

Patterns That We Live With

Playing Games With Divine Dichotomies

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One of the major contributions John Ritenbaugh has made to our understanding of God is the fact that God works in patterns. These may be historical types and antitypes. Or they may appear as repeated cycles in economics and in business. Patterns may appear as models, like the ubiquitous subject and verb in language, or as formulas God uses again and again in His creation: defining the area of a circle, is an example of a pattern in His creation. The Scriptural consistency of symbolism, such as that of leaven, or of the serpent, is another manifestation of God's use of patterns. Numerology is still another example, the uniform meaning of the number four or seven or ten or twelve in the Scriptures.

Patterns make life easier for us. They play an indispensable role in our task of making sense of history or current events, or in our understanding of the Scriptures.

In fact, God may have wired our minds to think in patterns. Psychologists call it the gestalt effect. Let us say someone shows you a series of unconnected dots, forming a circle. If that someone gives you a pencil and asks you to draw what you saw a month later, you would likely to take the pencil in hand and draw a lined circle, not the dots. Your mind has "connected the dots," organized them, as it were, subconsciously. Again, if you see a semicircle, you are likely, asked about it a month or two later, to claim you saw a circle. Your mind has closed the loop, completed the circle.

Well, whether that be so or not, true it is that patterns are everywhere. An important type of pattern is the dichotomies God has created and that He uses to hang human life around. These dichotomies give shape to the things on earth today.

We can say they form the woof and the warp of the fabric of the-around-and-the-about. You know, the threads of a garment woven perpendicular to each other, horizontal and vertical, which hold that garment together.

God's dichotomies are, in fact, constructs which give structure to the present order or, as Mr. Ritenbaugh recently pointed out, this present organization of things. You could also call it the architecture God based physical life on. You know, he could have done it a whole lot differently.

We are a carbon-based life form (another pattern, incidentally). God could have based life on, say, radium, and we would all glow in the dark. The Creator God had an infinite number of options, probably. But He chose the order in which we now live, here under the sun, for His own reasons.

These dichotomies are profoundly seated. In some cases, they are actually bio-basic. They span individuals, families, nations, being in reality cross-cultural. They are inescapable, universal patterns in our reality.

Historically, most of these God-created dichotomies appear during the time covered in the book of Genesis. A subset of them debuted during creation week itself. I call those particular dichotomies the "Seven-Day-Order Dichotomies," because God created them when He created the under-the-sun order in which we live. I want to discuss three of those dichotomies today, asking, "What happens when we play games with these basic patterns God has built?"

But first, what exactly is a dichotomy? The dictionary defines the noun, dichotomy, as, "A division or contrast between two things that are opposed or entirely different." That is a start, but we will see there is a lot more to it. A dichotomy intrinsically involves a pairing of binary opposites, like male and female. The word actually comes to English from the Greek, "dikho," which means, in two, or apart; and, "tomia," which means cutting. That is the same suffix "tomy" as in the word anatomy; or tonsillectomy, which refers to a cutting out, or removal, of the tonsils. So, quite literally, dichotomy means "cutting into two parts."

If you are thinking, “merism,” right about now, you are not at all far off. Just be aware that dichotomy is a term in logic, whereas merism is a term in rhetoric, a figure of speech where opposites represent an entirety: “He moved heaven and earth [that is the merism] to find his car keys.” It is a hyperbolic statement indicating he looked everywhere for them.

Please turn to Genesis 1 as we get down to the nuts and bolts, examining a clear example, the seven-day order dichotomy of day and night.

Genesis 1:3-5 And God said, “Let there be light,” and there was light. And God saw that the light was good. And God separated the light from the darkness. God called the light Day, and the darkness He called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, the first day.

What points can we make about this dichotomy?

First, notice that God created day and night. God ordained this dichotomy. He built it right from the get-go—the first day.

Second, God Himself named the members of this dichotomy, day and night. He did not delegate the naming to mankind later on, as He did with the animals, assigning their naming to Adam. He created and named it. This is a vitally important dichotomy used by virtually everyone all the time. For instance, day and night tell us when the Sabbath begins, after seven repetitions of the cycle. As I say, we drape our life with these dichotomies. Everyone does.

Third, the elements, day and night, are jointly exhaustive.

I need to explain that. Some pairings, like the nuts and bolts I mentioned above, are just that: They are pairs, but they are probably not dichotomies. To be a true dichotomy, the two members must pass two tests. One of those tests is joint exhaustion. Joint exhaustion means that both members of a dichotomy—in this case, day and night—define all the alternatives. The two members, together, are comprehensive. There are no other choices. Nuts and bolts are not much of a dichotomy, because there is such a thing as a washer.

While we understand there is some blending of light and dark just before the sun rises or after it sets, basically, day is light and night is dark—full stop. Outside of transition periods of twilight and dusk, or the atypical incident of an eclipse, there is no third alternative. That is a very important facet of a true dichotomy. Do not miss that point. Joint exhaustion: the two members exhaust all the alternatives.

Fourth, the elements, day and night, pass the second logical test of a dichotomy because they are mutually exclusive. Mutual exclusion means that, within the bounds of normality (there are always abnormal situations, statistical outliers; we are not going to go there) no entity can belong to both members of the dichotomy at the same time. The two members are mutually exclusive.

The sun cannot be up and down at the same time in one spot on the earth's surface. It cannot be day and night concurrently in your location; you cannot have it both ways at once. This is just another way of pointing out that the members of dichotomies, any true dichotomy in fact, are not compatible.

Now, time for a pop quiz about these two tests of a dichotomy, joint exhaustion and mutual exclusion. I will digress for a moment. Is the pairing of the New Covenant and the Old Covenant a true dichotomy? Remember, there are a number of other covenants, like the Abrahamic, so the two members, Old and New, are not jointly exhaustive. There are other alternatives. Also, a person can be under more than one covenant at one time, like we are under the Abrahamic, Sabbath, and New Covenants—all at once. So, the Old and New Covenants are in fact not mutually exclusive either.

The Old and New Covenant is a convenient pairing, but not a dichotomy. Again, like nuts and bolts, not all pairings are dichotomies. Logicians would call the Old and New Covenant an example of a “false dichotomy.” It fails to pass one or both tests.

Fifth, notice that God said this dichotomy was good. The seven-day order dichotomies are not the result of sin, but predate the introduction of sin into the order God built at creation. As part of the fabric of life He was in the

process of creating, God realized that this pairing was good. So, do not think of dichotomies as evil or bad. In this current order, we need them. We—everybody—use them.

Sixth, and perhaps most important, this dichotomy is irreconcilable by humankind. God's dichotomies—in fact, all His patterns—are that way, fixed firm in this creation. There is nothing you or I can do about it. We cannot change God's pairings.

While we can turn on a light, of course, we are unable to make day night or night day. Daylight savings time does not change the sun. Make no mistake about it: God can play with the schedule, as He did at the time of Joshua's long day (Joshua 10). He also undoubtedly played with the schedule in the days of Hezekiah, causing the shadow cast on the face of the sundial to go backwards ten degrees (II Kings 20:8-11). Thus it is that we need to live with the distinctions God has created. That is the title of my comments today: "Patterns We Live With." It is the way it is, right now.

If we try to change any of these seven-day order dichotomies, if we try to dilute them, to destroy them, to weaken their influence, we will run into trouble. While we are under the sun, we need to live with these dichotomies. We will come to see that there are some other things we need to do regarding God's dichotomies, but, this is a start. Satan, his demons, and his children are not content to do that.

As an example of the kind of trouble we can cause when we scoff at God's dichotomies, consider the second seven-day order dichotomy I want to discuss, that of male-female. Please, drop down to verse 27; this is an easy dichotomy to understand because it is so bio-basic.

Genesis 1:27 So God created man in His Own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.

Let me make five points about this dichotomy.

First, like the day-night distinction, God ordained the distinction of gender.

Second, as Genesis 2:18 indicates, this, too, is a good distinction. “It is not good that man should be alone; I will make him a helper comparable to him.” The implication is certainly that the male-female dichotomy is a good one, as it addresses a vital issue.

Something more needs to be said here. Human nature, being intrinsically competitive, tends to define one member of a dichotomy as better than, or superior to, the other. Hence, some people consider men superior to women. Feminists think just the opposite. Judaism has a huge difficulty with the Jew-Gentile dichotomy, a true dichotomy. Judaism understands the Jews to be better than Gentiles, failing to ascribe the Jews’ privileged place in history to God’s grace.

It is important to note that God nowhere in all His seven-day order dichotomies I mention today defines one member as better than the other. Different, but not better. In other words, God subscribes to the politically incorrect doctrine of, “separate but equal,” which was so important to public policy in the post-bellum South.

Third, the male-female dichotomy passes the test of joint exhaustion. The two members jointly exhaust all the possibilities. There is no third gender. Within the bounds of normality, there are no other alternatives.

Fourth, the male-female dichotomy passes the test of mutual exclusion. In normal situations, you are one or the other, not both at once.

Fifth and finally, the male-female dichotomy is unchangeable, all attempts by mankind aside. There is nothing mankind is able to effectively do to change the fact, the reality, of this dichotomy, that God created humankind in two genders. That is the way it is. Live with it. Like it.

It is clear that gender is a part of this order of things, the way God organized the around-and-the-about. To attempt to operate outside this dichotomy leads to sundry deviancies: to transgenderism and to attempts to change gender; to the designing and the wearing of unisex clothing; to unisex restrooms and showers; to a plethora of perversions.

Turn over to Leviticus 18. Here, the King James Version uses the word, “confusion,” in its description of a type of illicit sexual behavior. The Hebrew word actually means, “A violation of the nature of divine order.”

Leviticus 18:23 (New Century Version) You must not have sexual relations with an animal and make yourself unclean with it. Also a woman must not have sexual relations with an animal; it is not natural.

That is to say, it is outside of, or contrary to, the order God has created, the order discussed in Genesis 1.

In I Corinthians 14:33 the apostle Paul notifies us that,

I Corinthians 14:33 God is not a God of confusion but of peace.

That noun—confusion—there means, “unruliness or disorder,” in the Greek. Sexual deviancy is a violation of the order God created during creation week, and it leads to a whole lot of huge problems for individuals, and for society.

It is the satanically inspired work of feminist and gay advocacy groups to attempt to destroy that dichotomy. This is a type of deconstructionism, where people, analyzing binary opposites, or dichotomies, errantly conclude that they are not valid, wrong-headed, dysfunctional, or passé. This is a work of Satan and his children: Diluting and ultimately destroying the distinctions God has created when He wove this order of things in seven days.

Assessing their work broadly, we are certainly right to conclude that the godless do not rest easy but are existentially dedicated to destroying the basic distinctions which are part of the order of God’s creation. What they have done with gender is a prime example.

Please, turn back to Genesis 1 as we take a brief look at a third seven-day order dichotomy.

Genesis 1:9-10 (New Century Version) Then God said, “Let the water under the sky be gathered together so the dry land will

appear.” And it happened. God named the dry land “earth” and the water that was gathered together “seas.” God saw that this was good.

I have five points about this one:

First, God created this dichotomy.

Second, He named its elements, Land and Sea, just as He did Night and Day.

Third, these elements are jointly exhaustive: This is a true dichotomy. Anywhere you touch down on the face of the earth, you will be on land or sea. No other alternative. You cannot touch down on a cloud. There are fantasy movies wherein people live on islands floating in the sky. But that is an order of things created by someone like the Canadian filmmaker James Cameron, a fake reality, not the order God created. Fiction.

Fourth, you cannot exist on both land and in the sea at the same time. I appreciate, of course, that you can stand at the seashore with one foot in the water, one on the sand. But you understand what I am saying; you cannot exist in both land and sea the same time. They are mutually exclusive—different environments. You need to take special steps to exist in the sea.

Fifth, God defined this distinction as “good.” The waters, before God separated them from the land, were not called the seas. You can see what they were called in Genesis 1:2—the deep. That is a different Hebrew word from sea, mentioned in verse 10. Importantly, before God built the dichotomy, there is no indication that there was anything good about the deep. In fact, there in verse 2 it is associated with *tohu* and *bohu*, lacking form, chaotic, empty of life. The waters became good as a result of God’s creating the land-sea dichotomy—later He filled the seas with life.

Satan wants to destroy this dichotomy as well. How? By destructively returning the earth to a situation of *tohu* and *bohu*, the way it was before God created the land-sea dichotomy. We know that God will intervene to cut short Satan’s plans.

Now, let us approach dichotomies from a different perspective, as I begin to wind down.

At their core, what are these seven-day order dichotomies? Well, like many of the dichotomies documented in God's Word, they are gifts from God. They allow us to order our lives here under the sun. They are absolutely basic to our civilization and to our personal contentment. We are unwise to mistreat them.

It is like defying the land-sea dichotomy by deciding to walk on water. That is not our element. We can reside there only when we build a special environment to support the life God gave us. That is a life which depends on breathing air, an environment which is incompatible with aquatic life. Outside of God's grace—a miracle, you understand—if we try to walk on water, we could very well find ourselves over our head literally, struggling to survive. Those who refuse to live within the constraints of the seven-day order dichotomies God created are, well, all wet.

When I was a boy, I watched my mother make any number of shirts for my father or me. She bought patterns from companies which I think are still around, McCall and Simplicity. She carefully pinned the patterns, which were made of fairly thin paper with lines on them, to fabric which she had purchased in bolts from JCPenney. She carefully cut the fabric, following the lines on the paper and then sewed the various pieces of cloth together.

Obviously, there was a whole lot more to it than all that. If I tried to make a dress shirt, I am sure I would end up with a short pullover shirt like football players wear in warmish weather.

My point is that the pattern my mother purchased was a guide—a standard, if you will. Using it properly, she could transform formless bolts of cloth into a functional and attractive shirt.

But what if she did not follow the lines carefully? What if she used her scissors to capriciously cut triangles in the back of the shirt? What if she cut the fabric wherever she took a notion, analogous to those who cut human sexuality into 20 genders, and not two?

You get the point. If she did that, the shirt, when complete, would lack drape—it would not hang right. The triangular slits would eventually fray; the shirt would not last long. In short, the shirt would be neither functional nor attractive. It would be a rag from day one—a holey mess, if you will, filled with holes, simply sartorial *tohu* and *bohu*. All [of this is] because the seamstress did not follow the standard when she made her cuts.

Please, turn to II Timothy, a passage you know well. I will read it from the New King James Version.

II Timothy 2:15 Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.

The translators render the words, “rightly dividing,” from the Greek verb, *orthotomeo*. “Ortho,” means, “straight,” and, “tomeo,” means, well, you guessed it, “to cut.” Tomeo is related to the same “tomy” of tonsillectomy or anatomy or dichotomy—a cutting.

The *Disciple’s Literal New Testament* renders the verse this way:

II Timothy 2:15 (DLNT) Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker not-needing-to-be-ashamed, cutting-straight the word of truth.

This version glosses, *orthotomeo*, with the words, “That is, cutting true, accurately handling, as a skilled worker (a stonecutter, a farmer, a roadbuilder) would perform [his] job;” or, a seamstress. She knows how important it is to follow the pattern assiduously.

Let us draw an example from theology. Theologians have developed a dichotomy between faith and works. So, here is another pop quiz. Is the pairing of faith and works a logically valid dichotomy? Remember those two tests: Joint exhaustion and mutual exclusion as you mull it over.

Martin Luther, misreading the Scriptures, particularly the apostle Paul in the book of Romans, came to claim, “sola fide,” by faith alone. He believed that

faith and works were truly opposites, and mutually exclusive. He mis-dichotomized. For that pair is only that, a pair, not a dichotomy—and certainly not a God-ordained one.

To see that, please turn over to James 2. Indeed, Luther presumptuously came to the point of calling the book of James an, “epistle of straw,” calling into question the value of that book, because James’ comments hit at the heart of Luther’s pet argument. James argues that faith and works are not mutually exclusive but coexist alongside each other in the same person.

James 2:18 But someone will say, “You have faith and I have works.” Show me your faith without your works, and I will show you my faith by my works.

James 2:20-22 But do you want to know, O foolish man, that faith without works is dead? Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered his son Isaac on the altar? Do you see that faith was working together with his works, and by works faith was made perfect?

Does this sound like faith and works are mutually exclusive—working at cross-purposes—that they cannot or will not operate collaboratively? Clearly not.

What Luther did was to create a dichotomy, which God never created. And, to boot, it is not even a logically valid dichotomy. Luther cut the fabric in places God never intended it to be cut. That is not good; that is destructive; it produces a rag. That is exactly what the Catholic/Protestant dichotomy of faith and works is—a doctrinally useless, worthless rag.

Ever since that time, people have become polarized over these two non-polar entities. I think it was David Grabbe who mentioned binary thinking, and this is a good example of it, fostered by Satan in his hatred of God’s truth. That liar actually created opposites out of what are not really opposites at all.

What is the long and short of the fact that we live with a large variety of fundamental, God-created patterns? Well, we need to appreciate those patterns for what they are: God’s gifts to us. Additionally, we need to

painstakingly cut along the lines, keeping close to the standard, the pattern God has given us, taking care to use God's patterns rightly, not abusing them, and certainly not rejecting them, as those in the world all too often do.

Perhaps most importantly, we need to be thankful at all times for the way God has graciously ordered and patterned life for us now.