



Theology of Beauty and Imagination: A Guide to Wonder

with Dr. Junius Johnson

Lesson 5: Rules of the Imagination

Outline:

Rules for the Imagination

- When imagination's rules are not followed our suspension of disbelief collapses, or the image becomes absurd, or we cannot picture what we need to picture.
- Two main rules for the imagination:
 - **Sovereignty**
 - The imagination lives in a place of freedom.
 - It challenges boundaries.
 - It is analogous to a major premise in reasoning.
 - **Finitude**
 - Imagination is finite.
 - There is no limit to the things the imagination can conceive of.
 - I can only ever imagine one or two things at a time.
 - The imagination is formed, and its formation will further delimit what it is capable of bringing into focus.
 - Without boundaries, the imagination cannot begin its work.
 - This is analogous to a minor premise.
- Imagination aims at truth.

Imagination and the Theological Virtues (Faith, Hope, and Love)

- We must have the conception of something in order to have faith in it.
- Faith requires going outside of oneself to some extent. Imagination is required for this first step. We will not consent to what is impossible or absurd. As long as you think of it as absurd, you're not going to believe it (God is three in one).
- Philosophers sometimes suffer a failure of the imagination. A failure of the imagination is a transgression of the sovereignty of the imagination because you are not giving the imagination freedom that it ought to have.
- Theological hope grounds patience. It has received the Holy Spirit, a deposit.
- Christian hope is expectation.
- The object of Christian hope must be present in the imagination.
- With hope it is important not to transgress the finitude of the imagination.



- Christian hope aims at the coming of the kingdom of Christ. We must fix our eyes (the imagination) on the prize.
- Love as a theological virtue is a total gift of self to the other with nothing held back. Theological love loses itself in the other. In losing ourselves in Christ, we find ourselves more truly.
- Faith saw in a glass and darkly. Hope saw in a glass, but illuminated by the Spirit. Love sees face to face.
- **Imagination is intimately involved in contemplation, a joint act of reason and imagination.**