

Praise the Lord! Ye Heavens, Adore Him*Richard Mant (1776–1848)*

Praise the Lord! ye heavens, adore Him,
 Praise Him, angels in the height;
 Sun and moon, rejoice before Him;
 Praise Him, all ye stars of light.

Praise the Lord—for He hath spoken;
 Worlds His mighty voice obeyed;
 Laws which never shall be broken,
 For their guidance He hath made.

Praise the Lord—for He is glorious;
 Never shall His promise fail;
 God hath made His saints victorious,
 Sin and death shall not prevail.

Praise the God of our salvation,
 Hosts on high His power proclaim;
 Heaven and earth, and all creation,
 Laud and magnify His name.

ΤΩ ΚΡΟΝΟΥ ΚΑΙΡΩ*In the Nick of Time***God, Creation, and Humanity, Part 3: The Created World***Kevin T. Bauder*

The opening verse of the Bible has profound implications for a right understanding of God. Its implications for a right understanding of the created world are just as significant. Together with the following chapters, it provides a necessary and adequate foundation upon which humans can erect their view of creation.

The course plan for Foundations of Right Thinking 101 is very simple: God made the world. The created order is His handiwork. He is the Creator. The world and all that is in it are His creatures. They owe their existence to Him. God is eternal. Creation is not. God is infinite. Creation is not. God is absolute. Creation is not. God exists in and from Himself. Creation does not.

The world had a beginning. Once upon a time it did not exist. Then it did. Had God not chosen to create it, the world would never have been. It might not have been. Its existence depended entirely upon God's good pleasure. Its ongoing existence depends upon the sustaining activity of God. As the writer to the Hebrews states, God the Son is the person who is "upholding all things by the word of his power" (Heb 1:3). The apostle Paul adds that in Christ, "all things consist" or hold together (Col 1:17). The existence of the created order is contingent and derived.

The world is not God. Nothing in the world—no created thing—is God. No combination of created things can ever become God. Therefore, no created thing, and no combination of created things, must ever be worshipped. Such things must never be assigned an importance that is equal to or greater than God. They must never be accorded the kind of devotion that God alone deserves. To worship any created thing is to become an idolater.

People worship created things whenever they treat those things as if they were valuable in themselves. The true value of each created thing depends upon its connection to something greater than itself. Ultimately, the value of the whole created order is contingent upon its connection to God. Creation as a whole, and each created thing in particular, is always a means to an end. Only God is the end, the goal, the *telos*. If we detach any created thing from its proper role in serving God, and if we begin to treat any created



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thing as if it were somehow an end in itself, separately from or even alongside God, then we turn that thing into an idol. We worship it.

We must love God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength because there is one and only one true and living God (Mark 12:28–34). Since creation is not God, we must never love any created thing with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength. We must love creation only insofar as we can love it in connection with and service to the God who it was made to serve.

The world is finite, time-bound, and contingent. Nevertheless, it is good. It is good because He who made it is good. It is good because the Maker, reviewing His handiwork, pronounced it good. In the narrative of Genesis 1, God declares His creation to be good no less than seven times. The last, seventh time, He declares it to be very good. Humans must never treat the created order as if it were evil. Neither should they denigrate God's good creation as if it were unworthy of their attention and involvement. When, on the seventh day, God rested (Gen 2:2–3), He was not "resting up" as if He could be tired of creating. Rather, He was delighting Himself in the goodness of all that He had made. For humans to refuse to acknowledge and appreciate the goodness, beauty, and utility of the created world is to despise the Creator. This, too, is idolatry.

Those who make things leave their marks upon the things that they make. Similarly, God has left the impress of His person upon His *poiema*—the things He has made (Rom 1:19–20). Even though God Himself is spirit and invisible, His work as Creator makes certain aspects of His character obvious within the created world. These include His eternal power and His *theiotēs* or divine nature. This stamp of God's character means that people do not even have to reason backward from creation to Creator; instead, they confront the personhood of the Creator by merely living and breathing in the world. For human beings, not knowing God is not possible, even if they reject that knowledge and invent alternative explanations (Rom 1:21–25).

God's creation of the world was not meaningless, random, or arbitrary. God had a purpose in creation, and everything He made tends toward that purpose. The creation narratives repeatedly use the language of purpose. When God declared creation to be good, it had to be good *for something*. Specifically, the celestial lights are for seasons, days, and years. The sun and the moon are supposed to govern day and night. God gave herbs and fruit for food. God placed humans in the garden of Eden for a declared purpose.

The meaning and purpose of the world is not found in itself. It is found in the purpose of the Creator. When the created world is used according to the Creator's purpose, His creatures will flourish. When it is used contrary to His purpose, their flourishing will be hindered. The word *used* is important. Creation must be *used*, and not merely enjoyed, because its purpose is

fulfilled in right use. But it must be used rightly, and that right use is tied directly to the presence of humanity within the created order.

To understand the meaning, function, and use of creation, then, one must understand God's creation of humanity. One must understand where God has placed humans within the created order, and one must grasp the role that God has given humans to fulfill. Consequently, having discussed God and creation, we must next turn attention to the nature, purpose, and destiny of human beings.



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.
