

FAITHFUL TO THE WORD

Systematic Theology Series

THEOLOGY PROPER

The Doctrine of God

UNIT 8: THE DOCTRINE OF CREATION

Lesson 27

Creation and the Glory of God

Why God Made the World and What It Reveals About Him

Key Texts: Psalm 19:1; Genesis 1:28, 31; Romans 8:19–22; Revelation 21:1–5; Isaiah 65:17

The Heavens Declare the Glory of God

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Series Verse
<i>“Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways! For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who became His counselor?”</i>
Romans 11:33–34, NASB 1995

Introduction

Why did God make the world? It is the simplest and the most profound of all questions about creation, and it is the question to which this lesson, the concluding lesson of Unit 8, addresses itself with the full weight of the biblical and theological tradition. We have established in the previous two lessons that God created all things out of nothing by the sovereign word of His power, and that He created in six literal days, making human beings last of all as the crown of His creative work. Now we press into the question that those truths inevitably raise: what was God's purpose in creating? What does the creation, in its structure, its beauty, and its order, reveal about the God who made it? And what is the ultimate destiny of the created order, a destiny that will not be fully realized until all things are made new?

These questions are not academic; they are among the most practically important questions any human being can ask. If the universe has no purpose, if it is, as the materialist insists, the product of impersonal forces blindly operating without intention or aim, then human life within it has no inherent meaning, no objective worth, and no final hope. But if the universe was made by a personal God for a glorious purpose, then every star, every tree, every human face participates in a story that is moving toward a conclusion worthy of its Author. Everything depends on the answer to the question: why did God make the world?

The answer the Scriptures give is as simple and as inexhaustible as the God who gave it: God created the world for His own glory. Not as an expression of divine selfishness or narcissism, but as the most morally fitting and most generously good act possible for the most perfect Being in existence, the act by which the inexhaustible riches of His divine glory were communicated to a creation capable of receiving them, reflecting them, and rejoicing in them forever. This is the purpose of creation, and it is the theme that will carry us through every section of this lesson.

I. The Purpose of Creation: The Display of the Glory of God

A. The Testimony of Scripture

The Scriptures are not shy about the purpose of creation. From the Psalmist's opening declaration, "The heavens are telling of the glory of God; and their expanse is declaring the work of His hands" (Psalm 19:1, NASB 1995), to the heavenly doxology of Revelation 4:11, "Worthy are You, our Lord and our God, to receive glory and honor and power; for You created all things, and because of Your will they existed, and were created" (NASB 1995), the canonical witness consistently affirms that the creation exists for the display of the glory of its Creator.

Paul gives the most comprehensive expression of this truth in the doxological climax of Romans 11: "For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever. Amen" (Romans 11:36, NASB 1995). The prepositions are precise: all things come "from" God as their source; all things are maintained "through" God as their

sustainer; and all things are moving “to” God as their ultimate end and purpose. The creation does not exist for its own sake; it exists for God’s sake, as the arena within which His glory is displayed, received, and magnified.

Isaiah 43:7 makes the divine purpose in creation explicit and personal: “Everyone who is called by My name, and whom I have created for My glory, whom I have formed, even whom I have made” (NASB 1995). The phrase “created for My glory” is the foundational purpose statement for the creation of human beings in particular. Humanity, the crown of the creation, made in the image of God, bearing the divine likeness in its rationality, its morality, and its capacity for worship, is created specifically to display and magnify the glory of God.

B. What Is the Glory of God?

Before we can grasp the purpose of creation as the display of the divine glory, we need to be clear about what the “glory of God” means. The Hebrew word *kavod* (glory) carries the connotation of weight, substance, and worth, the sheer objective greatness of a person or thing. The glory of God is the sum of all His divine perfections displayed and made known: His power, His wisdom, His holiness, His beauty, His goodness, His love, His justice, and every other perfection that belongs to the infinite divine being. The glory of God is, in a word, God as He makes Himself known in the fullness of His being.

John 1:14 tells us that “the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth” (NASB 1995). The glory of God is not an impersonal radiance or an abstract attribute; it is the manifest presence of the personal God in the fullness of His character. In creation, God’s glory is displayed through the things He has made; in redemption, it is displayed most fully in the face of Jesus Christ (2 Corinthians 4:6). The purpose of creation is not merely to display some of God’s attributes in isolation; it is to display the full richness of who He is, culminating in the revelation of His glory in the person and work of His Son.

“The heavens are telling of the glory of God; and their expanse is declaring the work of His hands.” | “For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever. Amen.”

Psalm 19:1; Romans 11:36, NASB 1995

II. Creation as a Theater of Divine Attributes

John Calvin famously described creation as the “theater of God’s glory”, not a passive backdrop against which the drama of redemption is played out, but an active display of the divine character in every dimension of its structure, beauty, and order. The creation is the most immediately available divine self-revelation available to every human being, the one that requires no special literacy, no cultural preparation, and no prior theological education. Every person who has ever lived has had access to the testimony of the creation, and that testimony is, as Paul says in Romans 1:20, sufficient to render them without excuse before the God who made it.

Each of the divine attributes is legible in the created order, for those who have eyes to see:

- **Power:** The sheer scale and energy of the universe, stars that dwarf our sun by orders of magnitude, supernovae that release more energy in an instant than the sun will radiate in its entire lifetime, galaxies clustered in filaments that span hundreds of millions of light-years, is a testimony to a power that transcends all creaturely categories. “When I consider Your heavens, the work of Your fingers, the moon and the stars, which You have ordained” (Psalm 8:3, NASB 1995). The creation proclaims the omnipotence of its Maker.
- **Wisdom:** The intricate order of the creation at every scale, from the fine-tuned values of the fundamental constants of physics to the elegant structure of the DNA molecule to the precisely balanced ecosystems that sustain life on earth, is a testimony to a wisdom that designed and ordered all things with perfect intelligence. “O Lord, how many are Your works! In wisdom You have made them all” (Psalm 104:24, NASB 1995). The creation proclaims the omniscience and wisdom of its Maker.
- **Beauty:** The aesthetic richness of the created order, the colors of a sunset, the geometry of a snowflake, the song of a bird, the complexity of a coral reef, the sublime grandeur of a mountain range, points beyond itself to a Creator who is not merely functional but beautiful. The creation is not utilitarian in its design; it is extravagant, overflowing with beauty that far exceeds what mere survival would require. The God who made this world is a God of surpassing beauty, and the creation is His signature.
- **Goodness:** The lavish provision of the created order, the fertility of the earth, the abundance of living things, the sustaining cycles of rain and harvest, the inexhaustible resources of a world designed for its inhabitants’ flourishing, testifies to the goodness of the God who made it. “You open Your hand and satisfy the desire of every living thing” (Psalm 145:16, NASB 1995). The creation proclaims the generosity and goodness of its Maker.
- **Order and Faithfulness:** The regularity of natural law, the consistency of the seasons, the mathematical precision of celestial mechanics, the reliability of physical constants, is a testimony to the faithfulness and immutability of the God who established and upholds the created order. “While the earth remains, seedtime and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night shall not cease” (Genesis 8:22, NASB 1995). The creation proclaims the covenant faithfulness of its Maker.

These are not fanciful readings of natural phenomena. They are the natural response of a mind formed by Scripture encountering the world that Scripture describes. The creation does not prove God’s existence in the sense of providing irrefutable philosophical demonstration; but for those whose minds have been opened to see it, the creation is an unceasing and inexhaustible proclamation of the glory of the God who made it.

III. Jonathan Edwards and the Communication of Divine Fullness

No theologian in the Reformed tradition has developed the theology of creation and the glory of God with greater depth, greater systematic rigor, and greater lyrical beauty than

Jonathan Edwards (1703–1758). His treatise *The End for Which God Created the World*, written in the final years of his life and published posthumously as part of his *Two Dissertations*, is arguably the most important theological meditation on the purpose of creation produced in the English language. Its central argument deserves careful attention.

A. The Core Argument: Creation as Divine Self-Communication

Edwards' fundamental claim is that God created the world as the external expression and communication of His own internal fullness. God is infinitely full of all perfections, of knowledge, of love, of beauty, of joy, of goodness, and it is the nature of such fullness to overflow. Just as the sun necessarily radiates light by virtue of what it is (though Edwards carefully distinguishes this from the Neoplatonic idea of emanation, since for Edwards creation is free and not necessary), God's infinite fullness overflows into the creative act by which a world is brought into being that can receive, reflect, and rejoice in the communication of that fullness.

The goal of creation, on Edwards' account, is that the fullness of God, His glory, His knowledge, His love, should be expressed and communicated externally, so that it might be known and enjoyed and reflected by creatures capable of knowing, enjoying, and reflecting it. The greatest good for the creature is not something different from the glory of God; it is the creature's participation in and enjoyment of the glory of God. God's ultimate end and the creature's highest good are not competing interests but a single, unified purpose: the communication of the divine fullness to and through the creature, for the glory of God and the blessedness of the creature simultaneously.

B. The River and the Ocean: An Edwardsian Image

Edwards uses a suggestive image to capture this relationship. Imagine a great fountain of light, flowing outward in an ever-widening river of radiance. The river does not diminish the fountain; the fountain is not less full for the flowing. Yet the flowing is not without purpose: the river is flowing toward an ocean, an ocean in which all the radiance of the fountain will be gathered and reflected and magnified. The ocean is creation, the created order in its final, eschatological state, and the gathering of the divine fullness in the creature's knowledge, enjoyment, and glorification of God is the purpose for which the fountain has been flowing from the beginning.

This image captures something profound about the relationship between creation, redemption, and the new creation. The purpose of the original creation is not exhausted in the original creation; it is being realized through the entire sweep of redemptive history, and it will be fully realized only in the consummation, in the new heavens and the new earth in which the redeemed creation will fully know, fully enjoy, and fully glorify the God who made it and remade it. The river is still flowing; the ocean is being filled; the end is not yet, but it is certain.

C. The Moral Fitness of God's Self-Glorifying End

Edwards is aware that the claim that God created for His own glory sounds, on first hearing, like divine selfishness, as if God were a narcissist who made the world in order to have an audience. His response to this objection is one of the most important moves

in his entire theology: the accusation of selfishness applies to a creature who prioritizes himself over others who are equally worthy; it does not apply to God, who is infinitely worthy and who has no equal. For God to aim at anything less than His own glory as the ultimate end of creation would be to aim at something less than the greatest good, which would itself be a moral deficiency. God's seeking His own glory is not selfishness; it is the moral requirement of perfect goodness and infinite worth.

Moreover, Edwards argues, God's glory and the creature's good are not competing ends. The creature's highest good is precisely the knowledge, enjoyment, and glorification of God. There is no tension between God's seeking His own glory and God's seeking the good of His creatures, because the creature's good consists in its participation in the divine glory. Creation for God's glory is simultaneously creation for the creature's greatest blessing.

IV. The Cultural Mandate: Humanity as Vice-Regent

A. The Commission of Genesis 1:28

The creation of human beings in the image of God is immediately followed, in Genesis 1:28, by the first divine commission given to the human race: "God blessed them; and God said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it; and rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over every living thing that moves on the earth'" (NASB 1995). This commission is what theologians call the cultural mandate or the creation mandate, and it is one of the most important and most neglected doctrines in the whole of Christian theology.

The mandate has two primary dimensions. The first is the mandate of filling: "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth." Human beings are commissioned to populate the earth, to extend the sphere of the image-bearing community across the whole of the created order, so that the earth becomes filled with the knowledge and the worship and the life of those who bear the image of God. The second is the mandate of subduing and ruling: to bring the created order under the governance of image-bearing human beings who exercise dominion over it on behalf of and in accountability to their Creator.

B. The Meaning of Vice-Regency

The language of "subduing" and "ruling" in Genesis 1:28 has sometimes been read as a license for the exploitation of the natural world, as if God had given human beings unrestricted permission to use the creation for their own benefit without regard for its integrity or the good of other creatures. This reading profoundly misunderstands the nature of the mandate. The dominion given to human beings in Genesis 1:28 is the dominion of a vice-regent, not a tyrant. A vice-regent exercises the authority of a king on the king's behalf, accountable to the king for the manner in which that authority is exercised.

Human beings are made in the image of the God who declared the creation very good (Genesis 1:31) and who called His image-bearers to reflect His own character in their governance of what He had made. God's governance of creation is characterized by wisdom, goodness, and faithful care (Psalm 104; Matthew 6:26–30); human governance

of creation is called to reflect the same qualities. The cultural mandate is not a license to exploit; it is a commission to cultivate, to develop, and to govern the creation in a manner that honors the God who made it and cares for the creatures that inhabit it.

C. Work, Culture, and the Glory of God

The cultural mandate encompasses not merely agriculture and animal husbandry but the full scope of human creative and cultural activity: science, art, music, literature, architecture, technology, education, governance, and every other domain in which human beings “fill and subdue” the earth. All of these activities, when pursued in obedience to God and for the display of His glory, are a fulfillment of the cultural mandate. The scientist who investigates the structure of creation is exercising the mandate. The artist who images beauty is exercising the mandate. The parent who raises children in the fear of the Lord is exercising the mandate. The builder who constructs a city is exercising the mandate.

Abraham Kuyper’s great affirmation, “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!’”, is the cultural mandate applied to the Lordship of Christ after the fall and in light of the redemption. The whole of human life, in every dimension of its cultural expression, is claimed for the glory of God and placed under the lordship of Christ. The doctrine of the cultural mandate is the theological foundation of what Kuyper called sphere sovereignty and what the neo-Calvinist tradition has developed as a theology of Christian cultural engagement.

“God blessed them; and God said to them, ‘Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it; and rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over every living thing that moves on the earth.’”

Genesis 1:28, NASB 1995

V. Creation and Redemption: The Stage and the Drama

Creation is not an end in itself. It is the stage upon which the most glorious drama in the history of all possible worlds is being played out: the drama of the redemption of fallen humanity through the incarnation, death, and resurrection of the eternal Son of God, and the gathering of the elect from every nation, tribe, and tongue into the eternal kingdom of the Triune God. Creation provides the theater; redemption provides the play. And the play, when it reaches its final act, will reveal the glory of the God who wrote it in ways that creation alone could never have displayed.

A. The Eternal Purpose in Christ Jesus

Paul’s letter to the Ephesians opens with one of the most cosmically comprehensive theological statements in all of Scripture: God has “blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world” (Ephesians 1:3–4, NASB 1995). The election of the redeemed in Christ “before the foundation of the world” means that redemption was not an afterthought in response to an unexpected fall; it was part of the eternal purpose of God from before creation began.

Creation was made as the context within which the eternal purpose of God in Christ would be realized.

Ephesians 3:10–11 makes this cosmic purpose explicit: God’s intention is “that the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known through the church to the rulers and the authorities in the heavenly places. This was in accordance with the eternal purpose which He carried out in Christ Jesus our Lord” (NASB 1995). The church, the redeemed community gathered from every nation, the new humanity recreated in the image of Christ, is the instrument through which the manifold wisdom of God is being displayed to the entire created order, including the angelic hosts. The redemption of sinners is the most brilliant display of the divine wisdom, justice, holiness, love, and power that creation has ever witnessed. Creation was made so that this display could take place.

B. The Cross as the Center of History

The relationship between creation and redemption reaches its definitive expression in the cross of Jesus Christ. Colossians 1:15–20 presents a carefully structured theological poem that moves from the Son as the agent of creation (“for by Him all things were created”, v. 16) to the Son as the agent of redemption (“Having made peace through the blood of His cross, to reconcile all things to Himself”, v. 20). The one who created all things is the one who redeemed all things. The cross is not a response to an emergency; it is the revelation of a purpose that was embedded in the creation from its very beginning.

Paul declares in 1 Corinthians 2:7 that God decreed “a wisdom hidden in a mystery, which God predestined before the ages to our glory” (NASB 1995). The wisdom hidden in the mystery is the wisdom of the cross, the wisdom of the incarnate Son dying in the place of sinners for their redemption and the display of God’s glory. This wisdom was decreed “before the ages”, before creation itself. Creation was made as the arena within which this preordained wisdom would be displayed.

VI. The Groaning of Creation and the Hope of Restoration

A. The Subjection of Creation to Futility

The creation we inhabit is not the creation as God originally made it. The fall of Adam subjected the whole created order to what Paul calls “futility”, a condition of bondage, corruption, and frustration that extends from the human heart to the farthest reaches of the natural world. Romans 8:20–22 is the definitive statement of this reality: “For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself also will be set free from its slavery to corruption into the freedom of the glory of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groans and suffers the pains of childbirth together until now” (NASB 1995).

The creation does not groan because it was made defective; it groans because what was made very good has been subjected to corruption through the sin of the image-bearers entrusted with its governance. The thorns and thistles of Genesis 3:18, the futility and frustration that characterize human work and creaturely existence, the death and predation and suffering that mark the natural world, these are not the creation as God made it. They are the creation as sin has made it of what God made. And God has not

abandoned His groaning creation; He has subjected it to futility “in hope”, in anticipation of the restoration that is coming.

B. Creation Awaiting the Sons of God

The groaning of creation is not purposeless; it is teleological. Paul describes the creation as “eagerly waiting for the revealing of the sons of God” (Romans 8:19, NASB 1995). The liberation of the creation is tied to the liberation of the redeemed, the glorification of the sons of God at the final resurrection will trigger the liberation of the whole created order from its slavery to corruption. The creation is waiting for what the redeemed are waiting for: the consummation, the resurrection, the new creation.

This gives the Christian a particular vantage point from which to understand the suffering and brokenness of the natural world. The creation’s groaning is not evidence that God has abandoned it or that the material world is ultimately worthless; it is the labor pain of a creation that is being prepared for a glory that will surpass its original goodness. The midwife at this cosmic labor is God Himself, and the child being born is the new creation in which righteousness dwells.

VII. The New Creation: The Ultimate Goal of All Things

A. Not Destruction but Renovation

The ultimate destiny of the created order is not annihilation but renovation. The popular Christian imagination has often pictured the end of history as the destruction of the material world and the eternal existence of redeemed souls in a purely spiritual realm. This picture is not the biblical one. The Bible’s vision of the end is the new creation, not the replacement of the material world with a spiritual realm, but the renewal and glorification of the material world, purged of sin and death and groaning, and filled with the fullness of the divine presence.

Isaiah 65:17–25 provides the Old Testament’s most detailed portrait of the new creation: “For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth; and the former things will not be remembered or come to mind” (Isaiah 65:17, NASB 1995). The imagery of the new creation in Isaiah 65 is material, people building houses and planting vineyards, children growing to old age, the harmony of the animal kingdom restored. It is not a disembodied spiritual existence; it is the renewal of human and creaturely life within a renewed material world.

B. Behold, I Am Making All Things New

The New Testament’s vision of the new creation is even more explicit. Revelation 21:1–5 describes the new heavens and new earth with an imagery drawn from the entire sweep of biblical revelation: “Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth passed away, and there is no longer any sea. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband” (Revelation 21:1–2, NASB 1995). The divine declaration follows: “Behold, I am making all things new” (Revelation 21:5, NASB 1995).

The phrase “I am making all things new” does not mean “I am making all new things”, as if the present creation were being discarded and replaced with something entirely different. It means that the things that exist, the created order in all its dimensions, are being made new, renewed, restored, and glorified. The new Jerusalem comes “down out of heaven”, not to replace the earth but to transform it. The new creation is the present creation renewed from above, not a different creation made from scratch.

2 Peter 3:10–13 speaks of the present heavens and earth being “purged” or “purified” by fire, an image of the radical purging of sin and corruption from the created order, not its annihilation. The goal is “new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells” (2 Peter 3:13, NASB 1995). The restoration of righteousness to the creation, the reversal of the fall’s corruption, is the ultimate purpose for which the creation was made.

C. The Glory of the New Creation

The new creation will be more glorious than the original, not less. The original creation was very good; the new creation will be very good and more, filled with the fullness of the divine presence in a way that the original creation, with its still-open possibility of falling, was not. Revelation 21:3–4 describes it: “Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men, and He will dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself will be among them, and He will wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there will no longer be any death; there will no longer be any mourning, or crying, or pain” (NASB 1995). The presence of God among His people is the central feature of the new creation, not as the indirect presence of a God who maintains the world from outside it, but as the immediate, unveiled, face-to-face presence of the God who will be the temple of the new city and the light of the new creation (Revelation 21:22–23).

This is the ultimate purpose of creation: not that God would have a beautiful cosmos to admire from a distance, but that He would have a people, a redeemed, glorified, perfectly image-bearing community of human beings, who dwell in His immediate presence, know Him fully as He knows them, and glorify Him with the undimmed, uninterrupted, inexhaustible joy of the new creation, world without end. The creation was made so that this could happen. The redemption was accomplished so that this would happen. And the new creation will be the fullest and most glorious display of the divine glory that any creature has ever beheld or will ever behold: the glory of the God who is all in all (1 Corinthians 15:28).

“Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men, and He will dwell among them... and He will wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there will no longer be any death... Behold, I am making all things new.”

Revelation 21:3–5, NASB 1995

Key Texts: Psalm 19:1; Genesis 1:28, 31; Romans 8:19–22; Revelation 21:1–5; Isaiah 65:17; Romans 11:36

The Pastoral and Doxological Significance

A. Creation Gives Meaning to the Present

The doctrine of creation and the glory of God gives the believer a framework of meaning that no other worldview can provide. If creation exists for the display of the divine glory, then nothing is meaningless, not the ordinary routines of daily life, not the suffering that seems purposeless, not the work that seems insignificant, not the relationships that seem unremarkable. Every moment of human existence occurs within a creation that is the theater of God's glory, moving toward a consummation in which that glory will be fully displayed. Every act of faithfulness, every expression of love, every moment of honest work, every experience of beauty, every instance of worship, all of it participates in the great purpose for which the creation was made.

Paul's exhortation in 1 Corinthians 10:31 is the practical application of the theology of creation's purpose to the whole of daily life: "Whether, then, you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God" (NASB 1995). The smallest acts of daily life, eating, drinking, working, resting, can be done to the glory of God when they are done in conscious acknowledgment of and gratitude to the God who made all things for His glory. This is not a burden; it is a liberation, the liberation of a life in which nothing is trivial because everything is for God.

B. The Groaning Creation and the Confident Hope

The doctrine of the groaning creation and the coming new creation gives the believer a framework for living in the present world with both realism and hope. Realism: the world we inhabit is not the world as God made it, and we should not be surprised that it groans. The suffering, the frustration, the brokenness, the death, these are real, and they are the consequences of a real fall. The Christian who pretends that this world is fine as it is has not read Romans 8:19–22. But hope: the groaning of the creation is the labor pain of a new creation that is coming. God has not abandoned His creation; He is making it new. The Christian who is crushed by the weight of the world's groaning has not read Revelation 21.

The two together, realistic acknowledgment of the creation's groaning and confident hope in the creation's renewal, produce the particular kind of Christian endurance that Paul describes in Romans 8:23–25: "And not only this, but also we ourselves, having the first fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our body" (NASB 1995). We groan, because we are honest about where we are. We wait eagerly, because we know where we are going. The doctrine of creation and new creation is the theological ground of this posture.

C. All of Life Is Lived Before God

The cultural mandate, the commission to fill the earth, to subdue it, and to govern it in a manner that reflects the character of the God who made it, means that the whole of human life is lived before God and for God. There is no secular domain in which the Christian is free to operate as if God were absent or irrelevant. Science and art and politics and commerce and education and parenthood and friendship, all of it is conducted within the

creation that God made for His glory, by image-bearers who are accountable to the God whose image they bear. Kuyper was right: there is not a square inch that does not belong to Christ.

This is simultaneously a great weight and a great liberation. The weight: every dimension of our lives is accountable to the God who made us and before whom we will give account. The liberation: we are not free to treat any dimension of our lives as trivial or as beyond the reach of divine purpose. The smallest act of faithful human work, the most private act of honest worship, the most ordinary expression of love between image-bearers, all of it matters to the God who made the world for His glory and who is making all things new.

D. For Every Season of Life

For the new believer: You are made in the image of the God who created all things for His glory. Your life is not an accident; it is a gift from the God who made you to know Him, enjoy Him, and glorify Him forever. Every ordinary moment of your life, your work, your relationships, your rest, your worship, is an opportunity to fulfill the purpose for which you were made. Begin today to do all things to the glory of God (1 Corinthians 10:31), and watch the most ordinary life become a magnificent act of doxology.

For the long-tenured saint: The doctrine of the new creation is the doctrine of your ultimate hope. You are not waiting for the world to end and for your soul to escape to a disembodied spiritual realm; you are waiting for the renovation of all things, the resurrection of your body, and the face-to-face presence of the God who has loved you from before the foundation of the world. Let that hope, concrete, material, bodily, and glorious, sustain you through the groanings of the present age and the weariness of the long journey home.

For the one who is suffering: Romans 8:18 is the word for you: “For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us” (NASB 1995). Your suffering is real. The groaning you feel is the groaning of a creation subjected to futility. But the weight of glory on the other side of this suffering is so vast, so absolute, so unspeakable, that Paul cannot even construct a proportion between them. The same God who is making all things new is making you new, and what He is making will be worth everything it cost.

For the cultural worker: Whether you are a teacher, an artist, a scientist, an engineer, a parent, a politician, or a businessperson, the cultural mandate means that your work matters to God. You are not merely earning a living; you are exercising dominion over the creation on behalf of and in accountability to the God who made it. Do your work well. Do it honestly. Do it with the excellence that honors the God whose image you bear. And do it in the confidence that the God who is making all things new will not allow a single act of faithful human work done to His glory to be lost in the final renovation of all things.

Theological Terms and Definitions

Term	Definition
Glory of God	The manifest display of the divine perfections in all their infinite fullness, the sum of all God's attributes made known. The Hebrew kavod (glory) carries the connotation of weight, substance, and worth. The glory of God is not an impersonal radiance but the personal presence of the infinite God in the fullness of His character: His power, wisdom, holiness, beauty, goodness, love, and justice. The display of this glory is the ultimate purpose of creation.
Theater of Glory	John Calvin's image for the created world: not a passive backdrop but an active display of the divine character. The creation is the theater in which God's glory is displayed for the benefit of His creatures and in which the drama of redemption is enacted. Every dimension of the created order, its power, wisdom, beauty, goodness, and order, is a declaration of the attributes of its Maker.
Cultural Mandate	The commission given to humanity in Genesis 1:28: "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it; and rule." Also called the creation mandate. The commission encompasses the full scope of human cultural activity, science, art, governance, education, commerce, family, and every other domain in which human beings "fill and subdue" the earth. The mandate is not a license for exploitation but a commission for wise and faithful stewardship of the created order on behalf of and in accountability to the Creator.
Vice-Regent	A ruler who exercises authority on behalf of and in accountability to a higher sovereign. Human beings exercise dominion over the created order as vice-regents of God: their authority is real and significant, but it is delegated, not absolute, and exercised in accountability to the God who entrusted it to them. The vice-regent model guards against both an under-valuing of human dominion (passive non-engagement with the creation) and an over-valuing of it (exploitation and destruction).
Communication of Divine Fullness	Jonathan Edwards' central concept in <i>The End for Which God Created the World</i> : God created the world as the external expression and communication of His own internal fullness, His knowledge, love, beauty, and glory overflowing into a created order capable of receiving, reflecting, and rejoicing in them. The creature's highest good (the knowledge and enjoyment of God) and God's ultimate end (the communication of His glory) converge in a single unified purpose.
Sphere Sovereignty	Abraham Kuyper's concept that God has established distinct spheres of human society (family, church, state, science, art, commerce, etc.) each with its own God-given authority and responsibility, none ultimately subordinate to the others but all

	accountable to God. The concept is rooted in the cultural mandate and the Lordship of Christ over all of creation: “There is not a square inch in the whole domain of our human existence over which Christ... does not cry: ‘Mine!’”
Subjection to Futility	Paul’s description in Romans 8:20 of the condition of the creation following Adam’s fall: the creation was subjected to <i>mataiotes</i> (futility, emptiness, frustration), a condition of bondage and corruption that prevents it from fully fulfilling the purpose for which it was made. The creation’s subjection to futility is not its original condition but the consequence of sin; it is temporary, purposive (“in hope”), and destined to be reversed in the new creation.
The Groaning of Creation	Paul’s image in Romans 8:22 for the condition of the entire created order in its present state of subjection to futility: “the whole creation groans and suffers the pains of childbirth together until now.” The groaning is not purposeless but teleological, it is the labor pain of a creation awaiting its liberation and renewal. The creation’s groaning is tied to the believers’ groaning (Romans 8:23) and points toward the same hope: the redemption of the body and the restoration of the new creation.
New Creation	The ultimate eschatological goal of God’s redemptive purpose: not the annihilation of the present creation and its replacement with a purely spiritual realm, but the renewal, restoration, and glorification of the material created order, new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells (2 Peter 3:13), in which God dwells immediately among His people (Revelation 21:3), and in which all things are made new (Revelation 21:5). The new creation is the fulfillment of the purpose for which the original creation was made.
Kavod	Hebrew: “glory,” “weight,” “honor.” The primary Old Testament term for the glory of God. Its root meaning of “weight” or “heaviness” communicates the idea of substance, significance, and objective worth. The kavod of God is the weighty, substantial, magnificent reality of God Himself as He makes Himself known in the fullness of His divine being. When the kavod of the Lord fills the tabernacle or the temple, God’s manifest presence has come to dwell among His people.
Imago Dei	Latin: “image of God.” The doctrine that human beings were created in the image and likeness of God (Genesis 1:26–27). The imago Dei is the foundation of human dignity, the ground of the cultural mandate (humans rule as God’s image-bearers), and the basis of the new creation’s goal (conformity to the image of Christ, Romans 8:29). In the new creation, the image of God in humanity will be perfectly restored and glorified in union with the Last Adam who is Himself the perfect image of the invisible God (Colossians 1:15).

Practical Application

A. For the Mind: What Must We Believe?

We must believe that the creation exists for the display of the glory of God, that every dimension of the created order, from the structure of subatomic particles to the expanse of galactic clusters, from the intricacy of biological systems to the beauty of a human face, is a declaration of the infinite perfections of the God who made it. This is not merely a theological proposition to be filed away; it is a lens through which to see the entire world. The person who genuinely believes that creation is the theater of God's glory will never again be able to look at the natural world with indifference.

We must also believe the doctrine of the new creation with the full force of its material and bodily implications. The hope of the Christian is not escape from the material world to a spiritual realm; it is the resurrection of the body, the renewal of the created order, and the immediate, unveiled, face-to-face presence of God among His people in a new heavens and new earth in which righteousness dwells. This hope is not vague or ethereal; it is as concrete as the empty tomb of Jesus, whose bodily resurrection is the first fruits of the new creation.

B. For the Heart: What Must We Feel and Desire?

Let the creation move you to worship. The God who made the heavens and the earth is not a distant abstraction but the personal God who has revealed Himself in His Son and who dwells by His Spirit in your heart. Every act of creation is a declaration of His character, and every engagement with the created world is an opportunity for doxology. Cultivate the habit of seeing God in His creation, not in the pantheistic sense that God is the creation, but in the biblical sense that the creation is the mirror and the declaration of His glory.

Desire the new creation with the longing of those who know what they are waiting for. The eschatological hope of Christianity is not a vague aspiration toward "something better"; it is the confident expectation of a specific, revealed, glorious reality: the new heavens and the new earth, the resurrection body, the face of God unveiled, the company of the redeemed gathered from every nation, and the worship that will never end. Let that hope shape the way you live now, as a pilgrim who is passing through a groaning creation on the way to a creation that God is making glorious.

C. For the Hands: What Must We Do?

- Do all things to the glory of God (1 Corinthians 10:31). Let this be the daily intentional practice of your life: before every significant act, ask whether it can be done to the glory of the God who made you and the world you inhabit. The answer will usually be yes, and the asking will transform the quality and the intentionality of everything you do.
- Engage culture as a fulfillment of the cultural mandate. Whatever your vocation, your creative gifts, your sphere of influence, exercise them as a vice-regent of the God who entrusted them to you. Do your work excellently. Pursue truth in your intellectual life. Create beauty in your artistic life. Exercise justice in your civic life.

Build community in your relational life. All of it is the cultural mandate being fulfilled.

- Care for the created world as a steward, not an exploiter. The cultural mandate is a commission for faithful stewardship, not unlimited exploitation. Care for the creation, in your personal practices, in your community engagement, and in your political convictions, in a manner that reflects the goodness of the God who made it and the dignity of the creatures that inhabit it.
- Let the groaning of creation produce compassion, not despair. When you encounter suffering, brokenness, and death in the world around you, let it move you to compassion rather than to either denial or despair. The creation groans because sin has corrupted what God made very good. Your compassion for the suffering of the creation is a participation in the Spirit's own groaning (Romans 8:26–27) and a foretaste of the mercy of the God who will make all things new.
- Live in the light of the new creation. Every decision, every investment of time and energy and resource, every relationship, every act of worship, let it all be shaped by the knowledge of where history is going. The new creation is coming; the God who is making all things new will not allow a single act of faithful stewardship, a single word of honest witness, a single act of loving service to be lost in the renovation of all things. Live, work, love, and worship in that confidence.

Study and Discussion Questions

Opening Question

1. When you look at the natural world, whether at a mountain range, a starry sky, a forest, or the face of a child, does it naturally move you to worship the God who made it? Why or why not? What most inhibits your sense of the creation as a theater of God's glory?

Observation Questions (What Does the Text Say?)

2. Read Psalm 19:1–4. What does the Psalmist say the heavens “tell” and “declare”? How does he describe the scope of this declaration in verses 3–4? What is the relationship between the general revelation of creation and the special revelation of the Word (vv. 7–11)?

3. Read Romans 8:18–25. What does Paul mean by the creation's “subjection to futility” (v. 20)? What is the creation “eagerly waiting for” (v. 19)? How does the believers' groaning (v. 23) relate to the creation's groaning (v. 22)? What is the object of the hope described in verses 24–25?

4. Read Revelation 21:1–5. What specific features of the new creation does John describe? How does the description of God's dwelling among His people in verse 3 relate to the theme of the tabernacle and the temple throughout Scripture? What is the significance of the phrase “I am making all things new”, as opposed to “I am making all new things”?

5. Read Genesis 1:26–28. What is the relationship between the image of God (v. 26–27) and the cultural mandate (v. 28)? Why might the commission to “rule over” the creation be given specifically to those made in God's image? What does this connection tell us about the nature of the human vocation?

Interpretation Questions (What Does It Mean?)

6. Jonathan Edwards argues that God's seeking His own glory as the ultimate end of creation is not divine selfishness but the morally appropriate end for a Being of infinite worth. Explain his argument in your own words. Do you find it persuasive? How does his insight that God's glory and the creature's highest good are converging rather than competing ends bear on this question?

7. Explain what it means to say that creation is the “theater” of God's glory. How does each of the divine attributes, power, wisdom, beauty, goodness, order and faithfulness, find expression in the created world? Which of these expressions of the divine character do you find most moving or most convincing?

8. The lesson argues that the cultural mandate encompasses the full scope of human creative and cultural activity. How broad is the mandate? Does it include your specific vocation? How should the conviction that all of human life is a fulfillment of the cultural mandate change the way you approach your daily work?

- 9.** Explain the relationship between creation and redemption as presented in this lesson. In what sense is creation the “stage” and redemption the “drama”? How does Colossians 1:15–20 hold these two together? What does it mean that the cross was “predestined before the ages” (1 Corinthians 2:7)?
- 10.** What is the biblical picture of the new creation, and how does it differ from the popular Christian imagination of eternal life as a disembodied existence in a spiritual realm? What are the specific features of the new creation described in Isaiah 65:17–25 and Revelation 21:1–5? How does the bodily resurrection of Jesus function as the “first fruits” of the new creation?

Application Questions (What Does It Demand of Us?)

- 11.** Paul’s exhortation to “do all to the glory of God” (1 Corinthians 10:31) applies to eating and drinking, the most ordinary activities of daily life. What would it look like, concretely and practically, to apply this exhortation to a specific ordinary activity in your own life this week? Choose one and describe how you would do it differently in light of the purpose of creation.
- 12.** The lesson argues that the Christian posture toward the present world should combine realistic acknowledgment of the creation’s groaning with confident hope in the creation’s renewal. Which of these two is harder for you: the realism or the hope? What tends to push you toward either denial of the world’s brokenness or despair about it? How does the doctrine of the new creation address the tendency you struggle with?
- 13.** Kuyper’s affirmation that there is not a square inch in the whole domain of human existence that does not belong to Christ is a direct application of the cultural mandate and the doctrine of creation’s purpose. Are there areas of your life, your work, your leisure, your relationships, your political engagement, your aesthetic choices, that you have been treating as if they did not belong to Christ? How might this doctrine change your approach to those areas?
- 14.** As we close Unit 8 on the Doctrine of Creation, reflect on what Lessons 25, 26, and 27 together have taught you about the God who made the world. What is the single most transformative truth about creation that you want to carry with you into the next unit? And how do you intend to apply it, in your worship, your work, your relationships, or your response to suffering, in the coming days?

Prayer Focus

Close Unit 8 in prayer by praying through Psalm 8 together, the creation Psalm that stands as the most complete single expression of the theology of this lesson: the majesty of the Creator, the relative smallness yet extraordinary dignity of the human creature, and the wonder of a God who has made His image-bearers the stewards of His creation. Let verse 1 set the tone: “O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is Your name in all the earth, who have displayed Your splendor above the heavens!” (NASB 1995). Let verse 4 press upon you with its searching humility: “What is man that You take thought of him, and the son of man that You care for him?” And let verse 9 be the doxological conclusion: “O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is Your name in all the earth!”

Pray specifically for the grace to live as faithful vice-regents of God in the spheres He has entrusted to you: your work, your family, your creative gifts, your civic responsibilities, your care for the created world. Confess the ways in which you have treated the creation carelessly, your work mechanically, and your cultural responsibilities passively. Ask for the vision to see every dimension of your life as a participation in the purpose for which God made the world: the display of His glory through the lives of His image-bearing creatures.

Close with the hope of the new creation: pray for the day when the groaning of the present creation will give way to the glory of the creation made new; when every tear will be wiped away; when God will dwell among His people face to face; and when the redeemed from every nation will gather around the throne of the Lamb and the God and Father of all, and the worship that the creation was made to offer will fill the universe with unending joy. Come, Lord Jesus. Make all things new. To Him be the glory forever. Amen.

Soli Deo Gloria

To God Alone Be the Glory

FAITHFUL TO THE WORD

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