

Creation

Genesis 1:1, "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth."

Question: How can humans live in better balance with creation?

Key Verses: John 1:1-3; Colossians 1:15-17; Hebrews 11:3

The beginning is always a good place to start. If we are going to wrap our hands around the Bible and our minds around God, we can't ignore creation. Let's be clear. We will never fully comprehend the thoughts of God from his Word. Nor will we ever fully grasp the nature of an infinite Creator. Our goal is more modest. We want to understand our own place in His creation and our purpose in his plan. That is not only attainable it is responsible. As God honoring Christ followers we intend to know Him, to obey him, and to promote him in this world. To that end, let's start where the bible begins.

"In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." Simple enough. We get it. God made stuff. In fact, all the stuff we see, smell, touch, and experience, came from God. Yet it is clear that humanity has lost touch with the creator and consequently has had an awkward alliance with creation. We love creation but are uncomfortable and somewhat out of place in creation. We are clearly out of alignment with our world because we are out of alignment with our God. To move toward realignment with both God and his creation we need to understand a minimum of two things: (1) Who is this God who created this world? (2) Why did God create this world?

Who is this God Who Created this world?

Every artist has his fingerprints in his work. This principle is true for all of us whether we are carpenters, musicians, architects, teachers, painters, or entrepreneurs. Knowing the creation gives a glimpse into the nature of the creator. We expect to see the same with God's handiwork and we do. Specifically, God is triune, that is, God is one God who we encounter through three manifestations (or personalities if you like): Father, Son, and Spirit. For millennia Christians have labeled this concept "The Trinity." And though the clearest expressions of God's triune nature are found in the later revelation of the New Testament, all three members of the Trinity peak from behind the lines of Genesis 1:1-3.

Obviously, God the Father was the architect. His divine design is expressed in the opening phrase of the Bible "God created." Though this sounds simple, it is an earth-shattering declaration, decisively different than anything on offer in ancient religions. Most other religions have some explanation of the origin of the cosmos. Some sound similar to Genesis. For example, the Babylonian clay tablets from 7th century B.C. tell the story of Enûma Eliš, a creation account similar to Scripture. It opens with these words: "When the sky above was not named and the earth beneath did not yet bear a name, and the primeval Apsû, who begat them, and chaos, Tiamat, the mother of them both. Their waters were mingled together, and no field was formed, no marsh was to be seen when of the gods none had been called into being." The mention of a primal god, chaotic waters, and ordering of the elements strike a similar chord with the biblical account. This is true for a handful of other ancient creation stories.

Nevertheless, one thing that sets the Genesis account apart is that *God created the elements out of nothing*. Every other story assumes that matter is eternal. The Bible asserts that

only God is eternal. The consequence is that creation is an extension of God rather than god(s) being a part of the creation. This brackets out beliefs like Hindu pantheism and Greek mythologies which see gods in inanimate objects like wind and waves or deify animals and mythological creatures. It also brackets out Darwinian evolution that portrays matter as eternal and often winds up elevating the creation over the creator.

The Jewish concept of creation, later absorbed by Christians and Muslims, portrays God as separate, apart, and above his creation. Thus, it implies that the Creator God cares for the creation he himself wrought and nurtures. He loves his creation and continues to care for, work with, and hold account the humans he made to partner with him the world. This is an extraordinary view of this pale blue planet. When we ignore God the Father, the architect of creation, the consequence is two-fold—exaltation and degradation. This is true for both humans and animals. When God the creator is exiled from the equation, human beings exalt themselves as gods even while degrading themselves with baser animal instincts. They arrogate to themselves life and death decisions all the while living like animals when satisfying hedonistic desires. The same holds true for animals in an evolutionary or pagan worldview. Some animals are treated like humans while others are abused or obliterated by human progress. In practical terms, it is essential that the biblical view of creation holds influences society if we are to live in alignment as stewards of God's good earth.

The idea that God, the Father, created the earth is common core among the monotheistic religions of Judaism, Islam, and Christianity. However, there is another element added by Christians absent from the other perspectives--the Spirit as engineer. Genesis 1:2, "Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters." The word "hovering" expresses a vibration or quaking. This is an ADHD energy that seeks to bring order to the chaos. It is similar to a mother thirty minutes prior to dinner guests arriving. The Spirit is intensely intent on ordering the creation of the Father so that it is a nurturing and life-giving environment. This concept shoots through a handful of passages describing the Holy Spirit's ongoing creational care. Here are a couple to illustrate the point. Genesis 2:7 "Then the Lord God formed a man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being." The Hebrew word for "breath" is Spirit. God the Spirit was the animating force when man was made from the dust. This is equally true of the animal kingdoms. Psalm 104:30 "When you send your Spirit, they are created, and you renew the face of the ground." Every animal that has breath is sustained by the Spirit. God the Father created; God the Spirit creates. The Spirit is intimately involved in the very fabric of our earthly environment. He is the ongoing force of God which gives life, breath, and sustaining energy.

When the role of the Spirit is ignored, we tend to view the world through processes rather than relationships. We treat the earth as mechanical rather than seeing the creation as a means of connecting with God through the Spirit. We miss God in the thunder storm and wind, the bloom of a flower or the majesty of the Rockies. Our environmental insensitivities betray our ignorance of the Spirit's love for and ongoing presence in the molecular level and biological life of the world all around us. We wind up reducing worship to a building on Sunday rather than expanding it to the World through the expanse of our decades with each moment we draw breath. This results in a society that exchanges the love of the Spirit for the law of the jungle.

So if God the Father is architect and God the Spirit the engineer, then God the Son is responsible for the construction. He did the heavy lifting, so to speak, during the creation of the earth. This is seen in Genesis 1:3 “God said, ‘Let there be light,’ and there was light.” If we lay that alongside John 1:1-3 we see the mechanics of creation: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made.” The Word, we learn in verse 14, is Jesus before he came to earth in the flesh—the pre-incarnate Christ. Before he was Messiah, he was fully God, the embodiment, as it were, of God’s spoken word. When God gave the command, Jesus as the Word turned the command into a creation. The Apostle Paul affirms this idea in Colossians 1:15–17, “The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together.” Or again, Hebrews 11:3 “By faith we understand that the universe was formed at God’s command, so that what is seen was not made out of what was visible.”

Finally, when we ignore the role of Jesus in creation before his incarnation, we spiritualize salvation rather than embody it incarnationally. In other words, we relegate his salvation to a disembodied future rather than a life-transforming eternal life in our present daily experience. Consequently, evangelism becomes a philosophical argument about a disembodied soul rather than a creational care of an embodied spirit. The church focuses on Missions rather than our mission to make Jesus famous in our current context.

So there you have it, the Trinity embedded in the first three verses of Genesis. God is the architect, the Spirit is the engineer, and Jesus the builder. All three contribute in unique but interdependent ways. If any of these are ignored we run the risk of misalignment with creation as well as our fellow human beings created in God’s image.

Why God created

A second major question coming out of Genesis 1:1 is this: Why did God create the world? Some have speculated that God was lonely. He wanted company so he invented this scheme called humanity. That’s impossible to prove and pretty hard to swallow. God had angels in abundance. They could communicate, sing, perform, and do who knows how many things to entertain, serve, and otherwise occupy God. Furthermore, this Trinitarian view of God’s creation betrays a fatal flaw in this theory—God had himself. Our God is a community in himself. The Father, Son, and Spirit can love, communicate, experience, respect, and enjoy each other in their diversified unity. Don’t think about that too long it will mess with you brain. Nonetheless, what we see clearly in the Bible is the robust relationship of the Father and Son, the dynamic interdependence of the Son and Spirit, and the frenetic activity shared by the Spirit and the Father. There is absolutely nothing lacking in God’s own person that required him to augment himself with an external creation.

The answer to this question “Why God created?” is not hard. We need to look no further than Psalm 102:18, “Let this be written for a future generation, that a people not yet created may praise the Lord.” Every generation that God created from our primal parents in Eden to our own unborn children has a singular divine purpose--to bring God glory. This shouldn’t come as such a shock. The fingerprints of God in our own souls drive us in the same direction. Why do we dress fashionably? To look good. Why do we decorate our homes? To

impress company. Why do we present a gourmet meal with such panache? To hear oohs and aahs. Why do we build fast cars, sky scrapers, oil on canvas, or symphonies? Is it not our internal impulse to create for other's pleasure and our own praise? Every masterpiece praises the artist. Every film extols the director. Every invention honors its genius. So too with God. He creates out of impulse. The creation impulsively praises its creator. It is the natural progression: Creative genius, delightful creation, impulsive praise.

When we look at our own genetic complexity we are naturally awestruck. The fingerprints of an infant, the visual stimulus of the eye, the electrical synapses of the brain—our bodies are works of art. From Olympic spectacles to ballet, from the NBA to National Geographic, we are dumbstruck with God's handiwork. The Psalmist expressed it well: "For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb" (Psalm 139:13). Every sonogram and sunset, every sculpture and sonnet are promptings to praise a God with wide-eyed wonder. Even inanimate objects like mountains and rivers, stars and rainbows, without a spoken word, acclaim their creator (Psa 89:12; 148:5-10; cf. Eccl 12:1; Isa 43:7; Rev 4:11). This is why creation is God's primary apologetic (Rom 1:20, 25). By seeing his fingerprints in the world we are drawn to his portrait in the Word—his own son, Jesus Christ.

Let's be clear. We're not talking about an inanimate acclamation. Creation itself draws us to the creator himself. Just as the sun, moon, and stars praise God by doing what they were designed to do, so too the human species offers our highest praise not through verbal declarations but by alignment with our design. We were made to manage the works of God along with God. Ephesians 2:10, "For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do." Humans are at their best when they align with their created purpose as the pinnacle of God's creation to protect, promote, and enjoy the world in which we live. This is an amazing truth. What makes it more amazing and what raises the stakes is that God, through the incarnation of Jesus and the ongoing integration of the Spirit in this cosmos, intends to be a hands-on ruler not a distant despot. God is personally and perpetually involved in creating and recreating his masterwork of this world.

Key Points:

- When God is ignored in creation, you wind up with an atheistic world view that deifies humans (who make life and death decisions) and humanize animals.
- When the Spirit is ignored in creation, you wind up with a pantheistic world view that either deifies creation OR (paradoxically) abuses the environment as solely materialistic.
- When Jesus is ignored in creation, salvation is removed from the present and tangible and eternal life is reduced to a future disembodied state.

Action Step: Look at your current news feed and identify one of the worldviews mentioned above.

Further Resources: Gonzalez and Richards, [*The Privileged Planet*](#), 2004.

Addendum: What God did to restore a fallen creation

The story of the fall looms large in Scripture. Genesis 3 describes that pregnant moment in the garden when Eve was seduced by the Serpent to taste the forbidden fruit. That moment of indiscretion gave birth to a cascade of consequences. In the very next chapter Cain killed his brother Abel, introducing murder to the world. The human species began to spin out of control exercising a fallen free-will. By Genesis 6:7, the LORD said, “I will wipe from the face of the earth the human race I have created—and with them the animals, the birds and the creatures that move along the ground—*for I regret that I have made them.*” It was not that God’s plan was flawed. It was not that he wouldn’t do it again. None of this took him by surprise. Nonetheless, it did take his breath away. He was distraught over the condition of the creation he so cherished. This leads into the story of the Flood (Gen 6-8) when God hit “reset” on the world, knowing that it was round two not a permanent fix. As the first couple fell in the garden, so Noah’s family failed after the flood, so too Abraham’s nation rebelled. Notice, the plan of God all along was to take a fallen creation back. He began with a couple, then a family, on to a nation, and now his mercy extends to all the earth—every tongue, tribe, and nation.

Eventually, through his son, Jesus, he would recreate the human spirit by renewing it with his own Spirit. King David pleaded for that when crushed by the weight of his own sin. He sang, “Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me” (Psalm 51:10). The sacrifices David made in the tabernacle were temporary fixes for a broken spirit. The permanent solution, however, was not the lamb offered to God but the Lamb God offered to men. Through the blood of Jesus Christ, our spirits can be renovated—recreated. “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!” (2 Cor 5:17, see also Gal 6:15; Eph 4:24; Col 3:10). It is not a quick fix; it is not an easy solution; it is permanent transformation back to God’s creational intent. This is the Gospel message and the dominant preaching of the church for two-thousand years. However, it is not the whole story.

The fall of Genesis 3 marred more than the human spirit. The curse imposed on Adam and Eve affected all of creation—plants, animals, air, and water. The Apostle Paul expressed it like this:

For the creation waits in eager expectation for the children of God to be revealed. For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption to sonship, the redemption of our bodies. (Romans 8:19–23)

Environmental catastrophe of all manner are direct consequences of the fall. Human sin bleeds the environment through materialism, gluttony, greed, selfishness, cruelty, etc. Thousands of examples could be employed for this point but here are a few. People tend to litter other’s property not their own. When we see the earth as a garden we manage for God’s glory, trashing even a meter of it is unthinkable. Toxic waste poured into a river is a result of consumerism that replaces worship of the creator with the idolatry of covetousness. Pillaging of rain-forests for profitable crops rather than exploring them for undiscovered medicines betrays

a lustful neglect of God's genius embedded in our environments at the molecular level. More could be said but the point stands firmly: Our creational theology has environmental impact.

However, we must be clear. The Gospel of Jesus is not environmentalism. Jesus came to save souls not shrubs. His blood covers our transgressions and renews the spirit in us without removing the curse of Eden from us. Christian women still have pain in childbirth. Christian men still have thorns and thistles in their yard. We all still earn a living by the sweat of our brow. Nonetheless, the saving message of Jesus Christ is serviceable to the physical creation. How? When human beings get realigned with God they get realigned with the world. People who understand their divine role as guardian of the garden, treat pets with respect for what they offer, without exalting them to the role of human companionship. Humans who understand their position protect endangered species without endangering humanity. To be specific, a Christian should never kill a rattlesnake or wolf for sport nor would they let one live that endangered a child. A Spirit-filled follower of God would naturally choose to respect the environment out of respect for the Spirit who sustains it. Without oversimplifying some complex environmental issues we want to make the main point clear—God put us in charge of the earthly environment and we've done a pretty poor job treating it with the same respect we would a classic car our earthly father might loan to us. We've driven our world too fast, over bad terrain, without proper maintenance, cleaning, or repairs.

Granted, God's promises to create a new heaven, earth, Jerusalem (Isa 65:17-18; Rev 21:1-4). This current environment will be revamped according to his specifications. That does not, however, give us license to abuse the current environment. That would be tantamount to saying that Grandma is going to die soon anyway so it doesn't matter if I feed her, clothe her, or pilfer from her purse. That's nonsense. While we are in this world our stewardship requires that we care for creation in concert and connection with the Spirit of God who abides in the elemental details of our world. As we treat the air, water, and animals with respect, we learn to love the things the Spirit loves in tangible and practical ways. Our creational care connects us to the Creator Spirit.