

CHAPTER TWO: GOD, CREATOR AND RULER

2.1 GOD CREATES AND RULES

2.1.1 – God is declared to be ‘Creator of all, Sustainer and Ruler of the universe.’ What does this mean? We are told that in the seasons and harvests, in the rise and fall of nations, God’s goodness and judgement are present. All events are under the sovereign care of God. Does this mean God controls and determines what happens? Does this mean that the rise and fall of nations is a reward or judgement of God? Does God determine not only that there are seasons and harvests, but also the outcome of harvests?

2.1.2 – This paragraph says two things that appear contradictory, and yet, may speak some truth. First, God rules the lives of individuals and nations. But second, God does not negate our freedom and responsibility. God directs all that happens toward fulfilment in Christ. Yet, there is still evil, injustice and tragedy in the world. How do we make sense of this?

2.1.3 – God has a righteous and loving purpose God is working out in the world, yet there is evil in it. We see this paradox lived out in Jesus Christ crucified. God comes in weakness and shares our human struggles and suffering. Yet, God’s might is revealed in this. What does this mean? How is God’s purpose being worked out in all this? How is God mighty in suffering?

2.1.4 – God rules the world, yet evil abounds. We don’t understand. It is a mystery. Yet we believe that evil cannot ultimately prevail, for it is against God’s will (do we really believe this?). The resurrection of Christ, our experience of new spiritual life through our faith now, and our hope for ultimate triumph in the future sustain us as we live in tough, often unfair, times. But if evil is against God’s will, if God is mighty and powerful, why doesn’t God defeat evil now? Why must so many suffer while we wait for God to triumph over evil?

These are big questions, but we cannot avoid them.

2.2 OUR CREATION

2.2.1 – We are told that ‘we belong to God,’ we ‘have been made in the divine image,’ that ‘in God we live and move and have our being.’ What does this mean? Certainly, it means that we are interconnected with God, that there is purpose and meaning to our creation, that we are not accidents of nature or simply part of an evolutionary scheme that started with a big bang without any inherent purpose in it. There is purpose to it all because God is behind it all. As we come to know God, we come to know our purpose and vice versa. But what do we ‘know’ of God?

Whatever answer we come up with to the last question, we are also told that ‘our lives must reflect the Creator’s love and purpose for all creation.’ Maybe this gives us a clue as to what we may “know” of God and our own purpose in the world?

2.2.2 – This section is more intelligible and practical. It addresses the relationship between male and female. We ‘need one another in all of life.’ We are ‘dependent on each other.’ We have ‘been made male and female for our mutual help, comfort and joy.’ And for some of us, the relationship as male and female has a sexual component to it as well. The alternative, of course, is all too evident in the world around us. People want to be independent, their own person, and people are often exploited and abused sexually rather than cared for and cherished. People are put down because they are women and sometimes because they are men too. It is important to be our own person, but we also must accept how dependent we are on each other too. That means we can’t take each other for granted, and we need to respect our differences as men and women without putting each other down.

But let’s also talk about language here. Talking about “male and female” and “our creation as sexual beings” may suggest that we are made to connect sexually only as men and women rather than two persons whatever our gender. Is something missing in this statement if we want to be inclusive of gay and lesbian sexuality?

Also, a trans person may be identified ‘male’ at birth because of organs they possess and testosterone through their body (although the latter is more evident from puberty onwards). But what if in their heart and mind they identify as female? In fact, why must “male” and “female” be narrowly specific? Regardless of our body parts and hormones, are male and female simply poles of a scale we all fall within at different points, just like we do with our sexual orientation? What do you think?

2.3 OUR CALLING

2.3.1 – The language of ‘call’ is particularly important in the Presbyterian tradition. Is it important to you in the meaning of your own life and vocation? “Call” means we need to discern a larger purpose to our lives and what it is God has to fulfill in the world through us.

We are also told that the meaning of our lives, our vocation and our call can only find fulfillment in ‘the love and service of God.’ What does this mean? The next few statements tell us.

2.3.2 – ‘We serve and love God by the service and love of creation, especially the care of the needy.’ In fact, we’re told that ‘every kind of work that is honest and serves others is a vocation from the Lord.’

2.3.3 – We are also given some content to what ‘calling’ means. ‘Calling means the necessity to deny selfish ambition and desire in order to minister to others.’ This is also what it means to serve God. Finally, ‘in God’s service true freedom is to be found.’ What does this last statement mean to you? What is the connection between service to God and true freedom?

2.4 OUR CARE FOR THE WORLD

2.4.1 – in this paragraph we are told several things:

1) 'human life depends on the created world,' and even though we are given life as a gift, we need to be given life in an ongoing way by the natural world. We are not autonomous individuals, but dependent on the life around us.

2) We have a responsibility for the created world, to care for it as 'stewards' of God to whom the world ultimately belongs. Since we are made in God's 'image' (2.2.1), we must care for the world the way God cares for us and the world. We must work together with God not against God, and God has invited us to share in the caring of the world.

3) We bring to our care for the world all our 'human skill and science about the world and the universe.' Our purpose is not to control, master and use the created world, but to care for it and for each other. How does that determine how we live in relation to our natural world and the many species?

2.4.2 – This paragraph offers us the answer to the last question. We do have a complicated relationship with the natural world. We depend on it, we do make use of it, and we do master some elements in it to make our lives more livable. But at what point do we also misuse, abuse, and overuse 'God's good earth' such that our future on this planet is more tenuous than ever? Where has our 'human skill and science' been used in destructive, unsustainable ways?

2.5 SIN SEPARATES US FROM GOD

2.5.1 - The last questions lead directly to the theme of 'sin.' Sin means 'we do not care for the world as we should,' 'we do not fulfil our calling to serve God,' and 'our lives do not reflect the Creator's love.' Sin is also 'a rebellion against God, an insistence that we be god in our own lives.'

2.5.2 – Sin is also revealed in our lives by: 1) our failure to keep the 10 commandments, and 2) the gap between our lives and that of Christ as revealed in the gospels.

2.5.3 – Sin creates a distance between us and God. Our distance with God also affects our relationships with others and with the earth.

2.5.4 – 'Sin is a power present in every human life, even at birth.' Do you believe this? The traditional term for this is 'original sin.' Even before we are old enough to act there are sinful tendencies in us. Is this true?

Sins are listed like pride, indifference, untruthfulness, greed, lust, laziness, gluttony, envy and selfish anger. Is this list adequate?

2.5.5 – We're also told we cannot escape our sin (original sin) or the sin of the world. How is this true if it is true?

2.5.6 – The sin that passes through us and lives in us also shapes the world around us. We live its consequences and also shape those consequences. Is this true? Are there no distinctions between better and worse sin here possible?

2.5.7 – The only way out of this depressing state of affairs is revealed in Jesus Christ. 'Through the death and resurrection of Christ,' we receive 'life, forgiveness, healing, wholeness.' It is a gift ('grace' means gift) which also means we can't earn it or deserve it. And it is received by faith in what Christ has done and can do, not what we can do or fail to do. But is there nothing we can or should do to help ourselves overcome our sins?

Here are a few questions:

- 1) Are all sins on the same level of severity before God?
- 2) Is there a difference between Sin and sins?
- 3) Are there sins not listed that should be listed?
- 4) Does 2.5.7 offer a compelling answer to the problem of sin? What about people who don't know or accept Christ through faith. Are they forever stuck in their despairing state of sin?