



CENTER FOR STEWARDSHIP

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

INTRODUCTION

Week after week, we gather for worship and together confess the words of the Creed. Whether it is the Nicene Creed, the Apostles' Creed or the Athanasian Creed, the words tell the story of the plan—God's economy of salvation. The words are familiar. We know their rhythm and the flow of thought they express: the Father creates, the Son redeems, and the Spirit sanctifies.

Of the Creed's three articles, which do you think is the most important? Why do you think that? How do you see the three articles of the Creed fitting together—what is the relationship between the articles?

Perhaps the words of the Creed are too familiar, and the significance of the confession dulled. The Creed is laden with surprises, but for the purpose of this study, one point needs to be emphasized and appreciated: the first article is first.

Framing the central point in a tautology has its drawbacks. Tautologies tend to be not merely obscure but irksome. In this instance, though, the truth of the obvious statement is vital. The first article is first. God created the world—the entire universe—simply because he chose to. He created. We had nothing to do with it. No creature had anything to do with it. And God's remarkable creation was good; indeed, it was very good. That very good creation is the object of God's love and the reason for all that unfolds in the history of God's work in the world. The point of the second article is the rescue and restoration of God's first article work of creation. The third article confesses God's Spirit working through means to accomplish this redemption and restoration of creation.

The significance of recognizing and embracing the primacy of the first article can hardly be over-emphasized. Too easily, Christians hurry past the confession of creation and concentrate their attention on the familiar and essential narrative of the second article. Of course, it is right for us to delight in the story of Jesus—but not at the expense of a correct understanding of the place of God's creation in the story. In contrast to reducing the created world to a mere stage on which the drama of Christ's work unfolds, keeping the first article first lets us understand Jesus's work in the context of creation. Jesus fulfills the Father's plan for the sake of the creation. He lives, dies, and rises to restore the creation. The world is not inconsequential or secondary. It is the very reason for Jesus's work. It is the object of God's love and plan of redemption.

Right thinking about the first article and the central place of creation within God's work of salvation has several implications. The very materiality of the creation reminds us that the physical world is not to be contrasted negatively with what is spiritual. Because we live in the created realm, seeing creation from God's perspective helps us understand all of life as inherently godly and within the scope of Christian thinking. Finally, keeping the first article first influences how we understand God's intentions for the world: the resurrection of the body, and the re-creation of heaven and earth.

Q & A

The idea of the primacy of creation is highlighted throughout Scripture, but is prominent in the writings of John and Paul.

- 1 John 3:16 is widely recognized as a precise and compact expression of the gospel. What is not as readily recognized is the object of God's love. What does John 3:16 mean by "world"? How does John 12:47 shed more light on Jesus's work of redemption?
- 2 How does God's assessment of the creation (Gn 1:31) coincide with the idea that creation is central to God's work? Given this attitude toward the creation, what are we to make of the admonitions in I John 2:15-17 and James 4:4?
- 3 Read Romans 8:9-11. How does Paul's definition of "spiritual" in these verses differ from the way most people understand what it means to be "spiritual"?
- 4 How should Paul's declaration in Romans 8:11 affect our attitude toward our own bodies? What concrete actions or behaviors should result from rightly understanding the Spirit's work?
- 5 Read Romans 8:12-18. What is the contrast Paul is making in these verses? How do you make sure that you are "being led by the Holy Spirit"?
- 6 How does striving to live obediently as a disciple of Christ open one to suffering? Is suffering inevitable? What sort of "glory" do you think Paul has in mind?
- 7 Read Romans 8:19-23. What is the relationship between believers ("sons of God") and the rest of creation? How do these verses affect the idea of personal or individual salvation?
- 8 What are some examples of the creation groaning and suffering the pains of childbirth as it waits "the revealing of the sons of God"?
- 9 How does the truth of these verses contrast with the attitude that "it's all going to burn"? What impact should the reality of the restoration of the whole creation have on the way that Christians think and live?
- 10 What changes do you need to make in your attitudes or actions based on the truth that the first article must be first?

PRAYER

In your closing prayer, thank God for the wonders of creation and the promise that Christ's redemption will extend to every corner of the creation. Ask God to help you be a "first article" follower, recognizing the extent of God's love for all of creation, and embracing that creation with wonder and care.