? Am I serving the specific neighbors whose lives are touched by this work with the quality of care and excellence and love that the recognition of their image-bearing dignity requires? Am I finding in this work the specific expression of the image-bearing vocation that the Creator designed me to exercise? And am I holding the frustrations and the futilities of the present vocational life within the eschatological hope of the eternal vocation that the new creation will bring in its fullness? Let the theological framework of the vocation doctrine shape the quality and the character of the daily engagement with the work that the Creator gave you to do.

Study and Discussion Questions

Opening Question

- Think about the person in your congregation who experiences the greatest disconnection between their Sunday worship and their Monday-through-Saturday vocational life, who most acutely feels that their daily work is spiritually insignificant compared to the specifically ecclesiastical and evangelistic activities of the Christian life. What specific dimensions of the sacred-secular divide are most responsible for producing that disconnection in that person's experience? And what specific aspects of the vocation doctrine established in this lesson would most directly address the disconnection if they were communicated with pastoral warmth and theological precision?

Observation Questions (What Do the Texts Say?)

- Read Genesis 2:1–3 (the seventh-day rest) alongside Genesis 2:15 (the garden vocation). What is the relationship between the Sabbath rest and the work that precedes it? What does the Creator's own pattern of six days of work and one day of rest establish about the character of the image-bearing creature's vocational rhythm? And how does the theological grounding of the Sabbath institution in the Creator's own rest (v. 3: "God rested from all His work which God had created and made") establish the theological framework within which the human creature's work is to be understood?
- Read Genesis 3:17–19 carefully. What is the specific content of the curse, what specifically is cursed (the ground, not the work itself), and what specifically is the consequence of the curse for the human creature's experience of the vocational life? Does the passage say that work is a punishment for sin, or that the conditions of the work are affected by sin? What does the difference between "work is a punishment" and "the conditions of work are complicated by sin" imply for the theology of vocation in the post-fall world?
- Read Colossians 3:22–4:1 in full. Who is the specific audience Paul is addressing, and what is the specific vocational situation he is addressing? What theological principle does Paul apply to this specific situation, and how does the principle transcend its specific first-century application to become a universal account of the character of Christian vocational engagement? What does the phrase "it is the Lord Christ whom you serve" (3:24) establish about the ultimate recipient of the vocational labor?
- Read 1 Corinthians 10:23–11:1 in full. What is the specific practical question Paul is addressing in this passage (eating meat offered to idols), and how does he move from the specific practical question to the universal theological principle of verse 31 ("do all to the glory of God")? What does the fact that Paul grounds the comprehensive doxological principle in a question about eating and drinking, the most routine of all creaturely activities, suggest about the scope of the principle's application?
- Read Revelation 22:1–5. What is the specific description of the eternal state that this passage provides? What does the phrase "His bond-servants will serve Him" (v. 3) establish about the character of the eternal life, is it primarily passive (contemplation, rest) or active (service, vocation)? And how does the description of the eternal service as *latreuo* (the same word used for the worship and liturgical service of God) establish the theological connection between the vocation doctrine's account of work as worship and the eschatological vision of the eternal vocation?

Interpretation Questions (What Does It Mean?)

- The lesson argues that the use of the word *abad* in Genesis 2:15, the same root used throughout the Old Testament for the worship and service of God, establishes the theological connection between the garden vocation and worship. Is this argument exegetically compelling? Does the mere use of the same root in both contexts establish a theological connection, or is the connection more dependent on the broader theological framework of the *imago Dei* and the cultural mandate? What additional exegetical evidence would most strengthen or weaken the case that the pre-fall garden vocation was itself a form of worship?

- Luther's vocation doctrine grounds the theological dignity of every lawful calling in the creation mandate and in the service of the neighbor, without requiring that the work be explicitly offered to God or consciously motivated by the desire to glorify God. On this account, even the unbeliever's work has genuine theological dignity when it exercises the cultural mandate faithfully and serves the neighbor well. Do you find this account adequate? Does the unbeliever's work have the same theological dignity as the believer's work? What difference does the conscious orientation of the work toward the glory of God make for the theological character of the work, and how does Colossians 3:23's "as for the Lord" principle bear on this question?
- The lesson identifies the eschatological vocation of the new creation as the forward horizon that gives the present life's work its ultimate significance. Does the prospect of the eternal vocation genuinely motivate the present life's vocational engagement, or is it too abstract and too distant to function as a practical motivating reality? What specific practices of eschatological imagination, what specific meditations on the new creation, what specific prayers for the eternal vocation, what specific liturgical practices, would most effectively make the eschatological horizon a genuinely motivating present reality rather than a merely abstract doctrinal affirmation?
- The lesson treats the contemporary evangelical sacred-secular divide as a theological error equivalent in its practical impact to the medieval distinction between the religious and the secular callings, even though the contemporary form does not explicitly invoke the medieval category distinction. Do you agree that the contemporary evangelical sacred-secular divide produces the same theological distortion as the medieval form? What specific evidence from the life of the evangelical church, in the congregation you serve, in the evangelical culture more broadly, most clearly demonstrates the practical impact of the sacred-secular divide on the congregation's engagement with the theology of vocation?
- The lesson argues that the faithful exercise of the present life's vocational labor will be received into the new creation's inheritance in some form, that the best of the present age's cultural and vocational achievements will survive the eschatological transformation in a purified and glorified form. Does this claim adequately account for the comprehensive renewal that the new creation requires, the burning up of the earth's works (2 Peter 3:10) that Paul's account of the judgment fire in 1 Corinthians 3:11–15 describes? How do the judgment fire passages relate to the vision of the nations bringing their glory into the new Jerusalem? What specific theological framework would most helpfully hold both the discontinuity (the old order passes away) and the continuity (the faithful labor is received) together?

Application Questions (What Does It Demand of Us?)

- The lesson argues that the theology of vocation requires the congregation to address the Monday-through-Saturday vocational life of its members with the same theological seriousness that it brings to the specifically ecclesiastical and evangelistic dimensions of the Christian life. What specific proportion of the congregation's regular preaching and teaching is devoted to the theology of vocation and the specific vocational callings of the congregation's members? What proportion would be appropriate for a congregation whose members spend the vast majority of their waking hours in vocational activities outside the specifically ecclesiastical sphere? And what specific changes in the content and the emphasis of the congregation's teaching ministry would most effectively close the gap?
- Luther's account of the neighbor-love dimension of the vocation doctrine suggests that the quality of the vocational work, the excellence of the shoe the cobbler makes, the accuracy of the diagnosis the physician provides, the quality of the food the farmer grows, is itself an expression of love to the neighbor. Does this account of vocational excellence as neighbor-love change the way you understand the ethics of the daily work in your specific vocational calling? What specific ways in which you could improve the quality of your vocational work, the specific excellence that the neighbor deserves from the person who has been called to serve them through this specific vocation, would most directly express the love of neighbor that the vocation doctrine requires?

- The lesson identifies the Sabbath as the context within which the theology of vocation is held, the rhythm of work and rest that the Creator's own pattern establishes as the proper rhythm of the image-bearing creature's vocational existence. How adequately does your own vocational life reflect the Sabbath's rhythm? Are there specific patterns of overwork (the idolatry of labor that refuses the Sabbath's rest) or specific patterns of sloth (the avoidance of the vocational calling that the Sabbath's rest is designed to serve) that most need to be addressed in your specific situation? What specific practices of Sabbath-keeping would most effectively establish the theological rhythm that the vocation doctrine requires?
- The theology of vocation's eschatological dimension, the eternal vocation of the new creation as the forward horizon of the present life's vocational engagement, is a dimension that most evangelical congregations have not adequately communicated or adequately inhabited. What specific evidence from the congregation you serve most clearly demonstrates the practical absence of the eschatological vocational hope? And what specific formation, what specific preaching on the new creation's eternal vocation, what specific meditation on Revelation 22:3's *latreuo*, what specific communal practices that anticipate the eternal service, would most effectively develop the eschatological vocational hope in the congregation's imagination?
- The lesson closes with the Matthean commendation "Well done, good and faithful servant" as the eschatological assessment of the vocational life's faithfulness. The assessment is about faithfulness ("faithful") rather than visible achievement: the worker who labored faithfully in the frustrated conditions of the fallen world will receive the same commendation as the worker whose labor produced impressive visible results, because the ultimate assessment is made by the One who sees the heart and who evaluates the faithfulness of the stewardship rather than the magnitude of the achievement. Does this eschatological framework change the way you evaluate your own vocational work and the vocational work of others in the congregation? What specific patterns of vocational discouragement, the sense that the work is too small, too limited, too invisible, or too easily frustrated to be significant, would be most directly addressed by the theology of vocation's eschatological framework?

Prayer Focus

Open this twenty-first lesson of the Anthropology series with a reading of Psalm 104, which is the Psalter's own extended meditation on the goodness and the provision of the Creator who sustains the work of the creation and the work of the creature. Read it as the theological framework within which the theology of vocation is properly held: the God who makes springs gush forth in the valleys (v. 10), who causes the grass to grow for the cattle and vegetation for the labor of man (v. 14), who makes wine to gladden the human heart and bread to sustain the human life (v. 15), and who appoints the sun and the moon to mark the times and the seasons (vv. 19–20) is the same God who designed the image-bearing creature for the vocational labor of cultivating the earth and keeping it. The creation that Psalm 104 celebrates is the creation that the cultural mandate's commission is designed to develop and to govern; the God who sustains the creation is the God who designed the human creature to exercise that stewardship; and the doxology with which the Psalm concludes, "Bless the Lord, O my soul. Praise the Lord!" (v. 35), is the specific doxological response that the theology of vocation's account of work as worship is designed to produce. Read the Psalm slowly, attending to the specific ways in which the Creator's own sustaining work in the creation is the context and the model for the creature's vocational labor; and let the Psalm's doxology become the spirit in which you approach the vocational calling that you carry from the worship of the sanctuary into the work of the week.

Spend time in Trinitarian adoration, allowing the theology of vocation to deepen your worship of the Triune God who models and designs and sustains the image-bearing creature's vocational life. Begin with the Father, the Creator who worked for six days and rested on the seventh, who made the universe by the sovereign activity of His creative word and declared the whole creation very good at the completion of the work, and who designed the image-bearing creature to exercise in the creaturely sphere the same creative, developing, governing, and sustaining activity that He exercises in the divine sphere. Adore the Father whose design for the human creature's vocational life was the expression of the creature's image-bearing character, whose sustaining grace preserves the goodness of the vocational calling through the fall's complication, and whose eschatological purpose for the creature includes the eternal vocation of the new creation in which the frustrations of the fallen world's work are permanently removed. Move to the Son, through whom all things were created and in whom all things hold together (Colossians 1:17), who in His earthly ministry exercised every dimension of the cultural mandate's vocational commission in the specific form of the itinerant teacher, healer, and community builder, who worked with His hands in Joseph's carpenter shop, who cultivated the community of disciples with the patient formation of a teacher who knew His students well, and who completed the ultimate vocational work of redemption with the specific declaration of the worker who has finished: "It is finished" (John 19:30). Adore the Son who sanctified every dimension of human vocational life by inhabiting it Himself, who is even now interceding for the workers in every vocational domain, and who will one day declare over every faithful stewardship of the image-bearing vocation the commendation: "Well done." Conclude with the Spirit, who is at work in the hearts and minds of believers renewing the image toward the true knowledge, righteousness, and holiness that transforms the character of every vocational engagement, producing in the worker the quality of heartily-as-for-the-Lord engagement that Colossians 3:23 requires, the neighbor-love that motivates the excellence of the vocational service, and the eschatological hope that sustains the vocational faithfulness through the futility and the frustration of the fallen world's conditions.

Pray together at this midpoint of Unit 7 in three specific directions. First, for the congregation's formation in the theology of vocation: that every member of the community would receive the specific, practically liberating conviction that their daily work matters to God, that the farmer, the teacher, the physician, the engineer, the parent, and every other person in every lawful vocational calling is exercising a sacred calling that the Creator designed them for, that the Lord Christ receives as service to Himself, and that the eschatological new creation will bring to its eternal and unfrustratable fullness. Second, for the dismantling of the sacred-secular divide in the congregation's practical theological culture: that the implicit hierarchy which treats the specifically ecclesiastical and evangelistic activities as spiritually significant and the daily vocational work as spiritually insignificant would

be dismantled by the theology of vocation's comprehensive account of every lawful calling as sacred, and that the congregation would develop a communal culture that honors the vocational callings of all its members with the same theological seriousness that it brings to the callings of its pastors and its missionaries. Third, for the specific workers in the congregation who are most acutely experiencing the fall's complication of the vocational life: those in jobs that frustrate them, those who labor without visible fruit, those whose vocational calling is exercised in conditions of injustice or exploitation or diminishment that make the "heartily, as for the Lord" quality of engagement feel nearly impossible. Pray for them by name if names come to mind, and ask the God who declared work a good gift before the fall and who will restore it to its unfrustratable goodness in the new creation to sustain the specific workers in your congregation in the specific vocational challenges they face today.

"Bless the Lord, O my soul. O Lord my God, You are very great; You are clothed with splendor and majesty."

Psalm 104:1, NASB 1995

Key Texts: *Genesis 1:1–2:3; 2:15; 3:17–19; 4:17–22; Psalm 104; Ecclesiastes 3:9–13; Colossians 3:22–4:1; 1 Corinthians 10:31; Ephesians 6:5–8; Romans 8:18–25; Revelation 22:1–5*

Soli Deo Gloria

To God Alone Be the Glory

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