

Dear Young People,

I probably should briefly remind you of where we are in our discussion. We are really discussing the antithesis and how a Christian and Reformed young person must live an antithetical life in everything he does. And in the last few articles we are discussing how a Reformed Christian lives an antithetical life in relation to this creation and all that is in it; particularly, the Reformed Christian's view of his earthly possessions.

In the last article I talked about that fact that, although God's creation is good, as Paul insists in I Timothy 4:4, when wicked men use God's creation for sin it and everything in it becomes accursed. God's world has become accursed because it is used constantly in the service of man's sinful efforts to drive God out of his own creation.

One thing more, which I do not think I mentioned last time, is that man himself also becomes accursed when he does such terrible things with God's world. You recall how Achan, who kept some things from Jericho, was accursed with his whole family and all his possessions, plus the stuff he took from Jericho. All his family were stoned to death and everything was burned with fire (Joshua 7:24-26).

There are a couple of things about this story in Joshua 7 that are worth noting. One is that sometimes we think that the punishment that came on Achan was too severe for the crime he committed. After all, he only took a few things for himself from Jericho, did he not? Is that so bad? The answer to this is that God takes a misuse of his creation very seriously and is furious with all those who do this. Achan was burned with fire in the Valley of Achor, but the wicked who misuse his gifts are burned with fire in hell – everlastingly. We are not talking about minor matters, but sins that God takes most seriously.

The other thing we should notice is that not only did Achan's whole family share in Achan's sin, but the whole family was stoned. I do not know whether the rest of his family knew what he had done; I presume they did. But it doesn't make any real difference. The whole nation shared in Achan's sin – even though nobody in the nation even knew what Achan had done. Listen to what Scripture says. Israel was defeated in the battle of Ai. Why? Ai was a small city and Israel a huge and mighty nation. God explains it: "Israel hath sinned and they have also transgressed my covenant which I commanded them: for they have even taken of the accursed thing, and have also stolen, and dissembled also, and they have put it even among their own stuff" (Joshua 7:11). Even though the rest of the nation did not know anything about what Achan had done, they were all considered guilty and were punished. Thirty-six of their warriors (perhaps fathers and husbands) were killed as punishment for Achan's sins (Joshua 7:5).

How can that be? The answer is that God deals with people in their organic and corporate relationships. A government that goes to war involves suffering for the whole nation – whether the individuals agree with the government or not, for the whole nation is responsible for the government's decisions. A father that is a drunkard brings grief and misery on his whole family, because all are responsible for his sin. And most clearly we are all totally depraved in ourselves, because we are all responsible for what Adam did in Paradise when he ate of the forbidden tree. But we are all responsible for what Christ did on the cross; and that is why Christ's righteousness that he earned for us is imputed to us.

The importance of this is that every one of us is responsible for the welfare of our families, our friends, and our church. We must always do what is good for that group to which we belong, for in this way we so good for ourselves.

But to get back to the narrative in Joshua, all Israel suffered for the sin of Achan, and the only way for Israel to escape responsibility for Achan's sin was to put Achan outside the nation. Israel was commanded to do it by stoning; we are commanded to do it by excommunication.

But now we come to the other part of God's command in Joshua 6:19. The gold, the silver the brass and the iron from Jericho had to be devoted to God. (You remember how I said that the same word is used in Hebrew for accursed and for devoted.) So all the things of Jericho were accursed, but some of the things were holy – but, and this is the point; **they were holy only when they are devoted to God**. That is a principle that remains true for all time!

You may ask: How is a Reformed Christian to use the things of this world? The answer is: Devote them to God!

You may ask: If everything in this world is corrupted by wicked men and becomes accursed – and we with them? How it is possible for us to use anything in God's world without being accursed? The answer is: They are, after all, God's creatures: they can become accursed (and we with them) if we use them to sin. They are good when devoted to God. That is the difference.

The Scriptures are full of these teachings. We must consider a few places where this truth is taught. Scripture is very rich, and this truth is taught in many different ways.

Let's take another look at I Timothy 4:4-6.

The first thing the text says is that because every creature of God is good, it must be received with thanksgiving. And, the apostle states emphatically, it can and is be received with thanksgiving only by those who "believe and know the truth."

The truth of which Paul speaks to Timothy is the truth of God's sovereignty. God has created all things in heaven and on earth – by the word he spoke. He said, powerfully, "Oak tree," and as quickly as he said it, the oak trees came into existence (Psalm 33:6). So with every creature.

Because God is sovereign he gives every creature its life and existence. Only because God continues to say, "Oak tree" do the oak trees continue to exist (Psalm 19). God is present with his whole being in every particle of the creation – even the atom, the neutron, the meson – even though he is also infinitely extended in his divine being far, far beyond the creation, for the heavens are his throne and the earth his footstool.

Because God upholds every creature every moment God rules sovereignly over the creature (even over man and devils) so that they can only do what is his counsel (Acts 2:23, 4:27, 28. Proverbs 21:1. Romans 9:21, and hundreds of other texts in the Bible).

He gives us everything we have and he takes away from us anything he pleases (Job 1:21).

We also confess therefore, that everything we have comes from God, and nothing is acquired through our own labors strength or wisdom.

Further, we are undeserving of anything at all. When God gives us anything – even a glass of water – it is a gift that we do not deserve; and it is therefore, a gift of grace.

When we believe this truth, we receive God's gifts with thanksgiving.

But I must stop here and return to this again.

With love in the Lord,

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