



CENTER FOR STEWARDSHIP

God's Story: The Relation of the First & Second Articles

GOAL OF THE STUDY

The tendency is to consider the Creed from a “spiritual” standpoint. Thus, the second article with its focus on the work of Jesus to redeem sinners is seen as central, and the first is little more than the prerequisite for the important content to follow. A direct consequence of a second-article focus is that the creation itself is marginalized and treated as mere scaffolding for the story of redemption. The point of this lesson is to correct that thinking, and

to establish the significance of the first article being first. Seen in the context of the economy of salvation, the first article is primary. God creates, man desecrates the good creation, God sends the Son to save and restore the creation, and the Spirit works to assure the plan's fulfillment. To keep the first article first is to recognize all of God's activity in the context of the creation.

ANSWERS

- 1 In John and Paul's writings, “world” can convey two meanings. At times the world is the object of Jesus's saving work. Other times, the world is pictured as the enemy of the Christian (Luther's famous terrible trio: Satan, the world, the sinful flesh). The distinction is the reality of sin. Considered from the standpoint of the world's sinfulness and rejection of God's will, the world is dangerous and the object of divine wrath. Considered from God's perspective of redemption, the world's sinfulness is to be overcome, and so the world is not inherently evil and not rejected.
- 2 This question reinforces the distinction between the creation as the masterwork of God's creative love, and the creation in its state of brokenness in the continuing aftermath of the fall. So, we embrace the creation as God's good work, and we recognize its brokenness and the threat it poses to Christian life.
- 3 For Paul, to be spiritual does not mean that one has inclinations or tendencies to see things more deeply, feel things that transcend the material, or have a certain tenderness to God-stuff. Paul is right: to be spiritual is to have the Holy Spirit—a reality for every believer through God's gift of grace. This “non-mystical” way of thinking about spirituality will likely seem quite odd and even wrong to many Christians who have learned to think of spirituality as vapid, metaphysical feelings that one must conjure or discover. The reality is that at the font, we all become spiritual.
- 4 The work of the Holy Spirit is to bring about the resurrection of our bodies on the last day. How ironic that the Spirit's greatest work is to bring a material result! The right contrast for Christian thinking is not spiritual versus material. Believers should love the creation, including their own bodies and then show it the respect, care, and honor it deserves. This has compelling implications for issues of health and self-care, as well as for rituals and attitudes surrounding death and burial.
- 5 As noted above, the contrast is not spiritual versus material or spirit versus body. The “flesh” means man in rebellion and succumbing to the lure of sin. So, the contrast is between Christian and non-Christian. To be led by the Holy Spirit is to be on the receiving

ANSWERS cont.

end of God's grace through his chosen means—and to live in repentance for our failures to live obediently according to his will.

- 6** Discipleship, as will become evident in future lessons, always comes with a price. It is inevitable that if you strive to conform to the will and example of our Lord, you will find yourself on the path of self-sacrifice and at odds with the surrounding culture. But, the glory of the resurrection and the restoration of the creation will eclipse forever all that is endured now.
- 7** Salvation is not merely personal and it is certainly not individualistic. Jesus came to save the world—the whole creation. The redemption and consequent restoration is aimed at the entirety of creation. The “sons of God” merely lead the way into the promised restoration of creation. Man desecrated the creation, and so only as man is made right with God and the surrounding creation through the work of Christ is the creation also made ready for restoration.
- 8** The examples are limitless. “Natural” forces that destroy other parts of creation; creatures that prey on one another; relationships that are marked with strife and anguish; famine; disease; death: all of these are evidence of the earth groaning and gasping as it waits for the promised restoration.
- 9** Clearly, the attitude that the world is “going to hell in a hand-basket . . . and good riddance” is ruled out by the promised restoration of the whole creation. Christians are called to an appreciation of their bond with all the rest of creation, and to an awareness of God's love of and provision for all parts of creation—not only the elect humans. This is the opening for a discussion about Christian care for the environment and the creatures of the world. Recognizing God's concern for the whole creation allows Christians to more actively invest in and celebrate the things of this world—they are not inherently evil simply because they are material.
- 10** Different people will approach this question in different ways—some will embrace the new ideas, some will be skeptical, and some will respond as if it is no big deal. Encourage everyone to think of one thing they could re-consider about the way they interact with God's creation.