

THE223 Christian Narrative 1 Creation and Fall

Unit 2c The Goodness of Creation

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Hello and welcome to Unit 2 Session C. As we continue our conversation about creation, we will now consider the inherent goodness of creation as described for us within the biblical account. Our main teaching idea is this: All that God created was and continues to be inherently good. In this session, we will want to unpack the idea that God created things initially good and that, furthermore, all that God created continued being good even after the fall, that is, the introduction of sin into the world. Our discussion of the goodness of creation much depends on the purpose of creation, and so we begin here. Historically, there have been two reasons put forth for the purpose or end of creation. The first is that the chief end of creation is man's happiness, that God created all things for the enjoyment and happiness of mankind. The second is that the chief end of creation is God's glory, that God created all things in order for those things to bring him glory.

Now, you might be wondering why a discussion of the goodness of creation depends on the purpose of creation. In this session, we are considering the teleology of creation. Teleology is the philosophical attempt to explain the purpose of something. The goodness of creation or lack thereof is important inasmuch as it relates to the teleological nature of creation. So if the goodness or lack thereof of creation is to matter at all, then we must first consider creation's inherent purpose. While some have argued in the past that the happiness of humanity was the purpose of creation, this view is ultimately incorrect. While some ancients held this view or one close to it, such as Plato, Philo, and Seneca, this view came to its height in the 18th century during the enlightenment. This view is held by men like Kant and Schumacher. This view that the happiness of humanity is the chief end of creation basically argues that God cannot, in himself, be the end of creation since he is sufficient in himself and is not in need of anything. And since he could not make himself the end of creation, it only serves to reason, according to this view, that the ends or purpose of creation should be found within creation itself. That is to say that the end of creation should then serve the creature. And since humanity has a special place within God's creation, it serves to reason then that the end of creation is to serve humanity and that the best way to serve humanity is to ultimately increase man's happiness. So the end of creation is the supreme happiness of man.

However, this view is ultimately flawed. Berkhof notes that there are at least three fundamental flaws with this view. First, the goodness of God, while revealed through creation, is not dependent on creation in order to be known. The goodness of God can be seen within the relationships shared among the trinity. As such, the chief end of creation does not have to be one which proves the goodness of God, for God's goodness may be observed apart from creation. Second, God does not exist for the sake of man but vice-versa. Because man is a part of creation, it simply stands to reason that he himself cannot be creation's end. God is the only creator and the supreme good, not man. Finally, all of creation cannot be subordinated to the happiness of man. Human happiness simply fails to explain all of creation. This can be evidenced in all of the sufferings that are found in the world. No. Human happiness is not the purpose... Rather, the Bible teaches us that God created all things to show his glory. As Berkhof states, the church of Jesus Christ found the true end of creation not in anything outside of God but in God himself, more particularly, in the external manifestation of his inherent excellency.

So what is the purpose of creation specifically? Well, God created all things in order to make known his glory. Since his glory is observable within creation, creation itself, especially mankind, can then worship God because he comes to better understand God's glory within creation. In this sense, the happiness of man is found not as the end of creation, but as the natural result of worshipping God.

Now, let's turn our attention to understand how we come to this conclusion. First, we start by noting that the testimony of Scripture communicates that God created all things to show his glory. We can see this in a variety of places. For instance, Psalm 19:1-2 state, "The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork. Day to day pours out speech, and night to night reveals knowledge." In this passage, we discover that both nature and the cosmos were created to bring God glory.

Isaiah 43:7 tells us that not only do nature and the cosmos bring God glory, but humanity does as well. There it states, "Everyone who is called by my name, whom I created for my glory, whom I formed and made." Here it is clear that the reason God created humankind was for his own glory. Indeed, Revelation 4:11 shows us that the chief end of creation itself is to bring God glory. It proves this when it states, "Worthy are you, O Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they exist and were created." Yes, the purpose of God's creation was to make known his glory.

Now, we also have to understand that God created all things by his own free will. In other words, it's important to note that God did not need creation for any special reason. So God did not need more glory in order to be God. That is, it is important to see that creation does not add to God's glory. Rather, it simply declares it. Acts 17:24-25 state, "The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in temples made by man, nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything." God was not dependent on his creation for anything at all. Rather, his creation simply declares his own glory. So God did not create in order to increase his glory, yet neither did he create because he felt less or lonely without creation.

John 17 teaches us that Jesus was already in perfect relationship with the Father prior to creation. As Jesus states in verses 5 and 6 [John 17:5-6], "And now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had with you before the world existed. I have manifested your name to the people whom you gave me out of the world. Yours they were, and you gave them to me, and they have kept your word." God was not in need of anything from his creation when he created it. Because of this, we see that God's creation demonstrates his own excellence. God's creation reveals his own great wisdom and great power. In fact, what we discover is that the glory of God is the only end that is consistent with God's own independence and sovereignty.

Now that we have established that the purpose of God's creation was to reveal his own glory, we can turn our attention to the topic of the goodness of creation. As we have investigated the creation account, we have taken a look at several important Hebrew words. We looked at *bara*, that is, create. This word told us that God alone uniquely created all things. We looked at *kalah*, that is, complete; and *shabath*, that is, rest. These two words in concert told us that God rested because everything that he had intended to create was perfectly created. Today, we will consider one final word, and the word is *towb*, which is translated "good." *Towb* is used throughout Genesis 1. We see it used by God in verse 4, in verse 10, in verse 12, in verse 18, in verse 21, in verse 25, and in verse 31 [Genesis 1:4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25, 31]. Throughout the creation account, God declared that his creation was good. This word *towb* has a range of meaning, which includes the concept of something that is practically good, that is, economically or materially good. It carries the idea of abstract goodness, that is, something that is pleasant or beautiful. *Towb* can refer to something that is of high quality or high expense. It can also be

used to describe something that is either morally good or something that is philosophically good. God went to great lengths to declare that what he created was good.

In fact, in Genesis 1:31, we read, “And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.” Here in this passage, at the end of day six, God declared that all his creation was very good. God did not want us to miss the inherently good nature of his creation. The material world in which we live is a good world. That is, God specifically created it for his own purpose and pleasure. It was created to declare God’s glory, and as such, it is good. And here is something critical for us to understand. The introduction of sin into the world did not change the fact that God’s creation is good. God’s creation continues to be good expressly because God created in order to display and declare his glory. As we read in Job 23:13, “[God] is unchangeable, and who can turn him back? What he desires, that he does.” God desires that creation reveals his glory, and so it does. Even though all of creation was clearly affected by sin, the goodness of creation is still intact. God’s creation still brings God glory, and as such, it is good. It still serves God and has purpose. It accomplishes its end.

So, all that God created was and continues to be inherently good. Creation declares the glory of God. And no, sin, though terrible, has not ruined the goodness of God’s creation. As such, we should fight against those false beliefs that would have us hold that the created world is somehow less than the spiritual world. God, in his infinite wisdom and power, created all that is seen and all that is unseen to accomplish the same goal: to declare his glory. Thus, the things of the earth are good for this purpose, and the things of heaven are as well. We too, being created beings, are to declare the glory of God as part of his creation. To this end then, we close this session with the words of Psalm 145.

“I will extol you, my God and King, and bless your name forever and ever. Every day I will bless you and praise your name forever and ever. Great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised, and his greatness is unsearchable. One generation shall commend your works to another, and shall declare your mighty acts. On the glorious splendor of your majesty, and on your wondrous works, I will meditate. They shall speak of the might of your awesome deeds, and I will declare your greatness. They shall pour forth the fame of your abundant goodness and shall sing aloud of your righteousness. The Lord is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. The Lord is good to all, and his mercy is over all that he has made. All your works shall give thanks to you, O Lord, and all your saints shall bless you! They shall speak of the glory of your kingdom and tell of your power, to make known to the children of man your mighty deeds, and the glorious splendor of your kingdom. Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and your dominion endures throughout all generations. [The Lord is faithful in all his words and kind in all his works.] The Lord upholds all who are falling and raises up all who are bowed down. The eyes of all look to you, and you give them their food in due season. You open your hand; you satisfy the desire of every living thing. The Lord is righteous in all his ways and kind in all his works. The Lord is near to all who call on him, to all who call on him in truth. He fulfills the desire of those who fear him; he also hears their cry and saves them. The Lord preserves all who love him, but all the wicked he will destroy. My mouth will speak the praise of the Lord, and let all flesh bless his holy name forever and ever.”

All that God created was and continues to be inherently good. And you and I, as part of created order, were created to declare God’s glory.