

ALL THINGS

Part 1

*“And we know that all things work together for good
to them that love God, to them who are the called
according to His purpose” (Romans 8:28).*

By John David Clark, Sr.

CHAPTER TWO



THE CREATOR



“He left not himself without witness, in that he did good, and gave us rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with gladness” (Acts 14:17).

The Goodness of God

An astute and witty observer of life has speculated that the last reality which a fish would discover would be water. A fish could easily notice the water plants swaying with the currents. Other fish gliding around him, obviously, he would see. Sol's bright light and the dark floor beneath him, the fish would easily perceive. Even garbage, carelessly tossed into the fish's home would attract his attention. But that unseen, life-sustaining, life-enveloping substance surrounding him, that absolute necessity for his very existence - water - a fish might well never discover at all.

Of course, this is a parable concerning mankind. For in a sense which is not far from literal, we all do swim out our lives in the pervasive, sustaining, enveloping goodness of God. To the philosophers of Athens, Paul said of God:

“ . . . he giveth to all life, and breath, and all things

. . . That they should seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after him, and find him, though he be not far from any of us: For in him we live, and move and have our being. . . ” (Acts 17:25b, 27-28).

As with the fish, the mundane realities of our world hardly escape our notice. Other people and the concerns of daily living demand much of our attention. Human garbage, literal and figurative, is commonly and easily seen. But that upon which our very life rests, that "first cause", that elementary reason for our being - the goodness of God - is often among the last things realized or appreciated by men. Some, alas, never discover it at all.

Nevertheless, it is only of God's goodness that life on earth continues. It is God "*who giveth rain unto the earth, and sendeth waters upon the fields*" (Job 5:10). It is God who "*maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good*" (Mt. 5:45).

“He causeth the grass to grow for the cattle, and herb for the service of man: that he may bring forth food out of the earth; And wine that maketh glad the heart of man, and oil to make his face to shine, and bread which strengtheneth man's heart. . . ” (Ps. 104:14-17).

How true are David's words:

“The earth is full of goodness of the Lord” (Ps. 33:5).

Because God Is Good

If mankind merely evolved, if our existence is the result of pure chance, then we do not live because God chose for us to live. If mankind is simply another plateau of an ongoing evolutionary process, then God is just as pleased that we not be, is just as pleased as some other specimen of evolutionary impulse exist in our stead. There is not in that case any bond of love between God and man. It is said that in the evolutionary scheme, the odds against our coming to exist are virtually incalculable. Certainly, anyone who could, and then would have stacked the odds against us to that degree could not have been eager for us to live, could not have dearly loved and provided for our kind.

But God did create us. And He created us *only because He desired to create us*. It is of immense spiritual value for us to appreciate that. In creating us, God was coerced by nothing. He had nothing suggested to Him, was advised by no one as to how or to what extent creation was to be accomplished.

“Whatsoever the Lord pleased, that did he in heaven, and in earth, in the seas, and all deep places” (Ps. 135:6).

We human beings did not have to be. There were no laws of physics which demanded our formation. *We exist only because God wanted us*. Out of the endless possibilities available to his mind, God chose for us to be. Of His own heart, He conceived the idea of man and then made a conscious choice that man should live. We are creatures of His design, our contours fashioned by His hand. And grace upon grace, He was pleased to bestow upon man the sacred honor of being created in His own image. Man has dignity and wisdom and dominion in the earth because it pleased God to give it to him. We are man only because God is good.

On Purpose

It is compellingly clear that God created what He wanted to create, no less and no more. On the seventh day, He did not scan with remorse His completed creation, ruefully wishing He had done something better or differently. Quite the opposite is true. As the sun lowered upon the sixth and final day of creation, God paused to look,

“And God saw everything that he had made, and, behold, it was very good” (Gen. 1:31).

In accordance with this, we must acknowledge that when God created man, He created man the way He wanted man to be. It pleased Creator to make man healthy and sinless and to give him dominion on earth. It was His heart's desire that man should be greatly and continually blessed. There is comfort available to us in the knowledge that God created man well and happy *on purpose*.

The men of greatest faith believed that the goodness of God - His mercy, His justice, His compassion, etc. - were as certain as life, for life itself was irrefutable proof of it. In whatever evil circumstance they found themselves, they could not surrender hope, for they had committed their lives into the mighty hands of their unchanging Creator, believing that His will, as it was in the beginning, is that men should be happy, healthy, and pure.

The Power Of God

As creation itself is the surest and most constant witness of the Creator's goodness, so it is with His terrible power. That God *wanted* to create is one thing, but that God *could* create what he wanted is altogether another. To believe in God as Creator is to believe in a good God of incalculable power and authority. So awesome is His creative power, that God cannot lie. It is a power so terrible that whatever God says, is. Even the breath that proceeds from His lips performs deeds.

“And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul” (Gen. 2:7).

“By the word of the Lord were the heavens made; and all the host of them by the breath of his mouth...Let all the earth fear the Lord: let the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of him. For he spake, and it was done; he commanded, and it stood fast” (Ps. 33:6-9).

The magnificent implications of this truth are being decreasingly appreciated by the body of Christ because (1) the doctrine of creation is increasingly allegorized or neglected and (2) we confuse ourselves by applying the term "creative" or "creator" to men. Biblically, to speak very strictly, it is idolatrous to believe that man or any other created being can create anything. Man can invent. Man can rearrange particles of what God has created. But there is only one Creator, and there is none other even remotely like Him. Any being who can lie cannot create.

No Other Source

King David's reflection upon the power of the Creator which was demonstrated in His creation inevitably led him to marvel at God's providence for men. Of particular interest was God's delegation of power to the beings which He had created.

“When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars, which thou has ordained; What is man, that thou art mindful of him? And the son of man, that thou visitest him? For thou has made him a little lower than the angels, and hast crowned him with glory and honor. Thou madest him to have dominion over the works of thy hands; thou has put all things under his feet” (Ps. 8:3-6).

As David observed, man's dominion on earth was graciously granted by God. The great King Nebuchadnezzar was given the mind of an animal and for 7 years ate grass with cattle in the fields until he learned, in Daniel's words,

“. . .that the Most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever HE will” (Dan. 4:25).

But concerning dominion and the delegating of authority by God, there is much more to be considered than governments of men. For just as certainly as *man* would be powerless on earth had God not given him power, the same may be said of *every other creature in every other realm*. Whether earthly power, heavenly power, or powers of spiritual darkness, all life and all power exists only by the will of the Creator. There is no other source.

Every physical or spiritual strength of man, of nature, of fallen or faithful angels, even the power of Jesus Christ himself, *all power*, all authority, all strength, is subservient to God's power. No person, beast, or spirit has any power of its own or has received power ultimately from any other source than God. It came from God. It is a gift of God. And all creatures, great and small, carnal and spiritual, owe him all fear and thanksgiving for it. To fail to pay that debt is sin.

To Bless Or To Curse

Numerous gods with various fabricated personalities were worshiped and feared in the ancient world. Not just the way of isolated barbarians, polytheism dominated the entire ancient history of man. The learned and the ignorant, the noble and the base, governors and the governed - virtually all men in all nations - were immersed in this kind of spiritual darkness. The dying request of Socrates, an intellectual giant among men, was that an offering be made to the gods for his sick friend, Plato. The businesses associated with idolatry were both prosperous and secure (cp. Acts 19:23f). Among the most famous buildings on earth in those days were temples dedicated to particularly revered gods, such as the brilliantly sculptured Parthenon in Athens.

But the idolatry of the ancient world did not actually lie in the erecting of idols or temples or even in the performing of worship rituals for those other imagined deities. Those things were only the outward expressions of idolatry, for idolatry is a spiritual disease. The real idolatry, the real disease, lay in fearing that those gods had power, that they, like God, could do whatsoever pleased them, that they, like God, could determine and effect changes in the circumstances of the universe, that they, like God, could bless or curse whom they would. In short, the real spiritual disease of idolatry is believing that there exists another like the Creator. Pleaded Jeremiah concerning other gods:

“Be not afraid of them; for they cannot do evil; neither also is it in them to do good” (Jer. 10:5).

The revelation of God as Creator overcame the idolatrous spirit of those ancient times because included in that revelation is the truth that all power, whether to heal or to afflict, to lift up or to cast down, to save or to destroy (and therefore all fear and all worship) belongs to God.

It was during a blunt condemnation of Israel's fear of other gods that the Spirit of God, through Moses, proclaimed these stunning words:

“See now that I, even I, am he, and there is no god with me: I kill, and I make alive; I wound and I heal; neither is there any that can deliver out of my hand” (Dt. 32:39).

It was neither God's nor Moses' intent to intimidate or harass the Israelites. God's goodness rules that out. The purpose of these words was to remind the people of the Creator's absolute power over His creation and, so, to expose the foolishness of fearing or serving any other but Him. And the faithful in Israel rejoiced that that was true:

“My heart rejoiceth in the Lord. . . There is none holy as the Lord; for there is none beside thee: neither is there any rock like our God. . . The Lord killeth, and maketh alive: he bringeth down to the grave, and bringeth up. The Lord maketh the poor, and maketh rich: he bringeth low, and lifteth up. . . for the pillars of the earth are the Lord's and he hath set the world upon them” (Hannah, in 1Sam. 2:1-8).

Hannah gloried in God's power because she trusted in His love. But how did she glorify Him for His power? By acknowledging His authority over every circumstance of human life. Throughout Israel's history, in opposition to the idolatrous spirits of their times, the prophets declared the singular power of God:

“ . . . I am God, and there is none else. I form the light, and create darkness: I make peace, and create evil: I the Lord do all these things. I have made the earth, and created man upon it: I, even my hands, have stretched out the heavens, and all their host have I commanded. I am the Lord: that is my name: and my glory will I not give to another, neither my praise to graven images” (Isa. 45:22, 7, 12; 42:8)

Strange as it may sound to our ears, the righteous men of faith would not have so much as considered the possibility that their whole lives - including their sufferings were being directed by any other than God. It was the idolatry of believing that other gods were at work in their lives which ruined Old Testament Israel, as it was the righteousness of proclaiming that Israel's life was in God's hands alone that set the prophets apart.

This truth is of such abiding authority, however, that it not only challenged ancient idolatrous notions about God, but challenges modern notions as well. It is as distasteful to many modern ecclesiastical palates as it must have seemed queer to the ancient world, for the saints to confess that God is God of *all*. But it is irrefutably true now as it was then. And we are not of the same faith, not followers of that faith of the holiest and wisest of men, until we see, as they saw, all our sufferings as well as all our comforts to be determined for us by God. Anything short of that is too reminiscent of the ancient world not to be labeled idolatrous.

For the saints living now, this is probably the most difficult truth to believe about God. For we are living in an era wherein, as during the latest Old Testament times (cp. Mal. 2:17), the Creator is characterized as being ever gentle, never stern, ever loving, never doing harm. The power of God to afflict is virtually denied by the spirit of our age. Satan, instead, is almost everywhere honored with responsibility for the suffering of the saints. Unwise instructors have taught the saints to believe in God only as the God of all blessing and, in effect, to trust Satan to be the god of all discomfort. But you will never find any such doctrine in the mouth of righteous biblical characters. Later, we will speak more fully on this matter.

The Wisdom Of God

“O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out! For who hath known the mind of the Lord? Or who hath been his counsellor? Or who hath first given to him, and it shall be recompensed unto him again? For of him, and through him, and to him, are all things: to whom be glory for ever. Amen” (Rom. 11:33-36).

Faith in God's goodness and His power, as secure a foundation as those provide, is not enough to sustain us in the hardest trials. For if we know only of God's desire that we be nothing but blessed and of His power to accomplish that, then there is room for bitterness that He does not go ahead and do it. It is "a threefold cord" which is not easily broken, and when with faith in God's goodness and power we are bound to Him with faith in His wisdom, there is no seat left in our hearts for any disconnected visitor.

God has promised that He will end all suffering forever for those who love and obey Him. *"He will make an utter end"*, wrote Nahum the prophet, *"Affliction shall not rise up the second time"* (1:9). For the faithful in Christ, the Apostle John foresaw that

“. . .neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat. For the lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters; and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes" (Rev. 7:16-17).

There are, of course, questions as to why we must wait for those promises to come, and why we must through all our lives be confronted by sorrow, disappointment, and pain. We know that Jesus himself was *"made perfect through the things that he suffered"* (Heb. 2:10;5:8-9) and, so, that we might be made perfect is one of God's reasons for suffering to continue. But that is actually beside the point, for even though some answers to our questions concerning suffering are revealed, we could rejoice even if we were completely ignorant, so long as we knew that God knows all things. And it is the revelation of God as Creator which assures us that He does know all things, for He could not have created all things without His own knowledge.

Consider The Lilies

It is only by God's wisdom that birds take their flight (Job 39:26). Only by His wisdom do the stars gather in the evening skies (Job 38:31-32). By His wisdom do the clouds darken to water the earth (Job 38:25-27). By His wisdom, microscopic unions form successive generations of men. By His wisdom seasons change, beasts of the earth are nourished, men and women can think and feel and ask, and fires can turn leaves into rising columns of white and grey.

“O Lord, how manifold are thy works! In wisdom hast thou made them all: the earth is full of thy riches” (Ps. 104:24).

In contemplating the heavens, King David was not being an impractical dreamer, neglecting the weightier matters of his kingdom. Nor was Jesus promoting indolence when he enjoined us to consider the lilies. The most unforgettable spiritual lessons contained in the holy Scriptures are those based upon natural phenomena: a vineyard, the rain, fish in the sea, the wind, the planting of seeds. Wise Solomon was made still wiser by observing the ant (Prov. 6:6-11). The ephemeral quality of grass instructed Isaiah's heart in the wonder of eternity (Isa. 40:6-8). By His own immaculately wise design, the Creator's fingerprints remain, with subtle starkness, upon every article of His creation, and within even the smallest element of creation is hidden the potential of revelation of the God who created it.

“For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made. . .” (Paul, in Rom. 1:20).

Pondering creation, King David was enamored with the revelation of God in the rain, or in the animals of the forest, or in the daily labor of men (cp. Ps. 104). To David, there were testimonies in the trees, sermons in the silence of the stars. As if in a language both foreign and understandable, the skies to David seemed to be incessantly evangelizing the inhabitants of the earth.

“The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handiwork. Day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night sheweth knowledge. There is no speech or language, where their voice is not heard” (Ps. 19:1-3).

Oh, let us recapture this lost, holy sense of amazement at the Creator's labor. Let us with childlike wonder join in the prophet's song of praise:

“O give thanks unto the Lord; for he is good: for his mercy endureth for ever. To him who by wisdom made the heavens: for his mercy endureth for

ever. To him that made great lights: the sun to rule by day, the moon and stars to rule by night: for his mercy endureth for ever. Who giveth food to all flesh: for his mercy endureth for ever. O give thanks unto the God of heaven: for his mercy endureth for ever” (from Ps. 136).

Even Our Ignorance

Like chapel bells in winter, echoing loud and clear against cold and closed buildings, the exhortations of the ancient men of faith rebound against the empty confidences of proud mankind:

“Look unto the heavens and see; and behold the clouds that are higher than thou” (Elihu, in Job 35:5).

Known but to God, there is a measure for that which men call the measureless. There is in His heart the knowledge of that which men call the unknowable. There is a hope beyond what men have dreamed or can dream (Isa. 64:4; 1Cor. 2:9).

But there are worlds even within our own we know nothing of, secrets in the seas which man may never discover. On distant stars, what epic scenes of beauty and violence must surely play, beyond the realm of man's cognitive, even imaginative capacities. And all these imperceived, mysterious realities declare the glory of our Creator every bit as much as did the discernable heavens to David's awestricken heart. For everything we do not know is a reminder of the awesome knowledge of our Creator. In a curious twist of His fathomless wisdom, God has determined that even our ignorance, along with every other part of creation, should bear witness to His wisdom.

God's Purposes

I know perfectly well that regardless of how much a parent loves a child or how much power a parent possesses to provide for a child's needs, both that love and that power can be unwisely demonstrated. But God is never like that. He is the perfect Father. He didn't have to *learn* to be a good parent. He was good from the beginning. He doesn't make mistakes. Regardless of how much goodness and power Joseph trusted God to possess,

had Joseph not trusted in the Creator's wisdom, he would have wondered if his suffering was really necessary, if it was serving any good purpose.

We as the body of Christ are letting let slip from our grasp that thrilling sense of God's purpose in all things. To the eyes of faith, the sun doesn't just shine; it shines because the Creator has a purpose for its shining. To the eyes of faith, the sky itself never gives rain (Jer. 14:22); only God can do that. And when He does it, He does it for a purpose. "*All things are full of labor*" (Eccl. 1:8) because all things are fulfilling the often hidden purposes of God, and, oh, that He would ever keep that truth alive in our hearts! Jesus encourages us to trust in God's purposes with these amazing words:

“ . . . even the very hairs of your head are all numbered ” (Lk. 12:7).

Jesus' meaning is not that after you were born, God came while you slept and counted the hairs on your head. Rather, it is that the hairs on your head are numbered *to you* by the Creator, the point of Jesus' words being that God's care for us is so complete that every circumstance of our lives is contemplated by Him before it happens. That is, no circumstance, either pleasant or otherwise, is ever permitted into the lives of His children that does not fit into His plan for their lives, or that is not tailored by Him to match their faith (1Cor. 10:13). The reliance upon that truth during times of great suffering was the one act of faith which most clearly set the righteous apart from their idolatrous times.

Conclusion

Some may ask why, if all the circumstances of our lives, including our sufferings, are determined by God, should we desire to be delivered from suffering? The most obvious answer is that suffering hurts, and sane people do not enjoy pain. The prophets knew that God sent famine upon their land (2Kgs. 18:1), but they didn't pray for more famine. They prayed for rain (cp. 1Kgs. 8:35-40), in humility and fear before God.

Secondly, we should desire deliverance because the suffering which God determines for us is not an end in itself; it is never intended to last forever. It is only used now to serve God's purposes. Therefore, it is never wrong to want, or to pray for, or to expect healing. Indeed, it is wrong not to want or expect healing, because that betrays either an ignorance of, or worse yet, unbelief toward the Creator. It is always right to pray for healing, not only because healing would make us feel better, but also because God's purpose is always inextricably entwined with our healing. We cannot pray for healing without, at least implicitly, praying for God's purpose to be accomplished in our lives, for

they are too much of the same thing. Joseph's deliverance from the dungeon cannot be separated from his rise to Pharaoh's throne. And when he was praying for the one, he was working with the will of God toward the accomplishment of the other.

Thirdly, we should pray for deliverance because when things are made right in our lives, and when God's purposes are accomplished, God receives glory. And risking the appearance of too much spirituality, let me suggest that to bring glory to God may be the best reason to pray for healing and deliverance (cp. Ps. 30:9-12), even outweighing one's desire for personal comfort. Certainly we could not be wrong in attributing that depth of holy commitment to our Lord Jesus, whose only purpose in coming to earth was *"to do thy will, O God"* (Heb. 10:7).

To conclude then, I must say that to believe in the Creator is to believe in healing, in being made whole. I cannot imagine how we could know and trust in God without expecting good things to happen to our lives. Goodness is so much a part of what He is. The very reason faith asks for healing is because faith knows God. Faith seeks for God's "way of escape" from every temptation (1Cor. 10:13) because it believes there is one. Faith knocks on the door of deliverance because it believes that door has hinges (Mt. 7:7-11; Lk. 11:5-13; 18:1-8). Regardless of the bleakness of the situation, the men of greatest faith still possessed the faith to call upon God for help. Indeed, our heavenly Father bids us to do so:

" . . . call upon me in the day of trouble: I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me" (Ps. 50:15).

All the righteous from the beginning of the world have heard that compassionate voice of the Creator, beckoning all who would to come find shelter in His care. In the ancient, forgotten land of Uz, the Lord chose a man named Job to demonstrate for us the value of following after that voice.

