

TRUE,
GOOD,
&
BEAUTIFUL

TRUE, GOOD, & BEAUTIFUL

...

God's Design for a
Flourishing World

ROBERT J. PACIENZA

True, Good, & Beautiful: God's Design for a Flourishing World

Copyright © 2024 by Robert J. Pacienza

All rights reserved. Written permission must be secured from the publisher to use or reproduce any part of this book, except for brief quotations in critical reviews or articles.

Unless otherwise indicated, scripture quotations are taken from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version, copyright © 2001 by Crossway Bibles, a division of Good News Publishers. Used by permission.

Scripture quotation marked (NIV) is taken from the Holy Bible, New International Version®, NIV®. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.™ Used by permission of Zondervan. All rights reserved worldwide. www.zondervan.com The “NIV” and “New International Version” are trademarks registered in the United States Patent and Trademark Office by Biblica, Inc.*

ISBN 979-8-89660-942-1

Cover Design: Hampton Creative, www.hamptoncreative.com

Interior Design: Roark Creative, www.roarkcreative.com

Printed in the United States of America.

Published by:



Institute for Faith & Culture
5555 North Federal Hwy
Fort Lauderdale, FL 33308
(954) 771-8840

www.institutefc.org

For Preston and Lydia.

May God give you the grace to pursue the true, good, and beautiful.

CONTENTS

Introduction	9
CHAPTER 1 Creation	13
CHAPTER 2 Human Purpose	31
CHAPTER 3 Gender	47
CHAPTER 4 Work	63
CHAPTER 5 Marriage	81
CHAPTER 6 Manhood and Womanhood	95
CHAPTER 7 Government	109
CHAPTER 8 The Church	123
Conclusion	137
Endnotes	141
Index	149
About the Author	151
About the Institute for Faith & Culture	152



INTRODUCTION

Throughout history, philosophers, poets, and thinkers have sought to define the essential qualities that give life meaning and purpose. The ancient Greek philosophers, such as Plato and Aristotle, spoke of three transcendent ideals—**the true, good, and beautiful**—as guiding principles that inform human flourishing. These ideals, they argued, were not isolated from each other but interconnected, forming a unified vision of the world that offers harmony and order to existence. Later, writers such as Augustine and Aquinas, building on this classical heritage, recognized that this unity of truth, goodness, and beauty could only be fully understood and realized through a Christian lens.

As we defend the biblical worldview today, we find that these ancient insights remain profoundly relevant. The truth of Christianity does not stand alone but is inseparable from the goodness and beauty that flow from it. Truth, goodness, and beauty find their ultimate expression in the person of Jesus Christ and the biblical way of life that He calls us to embrace. Christianity, far from being a narrow or oppressive system, offers the fullest picture of reality—one in which truth, goodness, and beauty are not merely abstract ideas but living realities fulfilled in Christ.

It is in Christianity, and specifically in the person of Jesus Christ that we find the full realization of truth, goodness, and beauty. Christ Himself declared, “I am the way, the truth, and the life” (John 14:6), uniting these transcendentals in His very being. Unlike the philosophers who could only speculate about the nature of ultimate reality, Christians believe that the ultimate reality, the source of all truth, goodness, and beauty, has made Himself known in the person of Jesus Christ.

Truth is fulfilled in Christ because He reveals the ultimate purpose and meaning of life. The Christian understanding of truth is not limited to empirical knowledge or human reason but is centered on the revelation of God in Christ. This revelation is now mediated through the Bible. In Christ,

we see the perfect revelation of God's character and will. This truth is not a cold, impersonal fact but a living truth that calls us into a relationship with our Creator. As Scripture says, "You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free" (John 8:32).

Goodness is fulfilled in Christ because He embodies perfect moral virtue and sacrificial love. The goodness of Christ is seen in His compassion for the weak, His mercy for sinners, and His self-giving love on the cross. The moral teachings of Christianity—centered on the love of God and love of neighbor—are not arbitrary rules but reflections of God's goodness, which we are called to emulate. Through the Holy Spirit, believers are empowered to live in a way that reflects this divine goodness, bringing light into a fallen world.

Beauty is fulfilled in Christ because His life, death, and resurrection display the beauty of God's redemptive plan. The cross, an instrument of suffering and shame, becomes, in the Christian faith, the ultimate symbol of beauty—the beauty of a love so deep that God Himself would take on human flesh and suffer for the sake of His creation. The resurrection, in turn, reveals the beauty of new life, of hope restored, and of creation redeemed. The Christian life, marked by worship, virtue, and the pursuit of holiness, reflects the beauty of Christ's kingdom, which is breaking into the world even now.

During the last century, Bible-believing Christians in the West have experienced the social, cultural, and political ground shifting beneath their feet. Society has thrown off God's moral framework as an ever-increasing number of people have chosen to live without any real reference to God. None of this is surprising to those who know their Bible.

Perhaps the best way to describe the shift in America's secular culture is to say that it has become *more* secular. This is not to say that most Americans are agnostic or atheist. Instead, a critical mass of our citizens simply manage life without dependence on God. As a result, Western civilization is foundering, and, in many cases, is doing so in a state of chaos and confusion.

No society or culture has conformed fully to God's design. Eventually, because societies are populated by sinners, every civilization departs from its norms. In time, secular institutions become warped, twisted by sin.

The West is no exception. Indeed, we are there.

Think about it. The concept of "design" conveys that things are made to work satisfactorily by complying with the designer's intent. Thus, if humans

truly want to flourish, we must follow God's design for us and for the world. C. S. Lewis crafted this helpful metaphor:

God made us: invented us as a man invents an engine. A car is made to run on petrol, and it would not run properly on anything else. Now God designed the human machine to run on Himself. He Himself is the fuel our spirits were designed to burn, or the food our spirits were designed to feed on. There is no other. That is why it is just no good asking God to make us happy in our own way without bothering about religion. God cannot give us a happiness and peace apart from Himself, because it is not there.¹

Sadly, we have chosen to fuel our engines with a low-octane substitute of our own design. Our engines sputter, and we find ourselves stranded in difficulties, suffering, and sadness. In our sin-darkened world, we have filtered out the "thou shalt" and "thou shalt not," replacing them with the fuel of ever-changing secular opinions.

In rejecting God, our declining secular culture has also rejected his perfect design. God's design for creation, human purpose, gender, work, marriage, manhood and womanhood, government, and the church are all under attack.

That's a problem—with both temporal and eternal consequences.

The Bible reveals that God created us in his image, placed us on earth to honor him, and equipped us with everything we need to live abundantly.

If we want to flourish, we must fuel our machines, feed our spirits, and conform our values to God's original design. With God as the sovereign Creator, he is, by default, the chief Designer. As God's creation, humans are not entitled to tinker with the Creator's design but instead are to discover and honor it. By so doing, we can flourish, discover what the Bible calls *shalom*, and come to experience the abundant life Jesus promised.²

Our journey to the solution begins as we discover God's design as explained in the Bible. Let us devote ourselves, therefore, to the difficult but glorious task of declaring and demonstrating that God's design is true, good, and beautiful.



CHAPTER 1

God's Design:

CREATION

■ ■ ■

In the beginning, God created the
heavens and the earth. . . . And
God saw that it was good.

—GENESIS 1:1, 25

Have you ever felt like being a Christian puts you on the defensive with academics, intellectuals, and the world of science? That's understandable, especially with the deluge of media about the latest technological advances and newest scientific discoveries and the hesitancy some Christians feel about engaging the subject. But this is a very good time to do exactly that. Let's arm ourselves with the truth and joyfully step into the conversation.

In 2009, a war of words broke out when Christian groups purchased ad space on London buses to deliver messages about faith. The organization Humanists UK launched a counterattack called the "Atheist Bus Campaign." Their bus-billboard message was direct: "There's probably no god. Now stop worrying and enjoy your life." While crowd-sourcing funding to pay for the campaign, Humanists UK wrote, "Patron Richard Dawkins generously agreed to match . . . donations."³

Dawkins is more than just a prominent donor. He has earned an entry in the *Encyclopedia Britannica* for being an outspoken atheist who asserts "the supremacy of science over religion in explaining the world." His book, *The God Delusion*, "relentlessly points out the logical fallacies in religious belief and ultimately concludes that the laws of probability preclude the existence of an omnipotent creator."⁴

Activities like the rival bus-billboard campaign and books that challenge religious belief serve to bolster the perception that science and religious belief are incompatible.

Nothing could be further from the truth.

The Origin of the Universe

The origin of the universe is one of the most obvious areas of disagreement among men. As scientists discover new data, they adjust their theory accordingly. In the article "Then vs. Now: The Age of the Universe," NASA scientists explain it this way: "Before 1999, astronomers had estimated that the age of the universe was between 7 and 20 billion years. But with advances in technology and the development of new techniques, we now know the age of the universe is 13.7 billion years, with an uncertainty of only 200 million years."⁵ However, only 17 years later, other researchers suggested the earlier

assertion may have been off by half. Today, most scientists believe the age of the universe is more than 26 billion years old.⁶

Christians reject the ever-changing recalculations of science to explain their theory of origins. Our disagreement runs deeper than that: we believe secularists have rejected critical data, namely, the order apparent in the universe and the designing force behind it. Christians believe God is the sovereign Designer, Creator, Sustainer, and Redeemer of his universe. Secular scientists assert that a collision of gases ignited a big bang that, given enough time, spawned solar systems, planets that orbit the sun with precision, and a myriad of plants, animals, and intelligent mammals, some of which developed sophisticated speech and achieved higher levels of intelligence.

God Designed It All

Christians point to the order of our complex universe as evidence of a Creator, believing that order within complexity yields a data stream that should lead people, scientists included, to understand origins more accurately. The universe in general, and Earth in detail, point to something far more plausible than the big bang theory. Unbelieving scientists, of course, disagree.

Scripture helps us realize that a creation worldview far excels all others while pointing to God's salvation of mankind. First, let's remind ourselves of (or discover for the first time) the biblical doctrine of God's creation and then explore creation's governance, design, and goodness.

The Doctrine of Creation

According to the Judeo-Christian worldview, God designed his universe in an ordered way. Starting with nothing, he separated light from darkness and water from land; he produced vegetation on the land and spawned fish in the seas; he scattered stars in the Milky Way and beyond but placed a sun and a moon nearby; and he gave birds flight and animals free range of the ground. Finally, he created Adam and Eve in his image—and instructed them to steward the earth on his behalf.

God's design is called the "Doctrine of Creation." It finds its footing in the opening words of Genesis 1:

In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters.

And God said, "Let there be light," and there was light. And God saw that the light was good. And God separated the light from the darkness. God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, the first day.

And God said, "Let there be an expanse in the midst of the waters, and let it separate the waters from the waters." And God made the expanse and separated the waters that were under the expanse from the waters that were above the expanse. And it was so. And God called the expanse Heaven. And there was evening and there was morning, the second day. And God said, "Let the waters under the heavens be gathered together into one place, and let the dry land appear." And it was so. God called the dry land Earth, and the waters that were gathered together he called Seas. And God saw that it was good. And God said, "Let the earth sprout vegetation, plants yielding seed, and fruit trees bearing fruit in which is their seed, each according to its kind, on the earth." And it was so. The earth brought forth vegetation, plants yielding seed according to their own kinds, and trees bearing fruit in which is their seed, each according to its kind. And God saw that it was good. And there was evening and there was morning, the third day. (Genesis 1:1–13)

These are the first verses of the Bible, so it is fitting that they describe the origin of life in the universe. The passage goes on to describe the rest of creation—of the sun, moon, and stars; of sea creatures and birds; of animals; and of human beings. It turns out that human beings in every era of their existence would have two pressing questions answered by this first chapter of God's Word: "Where did we come from?" and "Who made us?"

Although urgent, these questions are far from new—and human beings

have a history of forgetting the answers. By the time the Holy Spirit inspired Moses to write the creation story in the opening pages of Genesis, the Israelites were barely adjusting to their newfound freedom, after having been enslaved to the Egyptians for 400 years. They had forgotten who they were and where they came from, and they might never have heard the true story of their origins. Four centuries of living in the culture of their captors had taken its toll. The word-of-mouth influence of the patriarchs centuries before had waned. The Israelites had forgotten they were to worship God, not the stars or cats or crocodiles. To say it differently, they were to worship the Creator, not the creation. Moses's writings helped to resurrect the answers to these important questions. His answers were clear and direct.

The questions "Where did we come from?" and "Who made us?" have echoed throughout church history; their answers were captured well in the Westminster Confession of Faith (1646).⁷ This portion of that Confession sums up the Doctrine of Creation:

It pleased God the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, for the manifestation of the glory of His eternal power, wisdom, and goodness, in the beginning, to create, or make of nothing the world, and all things therein, whether visible or invisible, in the space of six days, and all very good.⁸

The all-important doctrine of God's creation—as relevant today as it was thousands of years ago—stands in stark contrast to those who reject the concept of a designing and creating God. The doctrine begins with determining the governance of creation. That's a fancy way of saying "Who controlled creation?" and "Is that power still in charge?"

The Governance of Creation

Moses opens Genesis with a profound statement: "In the beginning, God . . ." (Genesis 1:1). God is preexistent from eternity past. He is the star of the show, being mentioned 32 times in the first 31 verses of Genesis. The opening words introduce us to the governing force of the universe: God himself.

“In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth” (Genesis 1:1) is foundational to the Judeo-Christian worldview. It puts into context everything else in Scripture. If you get this verse wrong, little else will make sense.

God’s preexistence and prominence as Creator and Ruler in Genesis 1 make it clear that God—not me, not you—is the center of the universe. God—not me, not you—is the main subject of the story of Scripture and, ultimately, of the story of the world. God has provided a proper order for everything. Just as he created the natural world and the moral life of humans, so he built into creation certain cultural norms. It is God who created human beings and the world in such a way that societies would develop marriages and families, art and science, scholarship and education, politics and economics, business and entrepreneurship, and sports and competitions. Each of these has a proper order which, if recognized, causes humans to flourish. Sadly, we attempt to usurp God’s design. Dutch Prime Minister Abraham Kuyper summed up God’s governance brilliantly when he said, “There is not a square inch in the whole domain of our human existence over which Christ, who is Sovereign over all, does not cry, ‘Mine!’”⁹ The story of creation rests on the governance of God.

The Lie of Human Autonomy

The elevation of God as the sovereign Creator confronts the cultural lie of human autonomy—that humans are somehow self-directed in this life and world. No, it’s the sovereign God, who has created all things and sustains all things, who also governs all things. He is at the forefront of creation. His dominance in the story of the earth’s beginning refutes the cultural lie that humanity is somehow self-governed.

Scripture reveals the Creator to have control over all creation. The Hebrew word “God” in Genesis 1:1 translates to *Elohim*, which speaks to God’s transcendent nature and universal majesty, while “in the beginning” conveys far more than a mere time frame. This is Elohim condescending to reveal his own eternal glory! Immediately, things get even more exciting—Elohim creates “the heavens and the earth” and sovereignly governs everything about them.

No word in the Hebrew exists that expresses the totality of all things, so Moses employs a Hebrew idiom. “The heavens and the earth” mean

everything one sees up above and all around. Despite that seemingly infinite quantity, nothing exists in the heavens above or the earth below over which God is not the sovereign Governor. This even includes nonphysical things like ideas, marriages, and emotions. All of creation is within the scope of God’s sovereign and governing hand.

Christians should be thankful man is not autonomous. As we’ve seen with the scientific confusion about the age of the universe, if our lives were in our own hands, we would have cause to despair against the onslaught of universal chaos and uncertainty. We might suffer and cry for 7, 14, 20, or even 26 billion years. Thanks be to God that our lives are in His hands!

The Lie of Human Self-Sufficiency

In addition to refuting the lie of human autonomy, God’s governance of creation also confronts the related cultural lie of human self-sufficiency. As is seen early in our story, recounted in Genesis 3, humans tried to claim their independence from God. From the Fall onward, we have often tried to exist as if we are not dependent on anything or anyone but ourselves.

But the opening lines of Scripture tell a different story. They tell us that God created the heavens and the earth *ex nihilo*—which means “out of nothing” in Latin. This means that God is dependent upon nothing, while everything, including humans, is dependent upon him. The formless “void” out of which God created the natural world was just that—empty nothingness (Genesis 1:2). That’s important to note, because if God created the heavens and the earth out of something, then God himself would be dependent on whatever that was. But he didn’t, and he’s not. That understanding is key to exposing the lie of human self-sufficiency.

The translators of the 1995 edition of the New American Standard Bible provide a clearer rendering of Genesis 1 than other versions. They translate Genesis 1:1–2 this way: “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was formless and void, and darkness was over the surface of the deep.” Some liberal scholars attempt to make the case that God created out of raw materials preexistent in the formless void—that he pulled together what was already there. The original Hebrew, however, makes it clear that the Earth was not already in existence in a formless shape before the Creator got

started. He actually created it out of nothing.

This may seem like nitpicking, but it is an important point. Follow this logic: if we believe that God's creation expressed in verse 2 indicates God used the formless void of Planet Earth—as if it were a clump of clay—and created the universe from it, then we no longer believe in creation *ex nihilo*. That's because the formless void of Planet Earth already existed, and if God used it, his creation wasn't "out of nothing." If we don't believe God created out of nothing, then we cannot believe that humans are utterly dependent upon God. Why not? Because God himself would be dependent on the preexistent, formless void called Earth.

Genesis 1:1–2 tells a different story: God created out of nothing, independent from everything but himself. Humans are thus wholly dependent on God and God alone.

Views of the Atheist

We see, then, that God is the sovereign Creator and Sustainer and Governor of all things. Chapters 1 and 2 of Genesis debunk the cultural lies that man is autonomous and self-sufficient.

It takes a great deal of faith to believe that God created *ex nihilo*, doesn't it? It takes an enormous amount of faith to believe the sovereign Creator of the universe spoke the world into existence simply through his life-giving Word.

But doesn't it require an even greater amount of faith to accept the view of the atheist? Try believing this: nothing created the heavens and the earth, but something that was never created sparked a big explosion of colliding gases that themselves were never created, which produced a spontaneous self-creation of materials that never previously existed because they too were never created. This mix then yielded a universe so complex that man remains unable to comprehend it fully. Holding on to these illogical claims must take enormous faith indeed.

Atheistic beliefs have real-world ramifications. A deeper look into a few views of the atheist reveals how those beliefs impact modern culture.

Much of the Western world was built upon the Judeo-Christian notion that human beings are created by God in his image. In 1859, however, Charles Darwin published *On the Origins of Species*. Darwin proposed that all species,

including humans, evolved through a purely accidental physical process called evolution. This turned the world upside down and is today enshrined as the only scientific theory on origins permitted in public education.

Darwinian Evolution has yielded a deadly harvest. Dr. Ernest Gordon, a World War II prisoner of war (who contributed to the building of the bridge rendered famous by *The Bridge on the River Kwai*), observed the bitter fruit of erasing the Christian worldview, including the Doctrine of Creation, from society:

During the late fifties, I was invited to address the senior class of an English department in a city high school. When I arrived at the school, I introduced myself to the assistant headmaster, whose office was at the entrance. He guided me to the appropriate lecture hall. Twenty years later, I was invited to the same school for the same purpose. I again presented myself to the same office, but it was no longer the habitat of an educator [of the assistant headmaster]. It was the command post of a police inspector. Corridors and classrooms were monitored by police officers who reported regularly to the inspector. The reasons for the change were obvious: violence, assault, rape, drug-induced madness. I interpret this scene as evidence of the end times of a civilization that had once benefited from the Christian worldview, one that exalted creation and people, and provided the ideals essential for an authentic education. I recognize that civilization does not create Christians. However, the community of faith created and still creates the civility that is evidence of civilization. That demoralized school is the tragic consequence of a society's rejection of the biblical world view that provided the intellectual dynamic of Western education. What is education but an expression of the prevailing culture?¹⁰

Dr. Gordon saw the results decades later, but when Charles Darwin proposed his theory of evolutionary origins, nobody could have known how it would eventually impact the world. *On the Origin of Species* caused a

sensation following its 1859 release. But in Darwin's 1871 book, *The Descent of Man*, he began to explore the implications of his theory and apply it to a wider range of subjects. It spawned a century-long craze to apply the ideas of natural selection and the evolutionary process to every facet of life. That craze came to be called "Social Darwinism."

Evolutionary thinking had cast aside the foundational tenet that human beings were made in the image of God. Earlier, America's Founders had rooted our rights in God's creation. Sadly, but unsurprisingly, those who rejected the biblical view of creation in favor of an evolutionary view quickly tossed aside the concept of human rights. Regarding *On the Origin of Species*, Karl Marx wrote to Frederick Engels, "This is the book that contains the foundation in natural history for our view."¹¹ That view was communism. Soon after, Adolph Hitler based his treatise *Mein Kampf* on evolutionary concepts.¹² The horrors of Nazi Germany were the fruit of a godless, secular view of human life.

Darwin's evolutionary views, adapted and modified by scientists who came after him, teach the process of natural selection: the fittest creatures learn best, survive, and propagate. The weaker creatures die to get out of the way, moving the process of evolution forward. In this evolutionary view of the world, death is but a mechanism for the advancement of the species. Today, society has reaped what it has sown: a ubiquitous culture of death.

The toll in human lives taken as a result of Darwin's theory is absolutely staggering. And very quickly, those human lives soon counted unborn babies among their number. In the United States, Margaret Sanger, who would go on to found Planned Parenthood, spoke of eliminating "human weeds" and wrote to a minister that "We do not want word to go out that we want to exterminate the Negro population."¹³ Of course, Planned Parenthood is now best known for its killing of the unborn (and more Black babies are aborted than babies of other races). The dark history of the Darwinian nature of the abortion movement is unfamiliar to many.

By now, Darwinian evolution has been our tutor for more than 150 years. The results are evident. Whether Darwin intended it or not, his theory has resulted in chronic violence, scores of pathologies, and millions of deaths. So, with all that natural selection behind us, has our species improved as advertised?

Evolution tells a grim story. But the biblical story of creation is both true and beautiful. It alone offers hope. This truth, when embraced in the public

square, leads to a flourishing society for all. The design of creation especially undergirds its hope, as we will see.

The Design of Creation

In Isaac Newton's magnum opus, *The Mathematical Principles of Natural Philosophy*, he observed the ordered nature of creation and drew this conclusion:

This most beautiful system of the sun, planets, and comets could only proceed from the counsel and dominion of an intelligent and powerful Being. . . . This Being governs all things, not as the soul of the world but as Lord over all; and on account of his dominion he is wont to be called Lord God.¹⁴

Newton observed the scientific data and concluded the design of creation, "this most beautiful system," and its orderly pattern point to a chief Designer, whom he called "Lord over all" and "Lord God." Like Newton, we cannot look at the specific design, patterns, and order of creation and not acknowledge a chief Designer.

Ironically, for centuries, scientists believed that the design of the earth demanded . . . a designer. Their conclusion was based on deductive reasoning, once a pillar of modern science.

Sadly, most people today would say that science and the Judeo-Christian faith are enemies. On the contrary, the Judeo-Christian worldview of creation provides the basis of modern science, but you're unlikely to hear that taught in school today. Indeed, some of the greatest thinkers through the ages have stood on the shoulders of Genesis, magnificently furthering science and innovation while believing in Jesus Christ. Copernicus, Kepler, Newton, Pascal, Leibniz, and Galileo are among the most prominent researchers who professed faith in Christ. All were unapologetically Christian and unmistakably scientists.¹⁵

Could these men have discovered such remarkable scientific truth had they operated outside of the Bible? It's interesting to consider the implications. For example, science would have been severely throttled by the Eastern religions, which don't even believe in a physical earth. It's hard to study the earth if it's not really there. Pagan, polytheistic religions might have pushed

back as well, given they attributed the story of creation to the gods battling in heaven. Even the fiction they embraced—wars in the heavens—was chaotic, not ordered.

The Goodness of Creation

We've seen that the Doctrine of Creation comprehends God's governance and design of creation. It's easy to overlook that it also bears his stamp of approval. His repeated proclamation throughout Genesis 1 is simple: "It was good." These decrees would have been paradigm-shattering for the ancients, who often perceived the material world as evil. For instance, many Greeks believed the physical was bad and that only the spiritual was good. But in the biblical account of creation, God declared each part good. No corruption or evil was present.

The world had never heard of the goodness of creation. But the people of God who were exposed to Moses's account in Genesis 1 couldn't miss it. Neither should Christians today. Throughout church history, we have believed that the physical is good, at least according to God's original design. We don't believe that the world is ultimately going to hell in a handbasket. In fact, we believe that God, instead of burning the created order up in flames one day, will refine the world with the Refiner's fire. He will eventually restore and redeem this world in the new creation.

The physical, bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ sent a signal that God cares about the spiritual *and* the physical realm. As a church, we imitate God's dual concern and engage both dominions. We engage modern culture for the glory of God and for the advancement of his kingdom. As we Christians confidently enter the current discussion about everything from climate change to fears regarding technology, let's remind the people with whom we engage that our God is a King who has not turned his back on the world. At creation, God pronounced his original design as good. We live in light of the promise that Jesus will once again come in glory to make this world right and restore it to its original goodness by his original design.

Worshipping the Creation

As mentioned earlier, humans have a history of forgetting the Bible's

answers to the two pressing questions "Where do I come from?" and "Who made me?" As a result, we turn the creation order upside down. We become so attracted to the beauty of what God created that we begin to worship the creation instead of the Creator. In other words, we fall into idolatry.

Why do we do this? What about creation is so alluring? The answer is found, yet again, in Genesis. Every part of creation enjoys one thing that you and I do not: the blessing of God. This is because man chose sin (Genesis 3:6–19). Therefore, every man, other than the God-man Jesus, is conceived and born in sin, as Paul explains in Romans 3:22–23. Every person thus deserves and receives the malediction of God, not his benediction.

The result is that people, even Christians at times, look at the beauty and goodness of creation and long for its goodness, yearning for its glory. We look at the mountains God created, and we crave God's benediction on them (Psalm 121:1). We look at a majestic eagle in flight, and we yearn to enjoy its blessing (Isaiah 40:31). We want to hear for ourselves what God pronounced: "It is good." But time and time again, our longing for blessing on ourselves leads us to worship what God has *called* "good" instead of the God who *made* it good.

Throughout history, humans have often fallen victim to the temptation to worship the wrong thing. The Egyptians worshipped the Pharaoh, the Romans the emperors, and the Greeks the earth, establishing the concept of "Mother Nature."¹⁶ It's no wonder Old Testament Jews crafted the image of a golden calf or set up altars to Asherah.¹⁷ Modern idolatry can be seen in radical environmentalism, extreme animal rights, gender confusion, sexual perversion, and materialism. This is all a result of our inner longing to worship what is true, good, and beautiful but failing to direct that worship to the Creator of all things. Humans have a long history of settling for the counterfeit instead of the real thing.

From Malediction to Benediction

What can restore us to God's blessing instead of his curse? Only Jesus was born with God's blessing after Adam and Eve's sin. As the Son of God began his ministry, he was baptized in the Jordan River. As he came up from the water, God spoke an audible blessing: "This is my beloved Son, with whom

I am well pleased” (Matthew 3:17). It was Jesus Christ himself, the new and better Adam (1 Corinthians 15:45), who received the blessing of God, the good Word of his Father. He received the benediction we crave.

The good news does not end there. On the cross, Jesus Christ took on our curse so that by faith alone people like you and me can receive God's blessing. Darkness fell upon Jesus as he hung on the cross so that the light of the gospel would fall upon all those who believe. Don't miss the dependency by the “genesis” of salvation at Calvary on the creation of the universe in Genesis 1. At the beginning of time, God separated light from darkness; on the cross, he separated the darkness of our sin from the light of his gospel.

In John 1:14 we read, “The Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.” The Word brings light to our dark souls. Through Jesus Christ alone we get the satisfaction, the soul fulfillment, the blessing we long for. We hear the words of our Father: “You are blessed. You are good.” We hear it not because of our goodness but solely based on the goodness of Jesus Christ.

If you fear that the point has been stretched too far, look at what the apostle Paul revealed: “For God, who said, ‘Let light shine out of darkness,’ has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ” (2 Corinthians 4:6).

Our redemption was foreshadowed at creation.

Creation Reveals Redemption

We see, then, that the opening lines of Genesis 1 reveal more than the story of creation; they reveal the story of our redemption too. Just as the light shone into the darkness at creation, the light of God's Word through the person of Jesus Christ shines into the darkness of our souls. Without Christ, we were formless. We were void, dark, and empty. But the light of God's gospel appeared and made us new, recreating us and bringing us from death to life. The gospel makes it possible for us to be born again and never again be empty. Jesus emptied himself of his glory (Philippians 2:6–8) so that we could forever partake of the glory of God the Father through the person and work of his Son.

What does the Doctrine of Creation have to do with me? If the Doctrine

of Creation is true, if God is Creator and Sustainer and Redeemer, then you are part of God's intentional design. Understanding that God made you by design means your life will never be the same. You will have hope beyond all hope. Being created by design, then redeemed by the sacrifice of Jesus, you obtain meaning and purpose that will exceed your imagination.

If the Doctrine of Creation *isn't* true, if God did not create the heavens and the earth, then whether you know it or not, you will live like a god unto yourself. Humanists UK, the organization that sponsored the Atheist Bus Campaign and that proudly calls Richard Dawkins a patron, rejects the Doctrine of Creation. Their mission statement reads, in part:

Humanists are people who shape their own lives in the here and now because we believe it's the only life we have. We make sense of the world through logic, reason, and evidence, and always seek to treat those around us with warmth, understanding, and respect. . . . We work to bring non-religious people together to develop their own views and an understanding of the world around them.¹⁸

If Humanists UK is correct and the Doctrine of Creation is more an invention by people of faith than a statement of fact, you may wish to shape your own life “in the here and now” because “it's the only life” you have.¹⁹ Living in this world among other self-autonomous individuals who generate their own version of hope, meaning, purpose, and order would be a life with no foundation. Certainly there would be no point in praying, because if God is not both Creator and Redeemer, he is no longer almighty and no longer God.

But if the Doctrine of Creation holds water, then it delivers the hope of redemption in Jesus—a real and enduring type of hope that gets us out of bed every morning and motivates us to care for our lost and dying world. The God who created the heavens and the earth according to his design is the same God who created you in his image. Because of that, the believer has hope that when Jesus Christ stepped into creation, emptied himself, and experienced darkness on the cross, he opened up the means to God's blessing.

We can and should give the world this good news—it will satisfy the emptiness of their souls. There is nothing else that can do that. In a world in

which so many are struggling, the Doctrine of Creation provides meaning, purpose, and hope.

That's why embracing the Doctrine of Creation makes us want to run to Jesus, the Creator, the Sustainer, and the Redeemer of all things. Knowing who made you, to whom you belong, and from where you came combine to make all the difference in the world. May we treasure the glorious news of the Doctrine of Creation and the good news that "in the beginning God created the heavens and the earth."

PRAYER

Our Father, your Word proclaims the truth that "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." May this life-transforming truth guide us in our dark world. We marvel that the same God who said "Let there be light" also sent Jesus to be the Light of the world.

Thank you, Jesus, for shining into our dark souls and bringing about re-creation for us. I pray for those who do not have this hope—those who have believed the cultural lie of human autonomy and who have gone through life believing they are an evolved version of random selection. Give them the understanding to accept your blessing of redemption and re-creation through the confession of Jesus as Savior.

It is in Christ's name we pray. Amen.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. In your own words, answer the two pressing questions "Where did we come from?" and "Who made us?"
2. Why does it matter that God created us versus the theory that we are a product of Darwin's evolutionary model?

3. Read the Westminster Confession (the Doctrine of Creation) excerpt in this chapter. What part or parts grab your attention? What phrases bring fresh consideration to your thinking?
4. Isaac Newton wrote, "This Being governs all things, not as the soul of the world but as Lord over all; and on account of his dominion he is wont to be called Lord God." List some of the specific areas of your life that constitute "all." Are there areas in which you are resisting acknowledging that God is Lord?

The gospel, if believed, separates the darkness of your sin from the light of Jesus' forgiveness. Why does this truth matter? How does it make you view yourself differently from before you believed? What does it say about God?