

From All that Dwell Below the Skies*Isaac Watts (1674–1748)*

From all that dwell below the skies,
 Let the Creator's praise arise;
 Let the Redeemer's name be sung
 Through ev'ry land by ev'ry tongue.

Eternal are thy mercies Lord;
 Eternal truth attends thy Word;
 Thy praise shall sound from shore to shore
 Till suns shall rise and set no more.

ΤΩ ΚΡΟΝΟΥ ΚΑΙΡΩ*In the Nick of Time***God, Creation, and Humanity, Part 1: Beginning a Conversation***Kevin T. Bauder*

When we think wrongly about God, we necessarily begin to think wrongly about other things, too. When we feel wrongly toward God, we inevitably feel wrongly toward other things. When we choose against God, we direct our wills such that making wrong choices about other things becomes unavoidable.

How we think about God determines how we think about ourselves. It determines how we think about creation and our role in it. It determines how we think about sin and its effects. No wonder that A. W. Tozer opened his book, *The Knowledge of the Holy*, with this sentence: "What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us."

The process also works in the other direction. If we think about creation wrongly, we shall begin to think of God wrongly. Wrong thinking about ourselves or about our sin will also lead us into wrong thinking about God. Indeed, one reason that people reject the true and living God is because they entrench themselves in false beliefs about self, sin, and the world—beliefs that they are not willing to surrender. Where our bad thinking starts does not matter. Wrong ideas about any of these areas will corrupt our thinking in all the other areas because these areas are connected.

The devil, God's greatest enemy, knows about this connection. He wants people to misunderstand who God is. He also wants them to misunderstand themselves, their sin, and the world in which they live. He further knows that if he can lead people astray in any one area, then the other areas are sure to follow. Consequently, he varies his strategy depending upon the situation. Sometimes he directly assaults our concept of God. Sometimes he attacks our vision of the created order. Sometimes he undermines our understanding of human nature. Sometimes he subverts our comprehension of sin and its effects. Wherever he starts, his goal is to sell us a package of lies that corrupts our entire moral vision.

Believe it or not, the devil and his demonic agents plan how they are going to subvert people's thinking. Ephesians 6:11 warns against the wiles of the devil. The word for *wiles* is one that means *stratagems* or *schemes*. Appar-



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ently, the devil and his spiritual operatives sit around thinking of ways in which they can deceive people about God, creation, humanity, and sin. Perhaps the demons even hold committee meetings where those strategies are discussed and refined. Their strategies can be quite sophisticated: James talks about a demonic wisdom that is earthly and sensual, one that results in human bitterness and fighting.

The demons also get help from human agents in transmitting these false teachings. According to the apostle Paul, certain false teachers pay attention to seducing spirits and doctrines of demons (1 Tim 4:1). These teachers sometimes repeat demonic teachings even when they know that they are false. Unbelievably, for reasons of their own, these hypocrites are willing to lie about teachings that they know to be untrue (1 Tim 4:2). Sometimes these false teachers even start out as professing Christians, but they later depart from the faith. Even after they apostatize, they try to leverage their former standing among Christians to convince God's people that their demonic teachings are true.

The power of these demonic strategies lies in the connectedness of biblical ideas about God, creation, humanity, and sin. The devil's schemes work because these areas of thinking cannot be sequestered from each other. Instead, they depend upon one another. For example, the false teachers of 1 Timothy 4 attacked biblical teaching about creation by denying its goodness, insisting that people should abstain from foods that God had made. They also tried to undermine a biblical understanding of humanity by attacking the institution of marriage, which (besides being part of the created order) is fundamental to God's purpose for the human race (1 Tim 4:3). Paul responded by defending the goodness of God's creation (1 Tim 4:4–5), and no wonder: the goodness of creation is tied directly to the goodness of the Creator who made it.

Paul was responding to a particular demonic stratagem. It was a stratagem that would multiply into many erroneous systems of thought, some explicitly pagan and others professing to be Christian. These demonic teachings would endure for centuries to come. Indeed, some manifestations of this stratagem are still with us today (more about those later). Paul's point, however, was not simply about one particular form of error. Rather, he was working from a vision in which teachings about God, creation, humans, and sin stand at four corners of a great theological quadrilateral. To bend any corner is to warp the whole quadrilateral and to distort all of the other corners.

What I want to do over the next several essays is to examine each of the corners individually. I will begin by looking at the biblical understanding of God—not exhaustively, but insofar as it affects our thinking about creation and humanity. Then I will explore a doctrine of creation, followed by a biblical vision of humans within creation. I will ask how sin has changed both

the created order and human involvement in it. Then I will try to bring all four corners together to articulate a vision for human activity under the Creator God in a sin-damaged creation. Once I have done that, I hope to explore a couple of specific ways in which this vision can be skewed by misunderstandings of God, creation, human nature, and sin.

This essay—the one that you are reading right now—functions as a kind of preface to the whole series. I am not yet sure how long the series may go. It will certainly get interrupted occasionally along the way. But I encourage you to keep track of the argument week by week. I believe that some of the thorniest problems in Western civilization today—and in the Western Church today—arise out of ways in which demonic teachings have warped the quadrilateral. So keep reading.



This essay is by Kevin T. Bauder, Research Professor of Historical and Systematic Theology at Central Baptist Theological Seminary. Not every one of the professors, students, or alumni of Central Seminary necessarily agrees with every opinion that it expresses.
