



Please open your copy of God's Word to Colossians 1:15–23. We are continuing our series on Growing in Our Shared Faith. Last Week we started looking at the relationship with God and His creation. Paul taught us last week about God's grace and helped us clearly understand the difference between special grace and common grace. And God's grace is to motivate us in how we view and love others whom God loves, with a special focus on people. Today, we're looking at God's purpose and plan for the entire creation.

I want to share with you one of my earliest lessons on the goodness of creation as it points back to the Good Creator:



All of creation is valuable because it is made by God and cared for by God. The BFM 2000 reads that God is the Creator, Redeemer, Preserver, and Ruler of the universe. . . . and that He reigns with providential care over His universe, His creatures, and the flow of the stream of human history according to the purposes of His grace.

**Everything brought into
existence that had no prior
existence is created by God for
His glory.**

Creation-

God's act of bringing into existence everything in the universe, things that had no prior existence. Both original creation and subsequent creations are for His glory.

So there are only two categories in this regard: the Creator and the creation.

As the first verse of Scripture reads, In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. In the beginning, there is God. He was before the beginning. There is nothing else in existence prior to His initial act of creation. Hebrews 11:3, speaking of this act, reminds us that God created everything out of nothing. There were no things. There was no material. There was no existence apart from God Himself. And He spoke the universe into existence. After that He also spoke to bring forth other creations, as we see throughout Genesis 1. And like our first slide, every child, every new plant, every new animal are all creations by God.

And God has done this work specifically through the person of God the Son.

**15 He [Christ] is the image of
the invisible God,
the firstborn over all creation.**

**16 For everything was created
by him,
in heaven and on earth,
the visible and the invisible,**

**whether thrones or dominions
or rulers or authorities—
all things have been created
through him and for him.**

**17 He is before all things,
and by him all things hold
together.**

**18 He is also the head of the
body, the church;
he is the beginning,**

**the firstborn from the dead,
so that he might come to have
first place in everything.**

**19 For God was pleased to have
all his fullness dwell in him,**

**20 and through him to reconcile
everything to himself, whether
things on earth or things in
heaven,**

**by making peace
through his blood, shed on the
cross.**

**21 Once you were alienated and
hostile in your minds as
expressed in your evil actions.**

**22 But now he has reconciled
you by his physical body
through his death, to present
you holy, faultless, and
blameless before him—**

**23 if indeed you remain
grounded and steadfast in the
faith and are not shifted away
from the hope of the gospel that
you heard.**

**This gospel has been
proclaimed in all creation under
heaven, and I, Paul, have
become a servant of it.**

**God created everything to be
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It is distinct from Him and
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That may seem very simple, but the point is more profound and needed than you may realize. Next week we begin talking about God as Spirit, as eternal and infinitely good. He is clearly distinct from us. Now, we know very well how messed up we can be, and how messed up the creation has become. But it was made to be good, and God still delights in His creation.

Genesis 1 repeats 6 times that God saw what He created as good. After He made mankind in His image and thus completing the created order with man and woman ruling as His image-bearers, His perspective was, "It is very good."

We know from the rest of Scripture that God created everything by, through, and for Christ. Everything exists and holds together by means of His powerful Word. And everything is returning to God and can only be redeemed and restored by means of Jesus.

As Paul bursts out in joyous praise about the creation in relationship to God because of the gospel,
For from him and through him
and to him are all things.
To him be the glory forever. Amen.

Everything that has been made by God matters to God and exists for His glory.

First, people are highlighted as part of the creation. We are part of it, embedded in it, but also unique within it. We are made in the image of God to be like Him and represent Him in the world.

So, remember our original screen. God made you and God don't make no junk! He made you in His image and that is very good!

So every human being is of inherent value and worth. God has made this world to be the place for humanity to dwell in the presence of God and to shape it for His glory. We have a special role given to us by God to oversee the rest of the created order.

In Genesis 1:28, God commissions people to shape the creation further for God's glory and to rule over it with care.

This past week, I read back through a great book on creation and our role within it as Christians. It's called True North by Mark Liederbach and Seth Bible. They point out that Christians may err in one of two directions when it comes to caring for the rest of creation. We may go wrong by assuming that it doesn't matter to God and shouldn't matter to us. I mean if it is messed up by sin and God is going to remake it, what's the point in us caring for it? I mean, didn't he say that Adam and Eve could eat from whatever tree and further tell Noah that he can eat animals. So, the creation exists for our benefit right? So, we can do whatever with it?

NOT SO FAST

God cares about what He creates. He set man and woman over it to care for it how He would care for it. Yes, we have rights to it, but it is not for OUR glory. It is to be shaped for maximizing God's glory. That work includes wisely using it and caring for it, not abusing it.

Another way that Christians may err is that they may overstate the place of the creation in relationship to God and man. Basically, they are tempted to take that which is good and make it into a god. If you truly belong to Christ, you should be very careful never to cross that line.

Paul speaks of the downward spiral of mankind in Romans 1 apart from the gospel: 21 For though they knew God, they did not glorify him as God or show gratitude. Instead, their thinking became worthless, and their senseless hearts were darkened. 22 Claiming to be wise, they became fools 23 and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man, birds, four-footed animals, and reptiles.

There is a distinction between the Creator and the creation that must be maintained.

**Creation is good because it is
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So let's say it this way: Creation is good because it is made by God. Creation is good but it is not God.

We are people pulled by different streams of thought constantly to either overvalue creation or to undervalue it. Do we use it for our benefit regardless of effect or guard it regardless of consequence on humanity?

So what do we do with this created realm in which we live and the people and things within it?

Let's consider Gen. 2:15 God commanded Adam to work and to keep the garden. The grand context of the Garden of Eden is that it is the first temple. It is the place God intended to dwell with man for man to worship God. So, how we interact with all that God has made, is to be an act of worship toward the Creator.

When we prepare gardens, we are to do so as worship of God. When we recycle and make wise choices about how we make products, it should be done as worship to God through using the creation carefully. When we hunt and fish or just shop for them, we should do so with both a thankfulness to God for Him supplying our needs and with a consideration of how our habits are helping shape a more beautiful display of God's glory.

When we speak to other human beings, we do so with love. We should seek to provide for their practical needs while also speaking the truth to matters in our culture. This is all to be part of our worship to God. We are able to worship rightly because we have been brought back into right relationship with God by Christ's sacrifice. And so part of our loving worship of God is lovingly sharing the gospel with others so they will also worship the one true God within this created order.

15 He [Christ] is the image of the invisible God,

the firstborn over all creation.

16 For everything was created by him,
in heaven and on earth,

...

all things have been created through him and for him.

Have you lost the wonder of a child? Have you taken for granted all that is around you? When you walk outside on a chilly morning, does the sensation enliven you at all? When you fill your cup with ice and water in your kitchen, do you neglect to appreciate how people before you have shaped culture for the benefit of others, including clean water on demand?

When a dog wags its tail to greet you, do you dismiss joy as irrelevant?

All things are created for the glory of Christ. We are made to enjoy the goodness of creation and shape it further for the glory of God, but the creation has also been corrupted.

Adam's sin introduced death and corruption for mankind and all things under his headship.

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The Son of God took on a physical body and remains forever, from here on out, both body and spirit. Our passage speaks to Christ's death being the price for the whole created order.

When Adam sinned, the ground had to pay for it, too. God pronounced a curse upon the ground.

All of the creation was affected by Adam's sin. God made it, and He don't make no junk. But we've junked it up by sin.

Our physical bodies die because of spiritual death. We are separated from God because of sin. Even for the Christian who has entered into new life in Christ, our bodies still need to be made new because the corruption of sin still affecting our physical bodies. We sometimes fall or the lie that our physical bodies don't matter, only our spiritual existence. But we are made to be physical and spiritual. Sin has corrupted the creation and distorted our view of it.

How many times over the past month have you just taken a moment to enjoy something beautiful? Snow? Trees? Children playing? Sunsets? A lake or the ocean? Animals grazing? People walking or dining together?

Compare those memories to how many times over the past few days have you despaired because of the news? How many times have you scrolled social media without even looking? How often do you speak to people as if they are just cogs in the process of life that we're trying to hurry through?

I've heard reports of depression, anxiety, and mental illness have increased across the board, in large part connected to our response to how we handle COVID-19. Yes, we should seek to bless others in practical ways, and this has included practicing social distancing.

But let me warn you about two dangerous perspectives brought up by the pandemic. It is very easy to slip into a wrong way of thinking about life in regard to these precautions and pleasures. Regarding precautions, our goal as Christians should never be mere survival.

We are made to flourish in the presence of God as we enjoy Him within His creation. Darwin apparently stopped enjoying nature in the latter part of his life because the joy and wonder was killed by his newly stated view about life. If there is no Creator and everything is just accidental, it has no purpose. If it has no purpose, there can be no joy in it.

Do not pursue a precautionary life for the sake of mere survival.

Regarding pleasures, do not treat people like they are puppets for your convenience and entertainment. They are not impediments to you getting back to what you enjoy. People are not pieces of meat for you to carve up for your personal delicacy. They are human beings made in the image of God. How you treat the person you consider the least important in the room reveals either your contempt for God or your delight in Him.

We are made for flourishing as worshipers of God, and this includes loving other people and enjoying the rest of creation according to God's designs and prescriptions.

The first Adam was a head of humanity whose sin plunged all creation into ruin and corruption. We needed another head over creation to make it clean and new.

**Christ has paid the price of
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Jesus is the only hope for all
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Christ has paid the price of reconciliation. Jesus is the only hope for all creation.

18 He is also the head of the body, the church;
he is the beginning,
the firstborn from the dead,
so that he might come to have
first place in everything.

19 For God was pleased to have
all his fullness dwell in him,

20 and through him to reconcile
everything to himself,
whether things on earth or things in heaven,
by making peace
through his blood, shed on the cross.

This is the good news. Christ has died for sin to reconcile everything to Himself. Yes, this means especially the church, but it also means reconciliation of the created order. God has not abandoned what He made. He has upheld it and sustained it. He has still enjoyed it.

This is the God about whom Psalm 104 reads:

10 He causes the springs to gush into the valleys;
they flow between the mountains.

11 They supply water for every wild beast;
the wild donkeys quench their thirst.

12 The birds of the sky live beside the springs;
they make their voices heard among the foliage.

13 He waters the mountains from his palace;
the earth is satisfied by the fruit of your labor.

14 He causes grass to grow for the livestock
and provides crops for man to cultivate,
producing food from the earth,

15 wine that makes human hearts glad—
making his face shine with oil—
and bread that sustains human hearts.

16 The trees of the Lord flourish,
the cedars of Lebanon that he planted.

17 There the birds make their nests;
storks make their homes in the pine trees.

18 The high mountains are for the wild goats;
the cliffs are a refuge for hyraxes.

19 He made the moon to mark the festivals;
the sun knows when to set.

20 You bring darkness, and it becomes night,
when all the forest animals stir.

21 The young lions roar for their prey
and seek their food from God.

22 The sun rises; they go back
and lie down in their dens.

23 Man goes out to his work
and to his labor until evening.

24 How countless are your works, Lord!
In wisdom you have made them all;
the earth is full of your creatures.

25 Here is the sea, vast and wide,
teeming with creatures beyond number—
living things both large and small.

26 There the ships move about,
and Leviathan, which you formed to play there.

27 All of them wait for you
to give them their food at the right time.

28 When you give it to them,

they gather it;
when you open your hand,
they are satisfied with good things.

29 When you hide your face,
they are terrified;
when you take away their breath,
they die and return to the dust.

30 When you send your breath,
they are created,
and you renew the surface of the ground.

31 May the glory of the Lord endure forever;
may the Lord rejoice in his works.

I had an interactive this week of God's care for even every sparrow. After finishing some research for this sermon, I decided it was a good time to care for our ferns. It was going to freeze that night, so I got up to bring them inside. Apparently, a sparrow was hiding in one of them. It flew through our hallway, past our kitchen, and into the guest bathroom. I wish I could show you the video of how my wife reacted to it flying in there as she opened the door. It provided a needed laugh for all of us. As I was trying to gently encourage the bird to fly out the window, there was a moment it just looked at me. And I remembered that God knows the smallest detail about this bird's life.

God has continued sustaining the creation, even that which He declared cursed. The thorns that would come forth because of Adam would be put on Christ as the victor's crown.

Sinful man and Satan may have mocked, thinking that the strife that caused blood to flow was the end of a single man's life, but it was the nourishing flow that brings new life and was the end of all man's strife.

God has not abandoned His creation, Nor has He forgotten that He declared man to be over the creation to care for it. If God intended to fill the world with rightly aligned worshippers, worshippers who would shape the creation around them for His glory, then He has given a renewed commission that includes the original. We now pursue that original commission by means of the Great Commission. If people are brought into new life in Christ, they have new hearts to obey God and seek His glory.

Learning to obey Christ and all that He taught is all-inclusive. It is always tied to evangelism but is all-inclusive.

So when we do ethics, we should tie it to discipleship. When we practice Creation Care, we should see the open door for evangelism. When we treat other people with inherent dignity and respect, we do so with prayer that they would be recreated into the image of Christ through saving faith.

We look forward to the physical return of Christ, who will judge all people and dwell with His followers in new creation.

We look forward to the physical return of Christ's, who will make all things new.

21 Once you were alienated and hostile in your minds as expressed in your evil actions. 22 But now he has reconciled you by his physical body through his death, to present you holy, faultless, and blameless before him— 23 if indeed you remain grounded and steadfast in the faith and are not shifted away from the hope of the gospel that you heard. This gospel has been proclaimed in all creation under heaven, and I, Paul, have become a servant of it.

The gospel is not just for now but for hope of eternity. Christ's accomplished salvation was done by means of His physical body, both in death and resurrection. So the benefit of hope applies to our physical bodies as well. Like the woman who loved much because she was forgiven much, some of you have louder amens going in your heart because you know how weak your body has become. I was talking to a guy yesterday who had a tendon snap a few years ago just from trying to reach behind his shoulders.

We do not know what it is to exist at this time apart from our bodies, and we should long for Christ to be exalted through giving us new bodies remade according to His resurrected body.

The same author who wrote in the NT to be apart from the body is to be with the Lord is the same one who looked forward to no longer having to deal with a corrupted body when his physical body is transformed.

50 What I am saying, brothers and sisters, is this: Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor can corruption inherit incorruption. 51 Listen, I am telling you a mystery: We will not all fall asleep, but we will all be changed, 52 in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we will be changed. 53 For this corruptible body must be clothed with incorruptibility, and this mortal body must be clothed with immortality.

54 When this corruptible body is clothed with incorruptibility, and this mortal body is clothed with immortality, then the saying that is written will take place:

Death has been swallowed up in victory.

55 Where, death, is your victory?

Where, death, is your sting?

56 The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. 57 But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ!

In Colossians 1:23 commentators rightly focus the matter of proclamation regarding people, specifically those who will be shown by faith to be part of the church from among all nations. But when Paul says the gospel has been proclaimed in all creation, I think he's also playing on the idea about Christ reconciling to himself all things.

18 For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is going to be revealed to us. 19 For the creation eagerly waits with anticipation for God's sons to be revealed. 20 For the creation was subjected to futility—not willingly, but because of him who subjected it—in the hope 21 that the creation itself will also be set free from the bondage to decay into the glorious freedom of God's children. 22 For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together with labor pains until now. 23 Not only that, but we ourselves who have the Spirit as the firstfruits—we also groan within ourselves, eagerly waiting for adoption, the redemption of our bodies. 24 Now in this hope we were saved, but hope that is seen is not hope, because who hopes for what he sees? 25 Now if we hope for what we do not see, we eagerly wait for it with patience.

God is going to bring about new heavens and a new earth. Christ is the firstborn from the dead, the firstborn with rights over both creation and new creation. We, as His people, are the first product, the first display of what new creation is like, as we now have the Spirit of God in us. But even as grand and amazing as this truth is, the Spirit is given as a guarantee of what is still to come.

So, we should seek to do our part in shaping this created world as we have opportunity, maximizing it for God's glory. We don't do it because we are somehow hope for creation. We are to care for God's creation because he made. We should enjoy what He has created as worship of Christ.

And so the vision of our church is that

Transforming our community and our world, by the power of God's Holy Spirit, into disciples of Jesus Christ.

And as people are transformed, their habits, purpose, and pattern are also transformed so that they too shape what is around them for the glory of God.

Creation matters because it is made by God and God don't make no junk.