



all things bright and beautiful
— fully alive in God's good world —

PART ONE – THE GOODNESS OF GOD'S WORLD

By Pastor David Fields

Psalm 104:10-15; Genesis 1

“She [Liza] had no love of places. A place was only a resting stage on the way to Heaven....Places were very important to Samuel. The ranch was a relative, and when he left it, he plunged a knife into a darling.”¹

“The thief comes only to steal, and kill, and destroy; I have come that they may have life and have it to the full.”

John 10:10

That life, that abundant life, is far more ‘earthy,’ material, grounded than many of us have been taught to think about it.

¹“Praise the LORD, my soul.

LORD my God, you are very great;

you are clothed with splendor and majesty....

¹⁰ He [the Lord God, our Creator] makes springs pour water into the ravines it flows between the mountains.

¹¹ They give water to all the beasts of the field;
the wild donkeys quench their thirst.

¹² The birds of the sky nest by the waters
they sing among the branches.

¹³ He waters the mountains from his upper chambers;
the land is satisfied by the fruit of his work.

¹⁴ He makes grass grow for the cattle and plants for people
to cultivate bringing forth food from the earth:

¹⁵ wine that gladdens human hearts,
oil to make their faces shine, and bread that sustains
their hearts.”

Psalm 104:1; 10-15

Creation is still good, even after the fall.

I. The First Christian Heresy: Gnosticism

Adversus Haereses (‘Against Heresy’) by Irenaeus of Lyons (2nd Century).

The word ‘heresy,’ from the Greek *haeresis* (αἵρεσις), means ‘to choose.’ Heresy is what you choose to believe about God, or what God says about being a human, rather than receive what God has said about God’s self. And as any good pastor, Irenaeus was not going to let this distortion of the gospel go unchallenged.

The subtitle of the treatise is:

*Against Heresy: A Refutation and Subversion of
Knowledge Falsely So Called.*

NOTES

Knowledge, in Greek, is: Gnosis.

Gnosticism:

“The essence of a person (the soul, as it were) comes from the divine, spiritual realm but has fallen from the perfect, immaterial realm through the levels of material creation, becoming enmeshed and trapped in matter (the body).

By means of the correct knowledge (gnosis) about their nature as spiritual beings and about the process by which the soul would ascend through the heavenly spheres, humans can be freed from the prison house of the body and of material creation and ascend again to join with the deity. The Gnostics goal was personal liberation and reunion with the deity.”²

Gnostic Tendencies include:

1. A duality between ‘the spiritual’ and the material world. The material world is corrupted and dirty, but the spiritual world was pure and good.
2. The soul, your psyche, your inner life, that’s the ‘real you.’ Your body is caged into this physical, material thing, and is longing to be free from it; to go back to some sort of immaterial realm.
3. The goal of salvation, then, is to escape this entrapment to your body. A sort of ‘evacuation’ of this material world.
4. The way of salvation is to realize – have this knowledge, this gnosis, this set of beliefs – that you are a spiritual being, destined to ascend to the heavens and join God there. Salvation is about knowing certain things. It’s disconnected to the practices you do with your body; how you live in relation to others.
5. And this means, of course, A devaluing of the material world – to see it as a ‘throw-away’ thing.

Gnostic Tendencies in our Broader Culture

“My body is a cage
That keeps me from dancing with the one I love
But my mind holds the key

Set my spirit free
Set my spirit free
Set my body free”³

Gnostic Tendencies within Popular Christian Thinking

- a. ‘Spiritual escapism,’ this idea that salvation means evacuation from this world, rather than a commitment to the biblical vision that won’t give up the goodness of creation, or God’s plans to redeem it too.
- b. Devaluing the good work God has given us to do, even ditching out on God’s call to care for this earth, as we’re commanded in Genesis 2:15.
- c. An overemphasis on our individual, inner state – as though it’s only what’s going on inside me that counts and devalues my actions with my body and my relationships with others, ‘like, that’s just ‘externals.’
- d. Devaluing of our embodied nature with an emphasis on thinking that excludes the embodied elements of discipleship.
- e. Devaluing the communal elements of corporate worship, with an emphasis on the individual experience.

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² David de Silva, An Introduction to the New Testament
³ Arcade Fire (2007). Neon Bible: My Body is a Cage. Merge Records.

II. The Goodness of Creation

"In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.

²Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters. ³And God said, "Let there be light," and there was light. ⁴God saw that the light was good, and he separated the light from the darkness. ⁵God called the light "day," and the darkness he called "night." And there was evening, and there was morning—the first day...

³¹God saw all that he had made, and it was very good.

*And there was evening, and there was morning
—the sixth day.*

Genesis 1:1-5; 31

What God made, God still calls good.

III. Learning to See

*³³I will sing to the LORD all my life;
I will sing praise to my God as long as I live.*

*³⁴May my meditation be pleasing to him,
as I rejoice in the LORD.*

Psalms 104:33-34

- 1) Take time to walk in nature.
- 2) Take time to appreciate great art
- 3) Approach the day with a posture of expectancy.

Expectancy isn't the same as expectation. Expectation says, 'This is what I want – what I want to experience. This is what God must do for me or show me.'

Expectation is a form of demand. Expectancy, on the other hand, is a posture that says, 'God, I'm open to whatever you want to say to me, or whatever you want to show me.'

NOTES

"Start looking!..."

All is gold that glitters...

The French windows, thus flung open, let in an evening even lovelier than that of the day before. The west was swimming with sanguine colours, and a sort of sleepy flame lay along the lawn. The twisted shadows of the one or two garden trees showed upon this sheen, not gray or black, as in common daylight, but like arabesques written in vivid violet ink on some page of Eastern gold.

The sunset was one of those festive and yet mysterious conflagrations in which common things by their colours remind us of costly or curious things. The slates upon the sloping roof burned like the plumes of a vast peacock, in every mysterious blend of blue and green. The red-brown bricks of the wall glowed with all the October tints of strong ruby and tawny wines.

The sun seemed to set each object alight with a different coloured flame, like a man lighting fireworks; and even Innocent's hair, which was of a rather colourless fairness, seemed to have a flame of pagan gold on it as he strode across the lawn towards the one tall ridge of rockery...

Don't you see that everything in this garden looks like a jewel? And will you kindly tell me what the deuce is the good of a jewel except that it looks like a jewel? Leave off buying and selling, and start looking! Open your eyes, and you'll wake up in the New Jerusalem."⁴

May it be that we are a people who "start looking," who "open our eyes", looking to see the beauty and glory of God all around us and turn it all back in praise.

May we be those who join our hearts with what we hear in 1 Chronicles 29:11:

*"Yours, LORD, is the greatness and the power
and the glory and the majesty and the splendor,
for everything in heaven and earth is yours.
Yours, LORD, is the kingdom;
you are exalted as head over all."*

⁴ Chesterton, G.K. (31 May 2020). Manalive. Suzeteo Enterprises.



Reflection

Open Up

The Bible presents a deep connection between the physical and the spiritual. They are inseparable (much more on that in the weeks to come). Why do you think it's tempting to try and tease these apart – hold them as separate?

Can you think of ways that people can tend to think in categories that keep these as distinct categories, and elevate the spiritual (the Gnostic tendencies listed above)?

Dig In

1. Read Psalm 104:1-15. This text speaks of God as Creator, and of the dependence of the world on Him.
 - a. What are some ways that you are experiencing God's creation that you can turn back in praise? Share with the group some ways you've seen God's goodness in his creative works.
 - b. If you were to write your own stanza of praise to God as Creator, what might they include? How would it go?
 - c. Look again at vv.14-15. How do these verses encourage you to think about the daily needs that God meets through the natural world?
2. **Read Genesis 1:31.** Are there any aspects of creation that you are currently devaluing – not seeing as 'very good?' How might understanding the goodness of God's world help you correct that?

Prayer

Take some time to share your requests or praise items with your group. Make use of your responses to the questions above to inform your praises to God, and spend time giving thanks for the goodness of God and His world.