

# Editorial: Reflections on Vocation

**STEPHEN J. WELLUM**

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**Stephen J. Wellum** is Professor of Christian Theology at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary and editor of Southern Baptist Journal of Theology. He received his PhD from Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, and he is the author of numerous essays and articles and the co-author with Peter Gentry of *Kingdom through Covenant*, 2nd edition (Crossway, 2012, 2018) and *God's Kingdom through God's Covenants: A Concise Biblical Theology* (Crossway, 2015); the co-editor of *Progressive Covenantalism* (B&H, 2016); the author of *God the Son Incarnate: The Doctrine of the Person of Christ* (Crossway, 2016) and *Christ Alone—The Uniqueness of Jesus as Savior* (Zondervan, 2017); and the co-author of *Christ from Beginning to End: How the Full Story of Scripture Reveals the Full Glory of Christ* (Zondervan, 2018).

The questions—What are humans? What is our value and dignity? What are we to live and die for?—are pressing questions today. Scripture gives us very clear answers to these questions, but our society, sadly, is quite confused. In the West, since the rise of the Enlightenment, we have witnessed a gradual departure and erosion of Christian theology and worldview. In its place, we have been captivated by various “isms” that have promised us “enlightenment” about ourselves but instead have resulted in darkness. For example, *Marxism*, *secular humanism*, *existentialism*, and *postmodernism* have all promised to deliver “liberating results,” but instead have led to a collective identity crisis.

The old adage has been proven true once again: “Ideas have consequences,” and really bad ideas have serious consequences indeed. In rejecting a Christian view of humans and substituting it for a mess of pottage, we have lost our bearings in the world. Why? Because we have cut ourselves off from our Creator and Lord, we have turned to understand ourselves by only looking at ourselves. What has resulted from such an

attempt is simply disaster. Instead of gladly acknowledging that we are creatures of the triune God, made for covenant relationship with him, and created to rule over the world for his glory as his image-bearers, we have turned from our blessed Creator and sought to substitute him for created things (Rom 1:18-32).

The fallout of not fearing God is that we have become fools, in the true biblical sense of the word (Prov 1:7). The attempt to understand who we are apart from seeing ourselves as God's creatures and rejoicing in it, has been catastrophic. Current views of humans, as diverse as they are, all tend to think of humans solely in terms of the impersonal—we are products of matter, motion, chance, or impersonal spirit, instead of the triune-personal God. Is it any wonder that our society cannot make sense of who we are? Is it a surprise that we have lost the meaning, purpose, dignity, and value of who we are? All around us families are in disarray, people are confused about their sexuality, suicide rates are skyrocketing, drug addiction is on the rise, and the value of human life from the womb to the tomb is under attack, from kindergarten to the highest levels of our government. Francis Schaeffer's ominous predictions about the effects of the loss of a Christian worldview on how we view, value, and treat one another have all come true. As Schaeffer predicted, unless we view ourselves in light of our Creator and Lord, and unless we find our redemption in Christ Jesus, ultimately we will fail to know who we are and the consequences will be severe—as we are now witnessing.

Today, then, what is needed is a robust theological anthropology that not only rightly views who we are in light of our triune Creator and Redeemer, but also lives out in the church the truth of our creation and redemption in Christ. In our present cultural context, it is not enough for the church simply to state the truth (which we must certainly do!), but we must also live out the truth as individuals, families, and churches. We must demonstrate before a watching world a Christian way of thinking and living, and we must do so in every aspect of our lives. It is not enough to talk about who we are and how we ought to live, we must actually *do* it in a way that adorns the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. Christ is Lord over everything, and part of the privilege we have as Christians is to live for him: "So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God" (1 Cor 10:31). In Christ, we are to "put on the new self, which is

being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator” (Col 3:10).

A crucial area in which we can demonstrate a practical difference between a Christian and our society’s view of humans is in the areas of vocation and work. It should not surprise us that how we view our vocation and the dignity of work is directly tied to our theology, especially what we think of God and ourselves as his image-bearers. From a biblical view, work is tied to the purpose of our creation and it is intrinsic to who we are as creatures and image-bearers created to rule over the world as God’s vice-regents. No doubt, our work has been affected by sin (Gen 3; Rom 8:18-25), but in Christ, God the Son has assumed our human nature to reverse the effects of sin and death for us by his cross and resurrection, and to restore us to what God created us to be in the first place. As we await the consummation of Christ’s glorious new covenant work, believers are to be about the task of growing in grace, knowing and enjoying God and one another, and living out what God created us to be as his redeemed creatures and image-bearers.

At the beginning of 2018, we devoted an issue of *SBJT* to the subject of vocation and work. We did so because given our present context, it is imperative that the church recapture the truth of what it means to be created and redeemed humans before a world that has little basis for the dignity and value of humans, vocation, and work. In this issue of *SBJT*, we are concluding the year with a similar focus because it is our conviction that the church needs to think faithfully about such matters. An important part of our witness to the world is demonstrating what it means for the church to be the church, and correspondingly, what it means for us to be truly human.

The articles in this issue were papers first delivered at the Southeast Regional Meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society held on the campus of The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in March, 2017. Each article focuses on a different aspect of vocation, work, and thus what it means to be human in the world. Gregory Lamb focuses on the neglected theme of human flourishing in Philippians as he wrestles with what Paul means to live and die in Christ. Daniel Diffey and Nathanael Brooks focus on the theme of work, industry, diligence, and justice in the book of Proverbs. The wisdom literature is a biblically rich resource about how to think rightly about work in the context of God’s covenant relationship

with his people, and by application to believers today living under the new covenant. Richard McDonald takes us back to the work of Matthew Henry who wrote much about a biblical view of vocation and work and as such, we are able to stand on his shoulders and learn important lessons about these matters from Henry's teaching of Scripture. Jacob Prahlow and Chris Smith conclude our articles by focusing on wisdom from the past, rooted in Scripture, about male-female roles in the church and society, and the issue of celibacy. Often celibacy is ignored in contemporary discussion, but as Smith demonstrates, focusing on celibacy helps orient us to the eternal state, and thus help us think about the purpose or *telos* of our creation as image-bearers.

Once again, our purpose in focusing on a Christian view of being human, vocation, work, and other matters, is to call the church to live out what our triune God has created and redeemed us to be in Christ. As our society embarks on a path that is and will lead to destruction, the church is called to exhort people to turn from such a path by teaching them what it means to be human, and by demonstrating it for them in our daily lives. It is my prayer that this issue of *SBJT* will in some small way enable the church to be faithful to our glorious triune Creator and Redeemer, for his glory and for the good of the church.