

STUDY 4

Creation and Worship

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There are many passages that indicate the whole of the creation exists to bring glory to God, i.e. to worship and serve him. While the role of humanity—as we will see—is crucial for the worship of creation to attain its goal, there are plenty of indications that creation itself (in its entirety) is built for worship. Some examples of this can be seen in the passages that portray creation exalting in the glory of God (e.g. Ps. 19:1ff.; 96; 98:7ff.; Isa. 35:1ff.; 44:23; 55:12–13); while in the Book of the Revelation, the central scene of the throne room in Heaven (Rev. 4–5) shows worship resonating out from the centre, gathering up all of the elements of creation, and returning in a powerful crescendo to God. The creation is seen to be at its pitch in the worship of God.

It is clear that the creation is neither freestanding nor self-serving. The whole of the created universe (both sentient and non-sentient elements) hinges on the word of God for its continued existence, and such existence is not simply that it should ‘exist’. It has a goal, and God is the sovereign ruler of the creation, to bring it to its *telos*.

The *telos* is the subject of other papers, but put simply we can (I trust) agree that all things will be summed up in the Son, all enemies will be finally subdued, and we with unveiled face will behold the glory of God. Every element of the creation will be freed from its slavery to corruption and decay, rising to full fecundity, with such fruitfulness secured eternally. All elements of the creation will cry, ‘Glory!’, as the earth will be filled with *knowledge* of the glory of God, as the waters cover the sea (Hab. 2:14; cf. 2 Cor. 4:6). Nothing unclean will enter, and no hurtful or evil thing will ever again disturb the holy sanctuary. It will be the *telos* of worship, pure and undefiled.

From Romans 8 we know that this final goal is related to the glorification of redeemed humanity. The liberty of the creation is inseparable from the liberty of the glory of the sons of God. The current state of the creation is one of groaning and travail, matching the groaning and travail of the sons of God, as we wait for the redemption of our bodies, the final consummation of our adoption. This is not a ‘cooling of our heels’ time until the real action begins! It is important to see that the current action of God is that of temple building, with the whole redeemed community becoming the dwelling place of the Spirit (Eph. 2:19–22). Thus the *telos* is not an aggregate of individuals but a divine community, fully indwelling God as he fully indwells them, each fully members of the other as all are fully members of him in and through the Son. The whole community will be conformed to the image of the Son *as a community*, in all its relations and acts. In this way, then, the life and action of the community will be one

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with the life and action of the Son, so that the *telos* is an active and ongoing participation in the works of the Son, which the Father has prepared for us to walk in.

Implicit in this picture of the *telos* is the fact that creation has been formed to bring glory to God by serving him, being the arena for the display of his holy nature and character. However, this could never be without reference to Adam, who has been made (from the *adama*) in the image and likeness of God to rule over the creation. The creation displays the glory to Man, and Man—as the image and likeness of God—displays the glory of him to creation, not least to its sentient elements. It would seem that God has tailored the worship of the sentient elements of creation for humanity to lead. The angelic host serve the heirs of salvation, and they (the heirs) will rule over them (1 Cor. 6:3; cf. Rev. 1:6; 5:10; 20:6; 22:3–5), though clearly under the authority of the throne of God and the Lamb. This was so for the Last Adam, and will be so for the redeemed community who will be conformed to his image.

We know from Romans 1:18–32 that the revelation God brings to us through the creation is neither received nor understood by fallen humanity, which suppresses the truth of God in deeds of unrighteousness. In particular, in this passage we see that our suppression of the truth consists in our exchange of worship. In that exchange, the creation itself is led into bondage and we, as the pinnacle of creation, neither hear its message of glory, nor convey the truth of the glory of God to it. In worshipping the creature rather than the creator, we lose our dignity and creation's purpose is upended. It is forced to become (for us) an end in itself, which is something that it could never be. No matter how much we consume from (or of!) the creation we are never satiated, since our fullness was never meant to be from it, but in the one who made all things. Indeed, he gives joy in the midst of our feasting (e.g. Acts 14:17), but we misconstrue this to believe that the joy comes from the harvest itself.

If we add to these observations the facts that Jesus (as the Last Adam) has fulfilled the mandate given to the first Adam; and that through him the whole of the creation (including redeemed humanity) exists to the praise of the glory of the Father's grace; and that the *telos* for the Father's adopted family is that they will be conformed to the image of the Son; then we can see that the creation must be *led* in its worship. It is neither freestanding nor self-perfecting.

This is, in fact, what the Son does. He leads the whole of creation in worship, and this is first and foremost in redeeming a kingdom of priests to God. We, who by grace are destined to be glorified as 'God's peer community' in the Son (to use Geoffrey Bingham's phrase), will come to our full goal in him, to the glory of God the Father and to the total experience of our being his blessed family. As part of the creation, we are led to worship in the Son; and we, as the completed image of God in him, will participate in leading the creation in its worship in the Son, to the Father, by the Spirit.

This all leads us to the place where we take up more directly the theme of the previous session. What does it mean for Adam to lead creation in worship? If we allow that the tabernacle and temple were images of the Edenic sanctuary (which itself was in the image of the heavenly—see Heb. 8:5), one of the elements inherent in this description is that these (the central worship sanctuaries) were the places where the will of God was to be done in every detail. Israelite worship was prescribed, with the whole cultus itself and the wider culture of the nation (e.g. as we see it associated with the sabbaths and the pilgrimage feasts) being *given* to Israel by God. The places of worship

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were to be the places where *his* will was done. This, of course, provided a stark contrast with the worship on the high places! The priests, then, were to lead the cultus and watch over the practice and life of the temple, so that the Lord's name would be honoured by his word being kept. (This, of course, has implications for our understanding of Jesus as both the cleanser of the temple and the builder of a new temple, with a new priesthood, over which he presides as the Great High Priest.)

We would be awry in construing the image and likeness of God in reductionist terms, but it is clear that at least one element of the image is the capacity to rule. This may be seen, for example, in the proximity of the concepts in Genesis 1:26 and in the distinctive nature of the command (word) addressed to Man in 1:28. In addition, we find the idea supported in Hebrews' exegesis of Psalm 8 (in Heb. 2), especially when linked to the statements about the Son in Hebrews 1:1–4. Naturally, this ruling could not be anything other than the reign and rule of love, since God is love and this is the nature of the kingdom.

It goes without saying that the mandate given to Man could not be fulfilled without the empowering presence of God (i.e. his blessing). God created Adam in order that Adam might be filled with the Spirit. Not only is this evident in the order of the creation accounts, but the Last Adam makes this inescapably clear in his own incarnation, life and ministry, death and resurrection; all of which he accomplished by the power of the Spirit. However, as the Ascended Adam, he also *pours out* the Spirit on his people, so that the nations may receive the promise made to Abraham, by faith. The church is thus the Spirit-engifted, royal and priestly community. In receiving the Spirit, the church receives the blessing of God, such blessing being his own presence, with his face (*panim*) shining on us, and with his presence thus accompanying us, as we are baptised by the Spirit into the Son.

Adam's priestly role lies in his being the apex of the creation and so being the completion (in and through the Last Adam) of the whole unified structure. The command to fill the earth and subdue it originally contained no suggestion of rebellious creation, but rather the extension of the boundaries of Eden. In extending the boundaries of the sanctuary to the ends of the earth, and in filling that extended sanctuary, the nations in Adam (Acts 17:22–28; cf. Deut. 32:8) were to be worshipping communities (so Matt. 28:18–20; Rev. 22:1ff.). This ties in with a later study, where the apostolic ministry of the gospel is spoken of in terms of worship, as the nations are brought to the obedience of faith. In proclaiming the gospel we are participating in the establishment of worshipping nations, who will live eternally to the praise of the glory of his grace. The unity of the nations redeemed in the Son stands in contrast to the false unity of the nations in their rebellion (as seen, for example, in Gen. 11:1–9). Such rebellious action is disarmed by the power of the Cross, through which God will unite all things to himself.