



## **Christian Worldview Whitepaper**

Cornerstone University faculty, staff, and students are committed to developing a Christian world and life view. We believe that an authentic Christian world and life view, or Christian perspective on reality, is one that follows the biblical narrative of creation, fall, redemption, and consummation.

### ***Creation***

The biblical story opens in Gen. 1 and 2 with the story of creation. Here we discover at least five foundational truths about reality. First, the opening words of Scripture, “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth,” indicate that an ontological distinction exists between God and his creation. God is wholly other than the world He has made. He dwells on an entirely different plane of reality. While the world God created is finite, temporal, and dependent upon God for its existence, God himself is infinite, eternal, and dependent upon nothing. Unlike everything in creation, God’s existence is necessary. He cannot go out of existence. He always was and he always will be. The sovereign God is ultimate reality.

Second, although the world is inferior to the God who created it, yet because it is the work of God, it is entirely good. Seven times in Gen. 1 God says that creation is good, the final instance declaring that it is “very good.” God created a world so impressive that it satisfied even His own impeccable standards. As He examined his

creation He decided that He would not change a thing. “It is good,” He said, “it is very good.”

Because creation is the good work of God, we are not only permitted, but we are encouraged to enjoy it just as it is. We do not need to stamp Bible verses on the things of creation to make them suitable for Christian consumption. “Everything God created is good,” Paul writes, and “nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving...” (1 Tim. 4:4). God is pleased when His children thoroughly enjoy this beautiful creation that He has given to them. No one should enjoy a day at the beach, a walk in the woods, a picnic in the park, a book, a song, or the pleasant company of friends like a Christian. Even though the world is now fallen, the corrosive effects of sin are unable to eliminate the goodness that God has placed here. This fallen creation is still “My Father’s World” and He wants us to celebrate, even indulge, in its goodness wherever we find it.

Third, Gen. 1:26-28 informs us that human beings are unique. Unlike the rest of creation, we alone are created in the image of God. It is this special dignity which bestows a sacredness upon human life. It is this fact alone which makes it wrong to kill a human being, even when the death is considered to have pragmatic value (e.g., useful for finding cures for various diseases, as in stem cell research). While theologians continue to discuss the specifics of what the *imago Dei* means, most scholars agree that at the very least the concept implies that people are meant to exist in three important relationships: with God, others, and creation itself. Thus, to be fully human is to be in proper relation with God, to be fully human is to be in proper relation with other people, and to be fully human is to be in proper relation with the world.

Although sin has damaged, marred, and nearly destroyed these three relationships, yet in Jesus Christ, the true human, they are restored. Christ repairs our relationship with our heavenly Father so that we can once again commune with Him, reflecting the divine fellowship that exists among the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Christ repairs our relationships with each other, empowering us to rebuild the shalom that once permeated his perfect creation. This is most obvious in the church, where diverse people with not much in common except the Lord Jesus Christ unite in flourishing bonds of fellowship. And finally, Christ returns us to the earth, enabling us to keep the ordinances of creation.

Fourth, Gen. 1-2 explains these creation ordinances, or commands that God gave to Adam and Eve at their creation. In Gen. 1:28 God commands them to “be fruitful,” “increase in number,” “fill the earth,” and “subdue” and “rule” the earth. The first three commands God also gave to the animals (Gen. 1:22), while the final two he reserved for humanity alone. Theologians call these commands to subdue and rule the earth the “cultural mandate.”

God elaborates this mandate in Gen. 2:15, where He orders Adam to protect and cultivate the Garden of Eden. Here we find that God did not intend his perfect world to remain as it was. He demanded more from Adam than that he merely avoid messing things up. He commanded Adam to develop his creation. How does one improve a perfect world? He develops it in a distinctively human fashion, planting the geraniums over there, learning what grows best where and what he most enjoys eating. God wanted Adam to participate in his ongoing work of creation, to take the raw materials of a perfect world and arrange them to produce the highest possible benefit.

This task continues today. We call it the development of culture. Cultures advance as people learn to cultivate the resources of God's creation, learning how to grow more wheat with less energy, pounding the earth's metals into automobiles and musical instruments, and mastering the lengthy process of turning the extra wool on a lamb into a hand-knit sweater. If we can locate our vocation in this picture, discovering how our interests and skills enable ourselves or others to exercise dominion over the earth, cultivating its resources for the profit of both humanity and the earth itself, then we will discover a divine nobility in our tasks. We will no longer work with one eye on the clock, motivated only by our paycheck, but we will realize that in our job we are cooperating with God. God has humbly chosen to complete and care for his creation through us. To paraphrase Martin Luther: "God milks his cows by those farmers assigned to that task."

Fifth, though work is an essential component of God's perfect world, the creation story indicates that human life is not to be one endless round of continual labor. Instead, the story of creation depicts the rhythm of life, a rhythm that alternates between the pulsating allegros of the work-day week and the serene legato of the seventh day rest. While theologians disagree concerning whether the Sabbath applies to Christians today, none can ignore the pattern of labor and refreshment that God has built into creation. Furthermore, as believers set aside an entire day to rest and reflect upon the goodness of God, they intentionally foreshadow the future, endless rest they will receive when their salvation is complete (Heb. 4:1-11).

## *Fall*

This creation rhythm of work and rest should have continued forever. Adam and Eve and their children should have continued to grow in their fellowship with God, others, and their world. We should have been born into a perfect world, a world without suffering and tears, a world of ever-increasing joys. We should live in a world where we never lock our doors, where goodbyes are never final, and where we never catch the flu. We should live in a world where everyone has a hundred best friends, where lions purr like kittens, and where juicy beefsteak tomatoes come fresh from the garden all year long.

But we do not. Something has gone terribly wrong. This is not the way it is supposed to be. Gen. 3 explains what went wrong with our perfect world. Very soon after his creation, Adam chose to reject God's Word and tragically brought sin and death into creation. He listened to his wife, Eve, who was deceived by the serpent into eating the forbidden fruit. Rather than submit to God's interpretation of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, which told her that she must not eat from it or die, Eve chose to agree with the serpent, who informed her that far from killing her, the fruit promised to make her as wise as God.

Eve's sin was thinking that she was capable to judge between God and the serpent. This reckless act of autonomy, taking upon herself the right to decide what was best for her, guaranteed that she would side with the serpent rather than God. She quickly decided that while God's prohibition restricted her freedom, the serpent's counsel encouraged her to actualize her potential. So she ate and passed the fruit to her husband, who foolishly joined her rebellion against God.

This very first sin of autonomy continues to drive every sin that the human race has ever committed. People rebel against God because at bottom they want to do what they want to do and no one, not even God, is allowed to cramp their style. This autonomy continues to hamper even Christian attempts to please God. As Christians know from painful experience, this self-centeredness is only slowly removed, and never completely in this life, by the sure and steady sanctifying grace of God. In the words of Paul, we must die to ourselves with Christ before we can be made alive (Rom. 6:1-14).

Adam and Eve's sin brought immediate consequences upon themselves. Eve is told that she will now experience significant pain in childbirth and Adam learns that his happy work is about to become sweaty toil. Even worse, both learn that because of their sin their bodies will now wear down and eventually die. Worst of all, both are expelled from the garden and the intimate communion that they enjoyed with God there. Adam and Eve, who just yesterday had walked with God, are now banished from his presence. Life has never been the same since.

Adam soon discovered that his sin was a cancer on the human race. Although it began with him it did not stop there. Adam was unable to contain the damaging effects of sin to his own person. To his horror he found that the disease of sin passes on to one's children. It must have been pure agony for him and Eve to watch as the chilling fingers of sin wrapped themselves around the heart of their first-born son. Who could have guessed that this tiny infant, the first baby the world had ever seen, would grow up to be a killer?

Gen. 4 records how Cain became jealous of his brother Abel when the latter's sacrifice was accepted by God. In anger Cain ignored God's warning and lured his

brother into the field, where he murdered him. Who could have known that Adam's sin, such a small thing as eating a forbidden fruit, could degenerate into murder within one generation? How could such a small sin reap such large consequences? Because it was not really small. Adam and Eve's sin was not merely eating the fruit, it was their autonomy which led them to eat. They wanted to be in charge rather than God. Once they gave way to autonomy, they guaranteed that sin would not remain small for long. Autonomous individuals sin as large as they need to keep themselves on top. Autonomy for Adam and Eve meant eating a fruit; autonomy for their son meant murdering his brother.

But sin is more than a cancer on the human race. It is also a cancer on the rest of creation. Gen. 4-11 explains how sin damages everything in God's world. Although sin began with humanity it did not stop there. Like a stone tossed into a pond, sin rippled out from the first couple until it had destroyed human society, the animal kingdom, and even the earth itself. As a result, Rom. 8:22 declares that "the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth" while it awaits God's final redemption.

Perhaps the best illustration of the fall-out from Adam's fall occurs at the Great Flood in Gen. 6. Here we learn that human wickedness has become so great that God decides to destroy not only all people but also all animals (Gen. 6:11-13). Everything must die. The only creatures who are spared are Noah's family and the animals which gathered into the ark. The story of the Flood teaches us that our sin pains God. He hates it so much that He will do whatever it takes, destroying the world if necessary, to remove it. So God bitterly drowns his creation, the same creation which only a few chapters earlier had brought him so much joy.

## ***Redemption***

The story of the Flood also teaches us that our sin infects everything else. Like a drop of dye diffusing through water, the corrosive nature of sin fans out into every last corner of creation. God's great plan of redemption intends to reverse entirely these effects of the fall. God is not content to merely salvage a few souls from his contaminated creation. Instead, He seeks to redeem everything from the ravages of sin. He will not rest until He has restored the entire world to its original, created goodness.

The majority of Scripture, Gen. 12 through Rev. 22, tells this story of God's redemptive plan. Here we learn that God initiated redemption through Abraham, who became the father of Israel, God's covenant people. Although God intended Israel to attract other nations to Himself by modeling how good it was to be the special people of God, Israel never lived up to the challenge. She showed fleeting glimpses of promise, especially under the leadership of Moses and David, but she always fell back into autonomy.

Finally, at just the right time, God sent his Son, Jesus Christ, to redeem the world. In Jesus' righteous life He recapitulated the errors of Adam and Israel. Unlike their rebellion, Jesus continually rejected autonomy, choosing to submit to his Father, even if it included suffering, rather than to protect and promote himself. In Jesus' obedient death and resurrection He satisfied His Father's wrath upon sin. Those who repent of their autonomy and believe that Jesus suffered in their place are adopted into God's family, forgiven of their sins, and empowered to please their new Father with acts of obedience.

This personal regeneration is the heart of redemption, but it is not the whole of it. Retracing the ripple effects of sin, the gospel also promises to redeem our bodies, human

society, the animal kingdom, and the earth itself. I Cor. 15 reminds us that it is not enough for our souls to be right with God. Instead, we long for the day when God will resurrect our bodies, bodies that will be free from the limitations of sin. Eph. 4:24-32 teaches that the church is to be the new society, modeling for unbelievers the close fellowship that the children of God share when they are united in Christ. Is. 11:6-9 and 65:25 express the peace that will one day exist between animals, and 2 Pet. 3:10-13 and Rev. 21:4 speak of a new earth as the final destination of the redeemed. In short, everything that sin broke will be restored by grace. This is what Peter meant when he spoke of the restoration of all things (Acts 3:21) and what Paul meant when he said that Jesus, who is both Creator and Redeemer, must reconcile all things to himself (Col. 1:20, Eph. 1:10).

Because everything in the world is going to be redeemed, Christians should care for this world. Rather than entertain Gnostic dreams of leaving this earth, Christians should strive to join God's redemption of it. We must realize that as earthlings we belong on this planet. God made us to live here, and here we will live forever (although the new earth is new it is still the earth). And what will we be doing on this new earth? According to Is. 60:3-11, 65:21, and Rev. 21:24-26, we will be doing what humans were made to do, participating in cultural activities as we continue to develop the good creation that God entrusted to us.

### ***Consummation***

But redemption does more than merely restore the earth to its original goodness. In some remarkable ways redemption also consummates creation, making it even better than it was before the fall.

Ontologically, the consummation brings two significant advantages. First, Rev. 21:2-4 asserts that God himself will ultimately dwell upon the earth. Unlike the opening chapters of Genesis, where God only intermittently walked with Adam and Eve, the final chapters of Revelation indicate that God will now permanently live with his people. He will truly be Emmanuel, the God who is with us.

Second, 1 Cor. 15:44-45 informs us that our resurrected bodies which live on this earth will be spiritual rather than natural entities. This does not mean that our bodies won't be physical (cf. Lu. 24:36-43, where Jesus' resurrected body was still material), but perhaps indicates that we won't be as dependent upon food and shelter as we are now.

Epistemologically, 1 Pet. 1:12 states that redeemed sinners know something that unfallen beings, such as the good angels, can not begin to comprehend. Specifically, our experience of sin and salvation enlarges our appreciation for the gracious God who has rescued us from certain damnation. In this way we possess a deeper understanding of the character of God not despite, but because of our sin.

Ethically, redemption also elevates us to a higher place than Adam and Eve enjoyed in their original creation. Although perfect, they retained the freedom to fall into sin. Their disobedience corrupted the entire human race, so that everyone born after them was not able not to sin. As children of Adam, we remain mired in this depravity until we were born again by the grace of God, an act which enables us not to sin if we wish. Even better, the same grace that regenerates promises ultimately to confirm our character in righteousness during the consummation. Unlike Adam and Eve, who lacked the absolute certainty that they would never fall, we then will have the assurance that we will never sin again.

## *Application*

Knowing that redemption is the restoration of creation should lead us to care for this creation and the culture that rises from it. One important step in learning how to care for God's world is acquiring a Christian liberal arts education. At Cornerstone University, we believe it is our Christian duty to examine every part of culture from this distinctively biblical, worldview perspective. We run every discipline through the grid of creation, fall, and redemption. We continually ask, "What created goodness is present?", "What fallen, autonomous aspects are present?", and "How might we reclaim this contaminated discipline for the glory of God?"

For instance, our education program prepares future teachers to supplant the secular humanism found in many classrooms with the knowledge and values that come from God; our history department challenges revisionist and relativist views of the past with the biblical view that events have the meaning and purpose assigned to them by God; our kinesiology department inspires graduates to take responsibility for their physical and psychological wellness, not merely for their own personal attractiveness or longevity but as an act of thankful stewardship to the God who created and redeemed them; and our science professors recognize that all creation groans beneath the weight of our sin, so rather than accept ecological problems as a normal part of life, they lead the charge to clean up sin's pollution and care for all of God's creatures.

In every discipline we battle the prevailing naturalism of modern secularism with the perennial truth of the biblical worldview. So philosophy is not a futile attempt to figure things out on our own, rather it is a promising quest to think God's thoughts after him. History is neither a meaningless record of past events nor a subjective story that is

open to many interpretations, but is rather a story of God's providential care for his world. Likewise, great literature does not receive its meaning solely from the reader, but reminiscent of the Scriptures, possesses an objective message in the text itself.

Unlike contemporary naturalism, we don't believe that the world accidentally evolved from billions of chance mutations, but that it is the purposeful product of our Father's hands. So political science is not an evolutionary extension of "might makes right," but is rather an opportunity to serve our neighbor in elected office. Morality itself is not a do-it-yourself discipline, but instead arises from the foundational principles of divine revelation. Similarly, music and art are not completely dependent upon personal taste, but there are specific criteria, embedded in God's creation, that distinguish important works of art from the pedestrian and the virtuous from what is vulgar. In these ways and more, Cornerstone University is committed to applying the unchanging principles of the Christian worldview to God's rapidly changing world.

Besides seeking to redeem each area of God's world, we also seek to integrate across the disciplines. Because God's world is a unity, a comprehensive worldview must strive to understand how each part of God's creation inter-relates with every other area. At Cornerstone University, we find that incorporating insights from other disciplines enables us to better understand our own.

For instance, theology professors use the findings of history, psychology, and the sciences to interpret the Scriptures, an interpretation which then loops around to inform these disciplines. Communication professors borrow the logic of philosophy, the ethics of theology, and the beauty of art to craft their rules of communication, rules which these other professors then seek to incorporate into their instruction. Philosophers better

understand the ancient, medieval, or modern mind as they study the literature, art, and music of the period, just as the literature and humanities professors benefit from learning their era's respective philosophy. Likewise, historians draw from nearly everyone to produce a full picture of the human story, while the others return the favor by producing a history of their particular discipline.

Such integration instills in faculty and students a holistic, integrated view of the world. We are a university—committed to pursuing a variety of disciplines around the unifying core of the Christian worldview. In this way we prepare our graduates not merely for jobs but, more importantly, to become exemplary Christian citizens, equally at home in God's Word and God's world.

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