

Technology and Theology Lesson 2: Biblical Overview

Cultivation, Corruption, Christ, Consummation:
A Biblical Theology of Technology

A Biblical Theology Review

Biblical theology can be defined in a number of ways. It can be theology that finds its source in the Bible (as opposed to ‘unbiblical theology’). Or, it can be theology developed over the whole Bible (as opposed to systematic theology, which is organized by topics; or, historical theology, which arises from various people and places in church history).

It is the latter, as a discipline of interpretation, that I will employ because of the way that it helpfully organizes our thoughts about technology as a biblical technology.

In truth, I imagine most people don’t think much about technology in the Bible. Oh, there are biblical archaeologists who write papers about Israel in the Bronze Age and there are Egyptologists who study hieroglyphics and the origins of phonetic alphabets, but most of us when we come to the Bible are not thinking about technology.

Indeed, the Bible is not a book about technology. From first to last, it is a book about the Triune God and his gracious work of creation and redemption in human history. The Bible is a book that stretches out from creation to new creation, and centers on the person and work of Jesus Christ. Yet, in that storyline we find that technology is not a peripheral matter. Rather, it is at the heart of God’s plan for humanity and the heart of redemptive history. Indeed, before the cross was an ornament celebrating the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, the cross was a human invention, devised as the worst form of punishment known to man. It was in this sense “technology.”

And if we are to understand our own technology, we need to center our thinking on the cross of Jesus Christ. But before doing that we need to consider a few definitions.

Definitions

- *Techne* = craft, skill, art; “the Greek term *techne* referred to a person’s skill [technique] in making things, not the tools they used to do so” (as we think of it).¹
- *Logia* = the systematic study of (biology, theology, scatology)
- *Techne* + *Logia* = the study of craftsmanship—both the artisans and the arts/tools; but Aristotle could even the systematic study of grammar, speech, and writing.
- Technology entered the English language around 1600. At that point it was used as it was in Greek, but with the rise of the sciences, the Enlightenment, and the industrial revolution, it soon changed.
- Practicing the arts changed to the study of the arts in the nineteenth century.
 - o In 1829, Jacob Bigelow wrote *Elements of Technology*
 - o IN 1861, M.I.T. was opened with educating its students in the knowledge of technology
- It wasn’t until the 20th century that technology took on the meaning we are most accustomed to: as acquisitiveness and consumerism rose, technology began to speak of things

Four Ways to Speak of Technology

1. the skill of making things
2. the study of the skill of making things
3. the tools used to make things
4. the things made with these tools²

It is the fourth definition that best describes the technology we have . . .

- "We can say that we are talking about technology when we use tools to shape nature in the service of human ends."³
- Technology is the "constellation of tools, machinery, systems, and techniques that manipulate the natural world for human ends."⁴
- "Technology . . . is the means by which we transform the world as it is into the world that we desire."⁵

Question: Is Technology Good or Bad or Something Else?

¹Dyer, *From the Garden to the City*, 56.

²Dyer, *From the Garden to the City*, 56–58.

³Egbert Schuurman, *Faith and Hope in Technology* (Toronto: Clements Publishing, 2003), 64-65.

⁴David Mindell, "Cultural Impacts of Technology," *Wiley Encyclopedia of Electrical and Electronics Engineering*, ed. John G. Webster (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 199), 1. Cited in Dyer, 35.

⁵John Dyer, *From the Garden to the City*, 35.

**Cultivation: In the beginning God creates
a world with boundless technological potential**

- I. God creates without technology – He speaks the world into existence
- II. God makes people who will rule the world with ‘tools’
 - a. Genesis 1:26–28 – subdue and rule
 - b. Genesis 2:15–17 – cultivate and keep
 - c. Genesis 2:18 – What is the first tool?
 - i. “[Language] is a tool we use to inform and categorize the way we see the world. Embedded in our language lies our values and identity.”⁶
 - ii. Not is it a tool; it is the tool that creates every other tool: Mind, imagination, reflection, memory, classification, cooperation all run on this singular tool. When language goes well, things work. When it doesn’t go well, confusion (Babel) and destruction.
 - iii. The human body is also a tool: muscles, minds, mandibles, mammary glands are all designed with the ability to do work.
 - d. So in all the work we do, the tools we make, the technology we do and create, we are reflecting something of the Creator.
- III. God makes world where technology is good and expected.
 - a. As Creator – he can work without technology, but not without the Word
 - b. As creations – we mirror his works when we use our words and works to build, make, create, organize, etc.

⁶Dyer, *From the Garden to the City*, 51.

**Corruption: Humanity misuses
creation, and technology is fractured**

I. The Fall

- a. The Word of God was twisted (by Satan) – Genesis 3:1–5
- b. The Word of God was distrusted (by Eve)
- c. The Word of God was rejected (by Adam)
- d. Adam and Eve took a good gift and misused it – Genesis 3:6
- e. God responded with a severe judgment – Genesis 3:14–19
- f. Now the creation which was created good is both good and bad – Ecclesiastes 6:1–12

II. Creation Corrupted

- a. Clothes (Gen 3:) – The creation that was made to draw closer to God was fashioned into garments to hide from God.
- b. Cities – Cities are a complex technology. They offer a way of life not dependent on God; the resources and fortification they have provide security without the Spirit.
 - i. Gen 4:17–19
 - ii. Gen 11
 - iii. Revelation 17 – 18
- c. Tools – Genesis 4
- d. Armies – Genesis 14
- e. Slavery – Genesis 37
- f. Agriculture – Isaiah 28; 57:5
- g. The Cross -

**Christ: The incarnation redeems creation,
along with all its tools and technology**

I. The Cross

- a. What they meant for evil, God meant for good
- b. It is a tool that stands at the center of the redemptive history
- c. A killing tree on Calvary reversed the effects of a living tree in Eden.
 - i. It was eating the fruit of the first tree that brought death
 - ii. It is eating the fruit of the second tree that brings life
- d. This reinterprets technological history

II. Back to the beginning

- a. God's Greater Garments
- b. Noah's Ark
- c. Altars
- d. Systems for Grain
- e. The Finger of God
 - i. Phonetic Language
 - ii. Tablets
- f. Tabernacle
 - i. The importance of image
 - ii. Dwelling place
- g. Solomon's Wisdom

III. Jesus Incarnation

- a. Who He Is
 - i. The son of a carpenter
 - ii. *Tekton*
- b. What He Does
 - i. Redeems language – He is the Word made flesh
 - ii. He enslaves himself to the Law – He submits himself to the Law
 - iii. He saves a bride who will populate his city

**Consummation: The City will not be destroyed;
it will be devoted to Christ**

- I. What Becomes of the City?
 - a. Under the influence of the World, the Flesh, and the Devil is a wicked place;
Under the influence of the Word, the Spirit, and the Christ it will be restored
 - b. History shows a competition between seeds and cities
 - i. Augustine:
- II. Babylon Destroyed
 - a. The Works of the Devil will be destroyed – 1 John 3:8
 - b. The Tools of Corruption will be eliminated – Revelation 17–18
- III. The New Jerusalem
 - a. All precious metals will be collected and redistributed – Isaiah 60
 - b. All weapons of destruction will be turned into tools of cultivation – Micah 4
 - c. New clothes will be furnished – Revelation 19