



the

STORY

in six acts



Understanding the Biblical Story in Six Acts

Patrick J. Griffiths

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◆ For Christ and His Church.

Table of Contents

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	Prologue	1
1	Act 1: God	2
2	Act 2: Creation	11
3	Act 3: Rejection	26
4	Act 4: Redemption	35
5	Act 5: Re-Creation	47
6	Act 6: Worship through Joy	62
	Epilogue	72
	Endnotes	73

Prologue

*“Now all this took place **to fulfill what was spoken** by the Lord through the prophet” Matthew 1:22*

No matter where we “poke” our stick in the Bible, we will touch the *Story*. The Bible tells us why God created. His purpose from the beginning of time has been to fill the earth with the knowledge of His glory for the joy of His people (Num. 14:21; Isa. 11:9; Hab. 2:14; Ps. 16:11; Isa. 25:6-9). A part of this *Story* is the fall of man, his rescue by God, and the relationship between the two flowing from this.

The *Story* traces the fulfillment of a **promise** made by God to crush sin by the voluntary and vicarious sacrifice of His only begotten Son, the Seed, whereby redeeming His people from sin and adopting them into His family. It is the *Story* of His immeasurable grace. This is the **gospel**; it is **good news**.

This *Story* of Fall, rescue, and joy is the telling of the following tale. May God enable us to see our story as the unfolding of His *Story*, and may the embracing of this truth cause you to experience the fullness of joy that is only possible **in Him**.

The *Story* ends where it began, with God. The **Gospel** secures for God **worshippers**. One day all things created will singularly **worship** God without hindrance. This will be a glorious and happy day. It will be a day filled with God! Are you a follower of Jesus?

Act One: God

“In the Beginning God”
(Gen. 1:1)

Every story has a beginning and this *Story* begins with God. God — the mere utterance of the word conjures up various images. Who is God? Is the noun representative of a pure idea, an ethereal being with no tangible expression? How do we come to know this God? Is He singular or in company with other “gods?” Is this God limited or limitless? Is God to be worshipped or feared or both? This study explores the God openly revealed in the text of Holy Writ. There is no loftier thought or central idea than God. The struggle in beginning the *Story* with God is to see Him apart from His creation. Our difficulty is in recognizing how creation exists so that through this temporal and finite vehicle we might come to know the eternal and infinite God. This task alone is daunting. Who is God apart from His creation? This idea is our meditation.

As I study Holy Writ, I find myself overwhelmed and perhaps overcome by the sheer magnitude of who God is in the revelation of the Bible. Yet God is far more than what we know of Him from Scripture. He is unfathomable. He is immeasurable. He is without outside limitations. How can a finite vessel of clay comprehend the incomprehensible God? Is the vastness of our universe capable of containing God? I think not.

God is knowable through His actions (i.e. creation/general revelation) and His words (i.e. Bible/special revelation). Both are expressions of who God is and what He does. General

revelation, what we know of God from the created world around us, is **the storybook**. It communicates His eternal power and Godhead (Rom. 1). In so doing, we see His handiwork and glory (Ps. 19:1). Such knowledge given by general revelation is just that — general or broad. It is non-specific. It is very generic. General revelation provides a subjective measurement of God. Special revelation, what God reveals about Himself in Scripture, on the other hand is specific, exact and intimate. **It is the storyline**. It is relationship oriented. Though I cannot know God exhaustively, it does not mean I cannot know Him personally or intimately. Special revelation enables me to know my God. Special revelation is objective and absolute in as far as it reveals God. God acts and speaks. He works in such a way that those He creates can understand Him. Through communication, He causes a relationship whereby the created benefit and He is glorified.

Who is the God that is so passionate about His glory and us? He is described in Scripture as self-existing, eternal, perfect, unchanging, all powerful, all knowing, always present, and infinite. Such qualities of being do not exist in the created. Created vessels cannot fully comprehend the vastness of God.

Each of these attributes are worthy of our fullest attention, yet we are incapable of completely unpacking the immeasurable. Someday, gone will be the shroud of depravity and the finite mind will pursue the infinite God with an untethered mind. We will consider a standard understanding of God's greatness in our exploration of this unfathomable ocean depth. Our intent is not to be exhaustive, but to stimulate thought. There are fuller readings, yet even these are only singular blades of grass in vast fields of grain. God uses vast

language to describe His promises of multiplying future generations as “the stars of the heavens and as the sand which is on the seashore” (Gen. 22:17). Yet because God creates the stars and sand, they are by nature finite, and thus capable of being numbered. Only God exists outside of numbering. We must shut out the sounds of creation and simply listen to the immensity of God. We must slow down so that we might know Him. We seek to describe God through “shadow.” All illustrations come out of creation, yet in the absence of the created there is only God. How might we go about describing an infinite God when the only vehicle of knowing God comes through finite creation?

God alone has written a *Story*, whereby He makes known to that which He creates who He is and what He does. This revelation (unveiling) of His person and work enable His people to know Him. **The relationship between God and man is one of gracious condescension.** Had He not stooped, no one could span the barrier between God and humanity. He has written each part of the *Story* with the intent of reflecting the glory of His being. His people are the beneficiaries of this pursuit. Their quest is to seek God in the self-disclosure of His person as explained in His attributes and reflected in His work. Although the word “attribute” might be foreign to our vocabulary, it occurs regularly. Attributes are the words used to describe other objects or ideas. To speak of and describe someone as thrifty, intelligent, or warm is to speak of their attributes. Such categories as noted are changeable. There are, however, qualities within each of us that are unchanging. They are what define us as a race. The thought of two eyes, two ears, one nose, one mouth, two arms, and two legs are consistent patterns of description as to what makes us what we are. We

go beyond this to intellect, the power of choice, and the fullest range of emotion. We go even further in describing our essence as human in contrast to animals and inanimate objects. Thus, when we speak of God and describe Him by His attributes, we reference those qualities that are uniquely His. God is in a category of existence unlike anything created, for He alone and only is uncreated. Such qualities manifested by Him are what make Him God. Creation has limitations and is finite. Only God is these things.

As one studies the Scripture, it becomes clear there is no god like the God of the Bible. Consider the following verses:

Then he said, 'Tomorrow.' So he said, '*May it be according to your word, that you may know that **there is no one like the LORD our God.***' (Exod. 8:10; 9:14; 15:11)

Indeed their rock is not like our Rock, Even our enemies themselves judge this. (Deut. 32:31; 33:26)

"To whom then will you liken Me that I would be his equal?" says the Holy One. (Isa. 40:25; 46:9)

There is none like our God . . . none. The following attributes (qualities) exist only in God. These attributes are the incommunicable attributes of God. They are what "make" God, God. Most of what we consider will be virtually impossible for us to bend our minds around. Yet it is the sheer magnitude of God and inability of man that provoke us to the study. Rather than hoping to grasp God fully, we must content ourselves with a filling that leaves us longing. That is exactly where God would have us be. With this in mind, let us consider God.

First, God is self-existing (Exod. 3:14-15). God identified Himself to Moses by the name, "I AM." God has been, is, and will be. There never was a time when God was not. He always existed. Such thinking defies reason or logic, but God is beyond human comprehension. Self-existence speaks of His origin. God has no family tree. He has no parentage, no lineage, but rather always existed.

Second, God is eternal (Ps. 90:1, 2). If self-existence speaks to His origin, then His eternity speaks to His longevity. The Psalms speak of God's eternity. Psalm 90 speaks of God preceding creation and of being "from everlasting to everlasting."

From eternity past, into the immediate present, and reaching beyond into eternity future, God has been, is, and will forever be. When compared to man's mortal origin, God "abides forever" (Ps. 102:11, 12). John captures God's eternity with the statement, "I am the Alpha and the Omega" (Rev. 1:8; 21:6; 22:13). God is the first (i.e. "self-existing") and the last (i.e. "eternal"). There is no ending in sight for God. He will never "wear out."

Third, God is perfect (1 John 1:5; Deut. 32:4; Isa. 25:1). There is nothing lacking in who God is and what He does. In the being of God, there is nothing out of order. There are no loose ends or dull edges in need of sharpening. All of God is exactly what He is supposed to be. Because this is true, **whatever need exists in the created is answered in the Creator.** Because God is perfect, nothing within Him or external to Him necessitates change on His part.

Fourth, God is unchanging (immutable [Mal. 3:6; Heb. 6:13-18; James 1:17]). Between His self-existence and eternity lies God in His essence and action. What God has been and what God will be defines who God is in the created present. There are no variables with God. God does not grow or mature. There is no decline or decay. We speak of change only as it exists in creation. To apply such terminology to God is as inappropriate as defining creation as unchanging.

Fifth, God is all-powerful (omnipotent [Matt. 7:29; 19:26; 28:18; Eph. 1:20, 21]). Omnipotence is a compound word coming from the Latin meaning “all-power.” This is the first of three “Omni” words (omnipresent, omniscient, and omnipotent). **Nothing God chooses to do or wills to do is beyond His ability to do.** What God chooses to do, He does. There is no gap between God’s desire and the fulfilling of the desire. There is no power equal to or surpassing His. Whatever power exists in creation is an imputed power (Rom. 13:1ff; John 19:11; Dan. 4:34, 35). God gives power (authority) to creation, but creation has no intrinsic power of its own. He is the Sun from which the moon of humanity reflects power.

Sixth, God is all knowing (omniscient [Ps. 139:4-13]). Omniscience is a Latin word meaning, “all knowing.” In an era when search engines provide hundreds of thousands of hits in a matter of seconds, it is impossible to comprehend how God knows all knowable information without sequence or space. Because God lives in an eternal now, there is no processing of information by God. He owns all information. Again, we use what we know to explain what is unknown. The accessibility of information and the processing of the same is only a muted shadow of God’s omniscience. As one

stands on the precipice of such immensity, there should be awe.

Seventh, God is all-present (omnipresent [1 Kings 8:27; Ps. 139:7-10]). There is nowhere God is not. God's omnipresence means **God is everywhere, at the same time, in the fullness of His being**. Regardless of the height, depth, width or length of any search, God is already there. When one entertains the sheer volume of the heavens, when piling and compounding galaxies, to think God did such things, knows all of the parts, and is present in every corner of creation, should we not tremble before such greatness?

Eighth, God is infinite (Job 9:10). Whatever limits exist within creation do not exist within God. Each of the qualities noted transcend our finite abilities to fully comprehend and appreciate. The vastness of God astounds. It is in the context of His infinitude that we stand stunned by the simple panoramic view of unparalleled beauty and unfathomable mystery. What is a fitting response to a study of God?

- Listen to how Isaiah the prophet describes his encounter with the hem of God's garment.

¹ In the year of King Uzziah's death **I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, lofty and exalted, with the train of His robe filling the temple.** ² Seraphim stood above Him, each having six wings: with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. ³ And one called out to another and said, "Holy, Holy, Holy, is the LORD of hosts, The whole earth is full of His glory." ⁴ And the foundations of the thresholds trembled at the voice of him who called out, while the temple was filling with smoke. ⁵ Then I said, "**Woe is me, for I am ruined!** Because I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips; For my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts." (Isa. 6:1-5)

- Listen to how the apostle John describes his encounter with the vision of God.

⁸I, John, am the one who heard and saw these things. And **when I heard and saw, I fell down to worship** at the feet of the angel who showed me these things. ⁹But he said to me, "Do not do that. I am a fellow servant of yours and of your brethren the prophets and of those who heed the words of this book. **Worship God.**" (Rev. 22:8, 9)

- Listen to how the apostle Peter describes his encounter with the living God.

⁶When they had done this, they enclosed a great quantity of fish, and their nets began to break; ⁷so they signaled to their partners in the other boat for them to come and help them. And they came and filled both of the boats, so that they began to sink. ⁸But when Simon Peter saw that, he fell down at Jesus' feet, saying, "**Go away from me Lord, for I am a sinful man, O Lord!**" (Luke 5:6-8)

- Listen to how Job summarizes his encounter with the whisper of God's voice.

¹Then Job answered the LORD and said, ²"I know that You can do all things, and that no purpose of Yours can be thwarted. ³'Who is this that hides counsel without knowledge?' "Therefore I have declared that which I did not understand, things too wonderful for me, which I did not know." ⁴'Hear, now, and I will speak; I will ask You, and You instruct me.' ⁵"I have heard of You by the hearing of the ear; But now my eye sees You; ⁶**Therefore I retract, and I repent in dust and ashes.**" (Job 42:1-6)

In considering God, it is the hope that the Holy Spirit will open our senses so that we might "feel" the impact of such truth on our minds and hearts. May it please God to allow us to see the hem of His garment, the whisper of His voice. May

Act One: God

He be pleased to brush up alongside us so that we might feel the pressure, the weight of who God is, and under that weight bow in breath-robbing worship.

This is where the *Story* begins and it begins with God.

Act 2: Creation

"In the Beginning God created"

(Gen. 1:1; Rom. 11:36; Col. 1:15-17; 1 Cor. 8:6)

Our *Story* began with God and later we will see how the *Story* ends with God, yet creation is sandwiched between these two bookends. When God chose to create, everything changed. Where once there was no need for grace, grace would immediately exist in the very act of creating. God condescended in the act of creating. Nothing the lesser (creation) does can merit favor from the greater (God). Yet why did God create? God's purpose from the beginning of time has been to fill the earth with the knowledge of His glory for the joy of His people (Isa. 11:9; Hab. 2:14; Ps. 16:11; Isa. 25:6-9). Yet how do we get from the beginning of the *Story* to its intended end?

God's *Story* has six acts: God, creation, rejection, redemption, re-creation, and worship through joy. Why would God create a world in which rejection (rebellion) would form one of the primary themes? Is this element intentional? Does it serve a larger purpose than the tragedy it visits on those who rebel and the residual consequences of this rebellion? The only way to answer these questions is to see the larger frame in which the picture is set.

All of us, without exception, live our lives as a drama. We are on stage every single day. What will we say? What will we do? According to which story will we live? If we are not answering these questions with the biblical script, we will follow another. We can't avoid

living by someone's stage instructions, even if merely our own.¹

Creation is everything outside of God. Thus, creation is everything that is not God. The Bible is clear; God made the heavens and the earth (Gen. 1:1; John 1:1-3; Col. 1:5-17). Nothing exists that He did not create. The Bible is equally clear how the end of all activity is to be "for the sake of His name" (Col. 3:17, 23) which is equivalent to "for the glory of God" (1 Cor. 10:31; 1 Pet. 4:11). God's intent in creating was to create a stage or context in which His presence could be displayed, and He would receive worship by the work of His hands in the joy of His people (Ps. 19:1ff). Revelation 4, 5, and 22 note this idea. All matter exists for the sole purpose of glorifying the unsearchable and unfathomable person of God (Isa. 43:7; Rom. 11:36; 16:27; Gal. 1:5; Eph. 3:21; Phil. 4:20; 2 Tim. 4:18; Heb. 13:21; 2 Pet. 3:18).

Matter within creation has several categories. First, there is a division between animate and inanimate objects, things living versus things not living (i.e. a bird versus a rock). Then there is a division between image-bearing elements (i.e. humanity) and non-image bearing elements (i.e. birds). The Bible speaks of humanity as the apex of God's order within creation (Ps. 8). Humanity receives the right to rule over and steward creation (Gen. 1:26; Ps. 8:6). God's purpose in creating humanity is for them to reflect Him and through them to spread His glory throughout creation and to the ends of the earth (Gen. 1:22, 28). All of creation bears His imprint although not in the same manner as humanity (Rom. 1:20; Ps. 19:1). Because of this, creation is a **shadow** of its Maker. The shadow (i.e. creation) points to God. That is His design for it.

God works in creation and speaks in revelation. Both are means whereby we know the *Story*. In God's initial acts, He created a context for those with whom He would have fellowship. He called all things from nothing. He wrote the *Story* in which all elements are present. God created everything outside Himself. All of creation speaks to His glory (Ps. 19:1) with humanity being the diamond within this spectacular setting (Ps. 8). Although creation speaks of His glory, only humanity carries His image (Gen. 1:26, 27). Creation, as overwhelming as it is, is only a shadow of the One who formed the substance. The shadow can only point; it can never provide. The shadow does not replace God; it only compliments Him.

Sin happens when we look to the shadow (creation) rather than to God for the meeting of our designer need. "No created thing could ever be for us what the Creator himself alone can be."²

One of the aspects of living **in the *Story*** is recognizing how everything is **from** God, **sustained** by God, and **for** God (Rom. 11:36; 1 Cor. 8:6; Col. 1:15-17). If this mindset is not embraced, then "life becomes an empty bubble on the sea of nothingness."³ All stories have a beginning, and our *Story* must begin with God and must recognize how everything is "from Him, through Him, and for Him - to whom be glory forever and ever, Amen" (Rom. 11:36).

"In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." This verse solves the problem of the "First Cause." What was there in the beginning? Where are we, the mankind, coming from and where are we going to? This has been an inscrutable question to

thoughtful men and women in history. In 1977 Alex Haley's *Roots* premiered on a network television and about 130 million American watched the series. Why would people be interested in a black man's effort to trace his family tree? An answer to this is that every person wants to know his roots and have a sense of history or find his place in history.⁴

When the Apostle Paul set foot in the Areopagus of Athens, he spoke as follows to those assembled there: "As I passed along and observed the objects of your worship, I also found an altar with this inscription, 'To an unknown God.' What you worship as unknown, I proclaim to you. The God, who made the world and everything in it, is Lord of heaven and earth. . ." (Acts 17:23-24).

Creation cries out for explanation. Everything in it strains to be heard. Everyone must address its voice. If I were to stand before you with a basketball in hand, you will rightly conclude there is both design and intent for its existence. If such a conclusion is provoked by, say a basketball, or soccer ball, or baseball, how much more so for creation itself.

Antony Flew, a British philosophy professor and leading champion of atheism for more than half a century, changed his mind and became a deist at the age of 81. In a telephone interview with ABC News (12/9/2004), Flew indicated that a 'super-intelligence is the only good explanation for the origin of life and the complexity of nature.' Nicholas Wade in the *New York Times* (6/13/2000) summarized the current state of the affairs regarding the origin of life as follows: 'The chemistry of the first life is a nightmare to explain. No

one has yet developed a plausible explanation to show how the earliest chemicals of life—thought to be RNA—might have constructed themselves from the inorganic chemicals likely to have been around on early earth. The spontaneous assembly of a small RNA molecule on the primitive earth ‘would have been a near miracle’ two experts on the subject helpfully declared last year.’⁵

Only what the Bible identifies as a “fool” (Ps. 14:1) can silence this voice and live a delusional existence. It is not my desire to defend the clarity of the biblical text. Some would doubt there is any God behind matter and others would suggest God started a process allowing natural evolution to spawn what now exists. I will work from the premise that what the text says is clear, “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.” To remove God as Creator and the One from whom and for whom all things exist, denigrates the dignity of the Creator and that which He created.

The second act of the *Story* is creation. Creation exists for a very definable and distinct reason. Adam and Eve were to glorify God by acknowledging how everything came from Him, is sustained by Him, and is for Him. They were to extend and expand the Garden until it covered the globe. Their responsibility was to be fruitful and multiple and replenish the earth. We will see their rebellion against this design, but for now, we will simply consider creation as a whole. This is the biblical *Story* that all stories come from. In the absence of knowing this *Story*, no story makes sense.

It is difficult for us to wrap our minds around God’s intent or motive in creating, yet all creation exists for His glory.

Creation reflects God, and through the reflection, He receives the honor and worship worthy of His being. Creation is not about us or for us. Creation is about God and for God.

There are three unchanging truths concerning creation forming the context for the unfolding of the *Story*.

The first unchanging truth is that everything outside of God comes **from** God.

For **from Him and through Him and to Him are all things**. To Him be the glory forever. Amen. (Rom. 11:36)

“God is the absolute origin of all that exists – all matter, all energy, and all organization. God as the author of everything explains the notion of God’s absolute mastery over all of existence. Because everything was created by God, then God has authority over it all.”⁶ There is nothing outside of God’s rule. When King David collected the offering made by the people for the building of the Temple, his heart overflowed with gratitude. Here is the prayer he offered.

¹¹ Yours, O LORD, is the greatness and the power and the glory and the victory and the majesty, indeed everything that is in the heavens and the earth; Yours is the dominion, O LORD, and You exalt Yourself as head over all. ¹² Both riches and honor come from You, and You rule over all, and in Your hand is power and might; and it lies in Your hand to make great and to strengthen everyone. ¹³ Now therefore, our God, we thank You, and praise Your glorious name. ¹⁴ But who am I and who are my people that we should be able to offer as generously as this? **For all things come from You**, and from Your hand we have given You. (1 Chron. 29:11-14)

We must hesitate to add anything to the beauty and majesty of this text. Anything we say will only diminish the weight of this passage. Friend, this is the language of the New Testament (Matt. 6:13; 1 Tim. 1:17; Rev. 5:13).

⁶ By the word of the LORD the heavens were made, and by the breath of His mouth all their host. ⁷He gathers the waters of the sea together as a heap; He lays up the deeps in storehouses. ⁸ Let all the earth fear the LORD; Let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of Him. ⁹ **For He spoke, and it was done; He commanded, and it stood fast.** (Ps. 33:6-9)

We can deny the text of all weight, authority and veracity, but let us at least acknowledge this is what the text says. God spoke and it was so (Gen. 1:3, 6, 9, 11, 14, 20, 24, 26). Remember, creation is the working of His will. What God desires He does. There is no gap between His will and the fulfillment of His will. Listen to the clarity of the following passages.

For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever. Amen. (Rom. 11:36)

⁵ For even if there are so-called gods whether in heaven or on earth, as indeed there are many gods and many lords, ⁶ yet for us there is but one God, the Father, **from whom are all things** and we exist for Him; and one Lord, Jesus Christ, **by whom** are all things, and we exist through Him. (1 Cor. 8:5, 6)

¹⁵ He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. ¹⁶ **For by Him all things were created,** both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities - **all things have been created through Him and for Him.** ¹⁷ He is **before all things,** and in Him **all things hold together.** (Col. 1:15-17)

[God] in these last days has spoken to us in His Son, whom He

appointed heir of all things, **through whom also He made the world.** (Heb. 1:2)

The word “through” is the preposition **dia**. The word “made” is **poieo** and is a “doing” verb. God made the world through the agency of Jesus Christ.⁷ **Jesus Christ made the world; Jesus Christ owns the world.** It is His to do with as He wills. Scripture identifies Him as the Maker of all the earth and is thus the Creator of all the earth.

Come, let us worship and bow down, Let us kneel before **the LORD our Maker.** (Ps. 95:6)

May you be blessed of the LORD, **Maker of heaven and earth.** (Ps. 115:15)

The rich and the poor have a common bond, **The LORD is the maker of them all.** (Prov. 22:2)

Thus says the LORD, your Redeemer, and the one who formed you from the womb, **"I, the LORD, am the maker of all things, Stretching out the heavens by Myself and spreading out the earth all alone."** (Isa. 44:24)

That you have forgotten the LORD your **Maker, Who stretched out the heavens And laid the foundations of the earth,** That you fear continually all day long because of the fury of the oppressor, as he makes ready to destroy? But where is the fury of the oppressor? (Isa. 51:13)

For your husband is your **Maker,** whose name is the LORD of hosts; and your Redeemer is the Holy One of Israel, **who is called the God of all the earth.** (Isa. 54:5)

Do you not know? Have you not heard? The Everlasting God, the LORD, **the Creator of the ends of the earth** does not become weary or tired. His understanding is inscrutable. (Isa. 40:28)

For they exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than **the Creator**, who is blessed forever. Amen. (Rom. 1:25)

Therefore, those also who suffer according to the will of God shall entrust their souls **to a faithful Creator in doing what is right**. (1 Pet. 4:19)

Friends, let us not attempt to outsmart God. Let us right now openly acknowledge all we see and all we do not see as coming from God.

The second unchanging truth is that God sustains everything outside of Himself.

For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever. Amen. (Rom. 11:36, [c.f. 1 Cor. 8:5, 6; Col. 1:15-17])

Let us allow others to comment on this incredible thought.

Christ is the controlling and unifying force in nature.⁸

The meaning is, that they are kept in the present state; their existence, order, and arrangement are continued by his power. **If unsupported by him, they would fall into disorder, or sink back to nothing.** If this be the proper interpretation, then it is the ascription to Christ of infinite power – for nothing less could be sufficient to uphold the universe; and of infinite wisdom – for this is needed to preserve the harmonious action of the suns and systems of which it is composed. None could do this but one who is Divine; and hence we see the reason why he is represented as the image of the invisible God. He is the great and glorious and ever-

active Agent by whom the perfections of God are made known.⁹

God is not only the creator of all that exists, but also the **sustainer** of all that exists. What this means is that, from moment to moment, all that exists only does so because God **wills** it to exist. Should God stop willing the existence of anything or everything, then that existence would instantly end.¹⁰

Right now God is sustaining our moments. He is holding in order this moment and the ones following.

The third unchanging truth is that everything outside of God is **for** God.

God has intent or design for what He creates. There is a reason behind all of this.

For **from Him and through Him and to Him are all things**. To Him be the glory forever. Amen. (Rom. 11:36, [c.f. 1 Cor. 8:5, 6; Col. 1:15-17])

The LORD has made everything for its own purpose, even the wicked for the day of evil. (Prov. 16:4)

Consider this “formula” as found throughout the New Testament.

For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. **To Him be the glory forever**. Amen. (Rom. 11:36)

[Now] to the only wise God, through Jesus Christ, **be the glory forever**. Amen. (Rom. 16:27)

[God,] **to whom be the glory forevermore.** Amen. (Gal. 1:5)

[Now] **to Him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations forever and ever.** Amen. (Eph. 3:21)

Now to our God and Father be the glory forever and ever. Amen. (Phil. 4:20)

The Lord will rescue me from every evil deed, and will bring me safely to His heavenly kingdom; **to Him be the glory forever and ever.** Amen. (2 Tim. 4:18)

[Now the God of peace] equip you in every good thing to do His will, working in us that which is pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, **to whom be the glory forever and ever.** Amen. (Heb. 13:21)

But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. **To Him be the glory, both now and to the day of eternity.** Amen. (2 Pet. 3:18)

And He has made us to be a kingdom, priests to His God and Father – **to Him be the glory and the dominion forever and ever.** Amen. (Rev. 1:6)

[I heard the voice of many angels] ¹² saying with a loud voice, "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power and riches and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing." ¹³ And every created thing which is in heaven and on the earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all things in them, I heard saying, "To Him who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb, **be blessing and honor and glory and dominion forever and ever.**" ¹⁴ And the four living creatures kept saying, "Amen." And the elders fell down and worshiped. (Rev. 5:12-14)

The end of all "things" sits with God. Everything is pushing toward the one climatic moment when He will receive all the glory from His creation. Yet what does "glory" mean?

The Old Testament word for 'glory' comes from the Hebrew word for weight, or heaviness. The idea behind it suggests substance and importance. For example, when Joseph finally revealed himself to his brothers in Egypt, he instructed them, 'So you shall tell my father of all my glory in Egypt, and of all that you have seen; and you shall hurry and bring my father down here.' In other words, he wanted his greatness, his privileged position and exalted status and power, to be reported to Jacob.

In the New Testament, the word 'glory' conveys the same idea. A man's glory is his good reputation. It is that about him which is praiseworthy. Jesus uses the word this way in Matthew 6:2, 'Therefore, when you do a charitable deed, do not sound a trumpet before you as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory from men. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward.' These people made a production of their giving so that the greatness of their generosity would be observed by many people.

John Calvin was correct when he said that creation is the theater of God's glory. Because this is true, we exist for the glory of God. And just as the inanimate creation has been called to glorify God, so have we. The inanimate creation and the lower animate creatures bring glory to God simply by being what God created them to be. As Psalm 19:1 teaches, by virtue of their mere existence the heavens declare the glory of God.¹¹

Giving God glory simply means affirming all of life, your circumstances, your situations, your station, your existence

in all of its mystery and complexity, in all of its joy and suffering, all of it, its breath-robbing delight and despairing loss of all hope is from God, sustained by God, and for God. Such affirmations in the midst of life give Him glory. Giving Him glory, worshipping Him, serving Him is the simple affirmation that everything is from Him, sustained by Him, and for Him. No act apart from this carries any more weight than a billion other acts, and all acts from this give Him glory.

The evidence is overwhelming and convincing to the unbiased mind. Even in this fallen world, we still see the grandeur and beauty of God's world - the grandiose Grand Canyon, the mighty Pacific Ocean, the clear blue sky, and the endless fields. The Scripture speaks to this idea in multiple ways. Consider the following.

Whether, then, you eat or drink or whatever you do, **do all to the glory of God.** (Col. 3:17a)

The larger context of this text speaks to the Lord's Table and doubtful matters falling outside of the Bible's direct address. In such matters, regardless as to what they are, do them to the glory of God.

Whatever you do in word or deed, do all **in the name of the Lord Jesus**, giving thanks through Him to God the Father. (Col. 3:17)

This text is in the household paragraph of Colossians (Col. 3:18-4:1). Your moments in "family" are all from Him, through Him, and for Him.

Whoever speaks is to do so as one who is speaking the utterances of God; whoever serves is to do so as one who is serving by the strength which God supplies; **so that in all things God may be**

glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belongs the glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen. (1 Pet. 4:11)

God put in play all of this so that we would affirm Him in everything. This is what it means to glorify God. No matter what your situation and your station in life, if you can acknowledge it as coming from God, sustained by God, and for God, you are living for His glory and living in *Story*.

What is of interest is to see how our salvation contains the *Story*; our **justification** comes **from God**, God sustains our sanctification, and our **glorification** is **for God**. Friend, will you not, right now, affirm everything in your life as coming from God, sustained by God, and ultimately for God?

In the absence of such affirmation, we are fools.

The fool has said in his heart, "**There is no God.**" They are corrupt, they have committed abominable deeds; There is no one who does good. (Ps. 14:1; see also Ps. 53:1)

Do you know God? Do you recognize everything in your life is from Him, sustained by Him, and for Him? Today, give God the glory!

Act 3: Rejection

*“You shall not eat . . . She took and ate and he ate”
(Gen. 2:15-17; 3:6)*

Before anything existed, there was God. God is self-existing. He needs nothing for the sustaining and perpetuating of His being. He is eternal having neither a beginning nor an ending. He is perfect, unchanging, all-powerful, all-present, all-knowing and infinite. There are no outside limitations to God. In creating, God condescended. He stooped in the making of a platform in which and from which His glory would be known.

The world He created is beautiful. Beauty is only definable as it reflects God. All things discovered by humanity speak to God’s beauty. All of its minutia and detail, its symmetry and predictability shadow the Maker.

Those things we taste, smell, touch, hear and see in shadow are mere whispers of His voice. The breath-robbling splendor of morning light and sheer magnitude of ocean’s depth is only the outer reaches of His garment’s hem. In comparison to God, all of creation’s mystery is as nothing. “My lifetime is as **nothing** in His sight” (Ps. 39:5). “All the nations are as **nothing** before Him, they are regarded by Him as less than **nothing** and meaningless” (Isa. 40:17). “His enemies are considered as **nothing**” (Isa. 41:11, 12). In fact, “all the inhabitants of the earth are accounted as **nothing**” (Dan. 4:35).

Think of those inexplicable moments when everything appears to be right with your world. This is the world in

which Adam and Eve lived 24/7. They lived with God. Their communion with Him was unhindered by any barrier other than the barrier separating finite man from infinite God. They felt love, acceptance, blessing and service. They knew no shame, no guilt, and no fear, things that currently mark our existence. It was a life unmarked by war, disharmony, tension, awkwardness, confusion, and misunderstanding. The world was at peace with God and itself.

All of this was theirs. In the abundance of God's invitation, He gave one prohibition for the good of His people, "From the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat from it you will surely die" (Gen. 2:17). The caution was for their protection. The question asked of them was simple, "Who do you love more, yourself or me?" Adam and Eve chose self rather than God, and thus chose to reject all God was in His person and work. It was a rejection for joy. Somehow, we must capture the brilliance of their existence prior to their sin and the invading darkness in their choice. Their choice would become systemic; it now pervades the whole.

Our problem with **sin is that it is rooted in the core of our being**. It permeates our hearts. It is because sin is at our core and **not merely at the exterior of our lives** that the Bible says: "There is none righteous, no not one; there is none who understands; there is none who seeks after God. They have all turned aside; they have together become unprofitable; there is none who does good, no, not one." (Romans 3:10-12).¹²

No one and nothing is left untouched. What they did, we continue to do. Like Adam and Eve, our voices are joined to theirs and we say “no” to God.

In that “no” came shame, guilt, fear, war, disharmony, tension, awkwardness, confusion, and misunderstanding. Nothing would ever be the same. Herein is the consequence of our rebellion against God. The world would now be in conflict with God and itself. Adam and Eve would now hide from God and seek to cover their nakedness by the work of their own hands. **Their attempts at undoing their deed only compounded the problem.** The shame and fear they experienced ripped at their souls as darkness called out from within. Pandora's Box has been opened and nothing created can close it. How might we grab hold of our evil sin against God? This is a dark journey wherein lies no light. There is good news, but before we experience the sensation of sighing, we must moan the agony of irretrievable loss. Listen to the words used to describe this sin.

First, sin is a *missing of a mark* (Ps. 51:4; Rom. 3:23). When Adam and Eve sinned against God they compounded the problem by their attempt to cover up the transgression through their own efforts. Sin is very much like the proverbial “tar baby.” “The Tar-Baby is a doll made of tar and turpentine used to entrap Br'er Rabbit in the second of the Uncle Remus stories. The more Br'er Rabbit fights the Tar-Baby, the more entangled he becomes. In modern usage according to Random House, ‘tar baby’ refers to any ‘sticky situation’ that is only aggravated by additional contact.”¹³ They were persistently missing the mark.

The word “coming short” is a very graphic word. Matthew 19:20 uses it of the Rich Young Ruler who “lacked” and was thus deficient in his relationship to God. It is used of the prodigal son who took his inheritance and squandered it away in lascivious living (Luke 15:14). Hebrews 11:37 uses it to describe those who were persecuted and thus “destitute.” The Septuagint (LXX), the Greek translation of the Old Testament, uses the word in Nehemiah 9:21 where it is translated by “lacking nothing (Israel)” and Daniel 5:27 “found wanting.” The Hebrew word for “lacking” is found in Judges 20:16. “Seven hundred crack marksmen, all of them left-handed and from the tribe of Benjamin, ‘could sling a stone at a hair, and not miss.’ Another literal usage is in Proverbs 19:2: ‘he who makes haste with his feet misses his way.’ Such literal occurrences are rare, however.”¹⁴

We will never see sin’s true nature until we see ourselves in comparison to God. Sin sells us short. Our rebellion against God speaks of deficiency, of lack, as we assess who God is and what He does. God looked at everything He created and said, “It is very good.” We look at the work of God and conclude otherwise.

Second, sin is a *passing over a boundary* or *transgression* (Matt. 15:2, 3; Acts 1:25; 2 John 9). This presupposes two truths: rules must exist for a transgression to take place, and transgressions exist where there is law and order. God gave a clear directive and Adam and Eve chose to cross the line. Notice also Rom. 2:23; 4:14, 15; 5:14; Gal. 3:19; 1 Tim. 2:14; Heb. 9:15.

Transgression assumes an absolute standard that is transgressed. Living in a lawless society does not negate the

nature of sin as a transgression for God's law is irrevocable and universal. What God invited, we rejected. His invitation and prohibition are for our joy and His glory. To this, we said “no.”

Third, sin is a *bending of what is right*, a perversion or crookedness (Matt. 17:17; Phil. 2:15). The path they chose is much like the winding wilderness wanderings. It is our English word *scoliosis* which describes a crooked or twisted spine (See Phil. 2:15 [cf. Acts 2:40]). We are a distorted generation. No matter how perfect we might consider others or ourselves, we are nothing more than twisted souls in need of straightening. It is of interest to note how only God in Jesus can thoroughly straighten that which is crooked (Heb. 9:10 – **reformation** means to straighten thoroughly).

Fourth, sin is *disobedience to a voice* (Rom. 5:19). Adam and Eve said “no” to God. There are two words describing this aspect of their rebellion. Romans 5:19 speaks of disobedience. It is a compound word **para** ‘aside’ and **akouo** ‘to hear,’ hence signifying a refusing to hear (disobedience). The New Testament uses it three times (Rom. 5:19; 2 Cor. 10:6; Heb. 2:2). The second word is found in Romans 2:8. It is often translated as unbelief or unbeliever. There is an intentional shutting out, a closing or covering of the ears. **It is not that we are passively deaf, but rather actively refusing to obey what we have heard.**

Although we sometimes call the rebellion of an infant cute, their “no” stands as a sentinel guarding the idols of their own heart. They are simply sinners in training. If left unchecked and unchallenged, they will persist in their rebellion against God. The “no” must be put down.

Fifth, sin is *rebellion* (Isa. 1:2; Ezek. 2:3). Numbers 20:24 uses the word to describe Moses and Aaron's rebellion against God (see also Num. 27:14). The word as used here means "bitter." It is similar to Naomi's name change to "Mara" (Ruth 1:19, 20). When we rebel against God, we view Him and His Word as a loathsome thing.

Sixth, sin is a *debt* (Matt. 18:21-35). We cannot address our own sin debt (Matt. 18:21-35). It exceeds our abilities. Sin is always against a holy God, paid by eternal hell. Hell is eternal because all sin is against an infinite God, and finite humanity cannot pay off an infinite debt. Hence, an infinite debt can only be paid by an infinite payment, by the infinite God-man, Jesus. **God's infinite sacrifice is man's substitute.** We are incapable of addressing our indebtedness to God. Unless and until God cancels the debt, we are without hope and will pay the debt to the last obligation. When King David was faced with falling into the hands of men or into the hands of God for judgment, He chose God for He is rich in mercy (Eph. 2:1-4).

Seventh, sin is *lawlessness* (Matt. 7:23; Titus 2:14; 1 Tim. 1:9; 1 John 3:4). We shun the rule of God and seek to establish our own. Sin is disorderly and chaotic. It is for this reason the Lord's Prayer is so pointed, "Your kingdom come, your will be done" (Matt. 6:10a). Such a prayer is an assault against the sinner's stronghold of self-governance.

Finally, sin is *wickedness* (Matt. 22:18). It is a moral evil (Eph. 6:12; Rom. 1:29). There is darkness to this type of wickedness. It is disturbing. If we step back and look at our own resident evil, we can see sin's sinister quality. The difficulty we will

always have is in the sanitizing of our sin. “Our hearts are deceitful above all things and desperately wicked we cannot know it” (Jer. 17:9). We show our sin through various means. Luke describes our sin in the following manner.

- Sin is pride (Luke 9:46)
- Sin is being lost (Luke 15:1-7)
- Sin is greed (Luke 18:18-30 [rich young ruler])
- Wanting your “fair share” of the family inheritance (Luke 12:13-15 [divide it up])
- Living for the shadow by building bigger barns (Luke 12:16-20)
- Sin is rejection (Luke 15:12 [younger son])
- Sin is self-righteousness (Luke 15:28 [older brother]; Luke 18:11 [Pharisee])

Paul’s approach is to list our sins of the flesh.

¹⁹ Now the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are: immorality, impurity, sensuality, ²⁰ idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, ²¹ envying, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these, of which I forewarn you, just as I have forewarned you, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. (Gal. 5:19-21)

⁵ Therefore consider the members of your earthly body as dead to immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed, which amounts to idolatry. ⁶ For it is because of these things that the wrath of God will come upon the sons of disobedience, ⁷ and in them you also once walked, when you were living in them. ⁸ But now you also, put them all aside: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and abusive speech from your mouth. (Col. 3:5-8)

It is apparent from the above passages that sin is anything but an accident, ignorance, mistake, illness or disease. It is a

Act Three: Rejection

character flaw of the highest order. It is the closed fist of the defiant heart. This is what sin is. We may deny sin actually exists, yet whatever we call it, it is still sin. To deny the falling of rain will not stop us from becoming wet. We must conclude with the author of Ecclesiastes when we say, “Indeed, there is not a righteous man on earth who continually does good and who never sins” (Eccl. 7:20).

It is hard to exaggerate the importance of admitting our condition to be this bad. If we think of ourselves as basically good or even less than totally at odds with God, our grasp of the work of God in redemption will be defective. But if we humble ourselves under this terrible truth of our total depravity, we will be in a position to see and appreciate the glory and wonder of the work of God.¹⁵

Sin is a part of God’s *Story*. In its absence, the *Story* is unknown. Redemption presupposes debt. The seriousness of our sin against God is the consequence our sin incurs. Unaddressed sin will result in our eternal separation from God. There is a hell and hell is to be separated from God. Hell is conscious awareness of who He is and what He has done and how one is absent from Him. That is hell and the opposite to that is living forever in His presence.

All must pass through this door if they are to enter into the very provision and presence of God. God created so that His creation would know and experience the joy He has within Himself as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. It is only in His presence where fullness of joy is experienced and it is only at His right hand that one finds pleasures forever more (Ps. 16:10).

God could have permitted Adam and Eve to remain in their sin. He could have chosen to ignore their plight and loss, yet a remedy is provided only by gracious confrontation. This will be the focus of the fourth act in the *Story*.

Before leaving this idea, let us consider the application. Do you see sin for what it really is? Have you asked God to forgive you of your sin and come to Him in childlike faith? Today let us acknowledge God's provision for sin and gift of forgiveness. Let us thank Him for His abundant gift in Christ Jesus the Lord.

Act 4: Redemption

*“The LORD God made garments of skin
and clothed them” (Gen. 3:15-21)*

The weight of sin is so heavy. There is a bone weariness permeating the whole. To whom or to what might one look for deliverance? Where is there hope? When might one find relief? The sinister aspect of sin enters with stealth seeking to rob souls of God designed joy. **Sin covers its malignant intent with façade, yet sin will always take one further than they wish to go, keep one longer than they wish to stay and cost one far more than they wish to pay.** The offspring of sin is death (Rom. 6:23; James 1:15). The tattered remains of all who partake litter the boundaries of God’s garden of joy. God could have allowed the rebellion of humanity to go unanswered, “But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us” (Eph. 2:4) sent His Son to be the Savior of the world (1 John 4:10).

With untold multitudes we add our voice and join the chorus, “How long O LORD will you hide your face from us” (Ps. 13:1)? We join a long litany of longing souls who look for the Seed Promise (Gen. 3:15).

²⁵ And there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was **Simeon**; and this man was righteous and devout, looking for the consolation of Israel; and the Holy Spirit was upon him. ²⁶ And **it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ.** ²⁷ And he came in the Spirit into the temple; and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to carry out for Him the custom of the Law, ²⁸ **then he took Him into his arms, and blessed God, and said,** ²⁹ "Now Lord, You are releasing Your bond-servant to depart in peace,

according to Your word; ³⁰ For my eyes have seen Your salvation, ³¹ which You have prepared in the presence of all peoples, ³² A LIGHT OF REVELATION TO THE GENTILES, and the glory of Your people Israel." ³³ And His father and mother were amazed at the things which were being said about Him. ³⁴ And Simeon blessed them and said to Mary His mother, "Behold, this Child is appointed for the fall and rise of many in Israel, and for a sign to be opposed – ³⁵ and a sword will pierce even your own soul – to the end that thoughts from many hearts may be revealed." ³⁶ And there was a prophetess, **Anna** the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was advanced in years and had lived with her husband seven years after her marriage, ³⁷ and then as a widow to the age of eighty-four. She never left the temple, serving night and day with fastings and prayers. ³⁸ **At that very moment she came up and began giving thanks to God, and continued to speak of Him to all those who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem (Luke 2:25-38).**

When Adam and Eve rejected God and chose their kingdom and their will over His, they immediately began to “feel” the impact of their decision. This consequence is notable by the attempt to cover their nakedness with vegetation. God could have allowed the threat to go unanswered, but He once again condescended and provided atonement for their transgression. Like Dorothy in the Wizard of Oz, Genesis 3 invites the reader beyond the veil. This enables one to read both the tragedy of sin and the triumph of grace. There are four notable elements in the unfolding of this act of the *Story* as found in Genesis 3. To this, we will now give our attention.

First, notice the nature of their demise (Gen. 3:7-9). Their fall was immediate and altering (vv. 7, 8). It is impossible for us to fathom what that initial moment of eye opening revelation felt like for Adam and Eve. The coldness of soul and darkness of spirit invaded and conquered. The metallic taste of ruin coated their tongue. There was something more than mere

cognitive recognition of their rejection of God. We cannot doubt both Adam and Eve were aware of their nakedness prior to the Fall, but such knowledge produced no sense of shame or the need to cover oneself up. “Shame, remorse, fear – a sense of guilt – feelings to which they had hitherto been strangers disordered their minds and led them to shun Him whose approach they used to welcome.”¹⁶

Their eyes were immediately opened and they knew they were naked. They attempted to cover their nakedness with vegetation and they hid from the presence of God. How might one process the movement from complete freedom to one of bondage? Today we move from bondage to freedom. They moved from freedom to bondage. Guilt and shame consumed them. They knew no way out. Did they know the full extent of their crime against God? At a minimum, they did know things were radically different. Consider the following thought.

One of the most significant aspects of the story can be missed if we are not listening carefully. The couple’s attempt to cover their nakedness with crude garments of leaves depicts the feeble and futile efforts of human beings to address the guilt of sin. Yet, there is also a positive aspect of the couple’s nakedness: they have seen their nakedness and are ashamed. While their remedy is not adequate, their capacity to acknowledge guilt and transgression is affirmed and valued.¹⁷

Even as Adam and Eve rejected God and ran from Him, God pursued them (vv. 9, 21, 24). God already knew what took place. He kept His pattern of meeting them in the cool of the day. God would powerfully impact them for the purpose of

rescue and restoration. This text demonstrates humanity's lack of innate goodness and desire for God. They were not meeting God halfway. There is nothing in this text suggesting their compliance to God's provision. We cannot doubt or deny the larger reality of the application (appropriation) by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone, but this text strongly establishes God's initiative, not humanity's. The Bible consistently portrays humanity as running **from** God not **toward** God.

THERE IS NONE WHO UNDERSTANDS, THERE IS NONE WHO SEEKS FOR GOD. (Rom. 3:11)

Second, notice the nature of the dialogue (vv. 9-19). God begins with questions (vv. 9-13). God's questioning was not for His information, but for their confession and repentance. God wanted each to own culpability and guilt.

- "Where are you?" (v. 9)
- "Who told you that you were naked?" (v. 11a)
- "Have you eaten from the tree of which I commanded you not eat?" (vv. 11b)
- "What is this you have done?" (v. 13)

God the Creator comes to have fellowship with them but must ask, 'Where are you?' If we have allowed ourselves to be caught up in the story, we realize the depth of emotion, the pathos, the sadness in the man's reply: 'I was afraid because I was naked.'¹⁸

Each was unwilling to admit their culpability except through transferred accusation. "The woman whom you gave to be with me" and "The serpent [by implication - which you

created] deceived me.” Both were saying, “It isn’t our fault that we disobeyed.”

This sin of the first pair was heinous and aggravated – it was not simply eating an apple, but a love of self, dishonor to God, ingratitude to a benefactor, disobedience to the best of Masters - a preference of the creature to the Creator.¹⁹

What is disturbing about this narrative is there is no statement concerning their confession and repentance. Nowhere does it say they repented of their rebellion. In fact the text says, “The LORD God made garments of skin for Adam and his wife, and clothed them” (v. 21). Again, by implication God had to save them for they could not save themselves. Salvation is always from the LORD; humanity cannot save itself.

God ends with proclamation and promise (vv. 14-19). God speaks to each offender as individuals.

- His proclamation to the serpent (vv. 14, 15)

The serpent’s sentence is already and not-yet. God immediately marks his existence by causing him to crawl on his belly and eat dust. In addition, he will become the enemy of the woman’s seed. He is assured of his future destruction by the seed of the woman. God said He would and He did. Jesus Christ is the fulfillment of this promise (Gen. 3:15) and the completion of this picture (Gen. 3:21). **This element and the picture provided become the defining elements of the Story as played out in and through the nation of Israel.**

Others would wish to negate the weight of this text as it relates to the Messiah. In hindsight, it can be seen how the rest of the *Story* flows from this spring. Did the early church understand the messianic nature of this text? Listen to the following passages.

"BEHOLD, THE VIRGIN SHALL BE WITH CHILD AND SHALL BEAR A SON, AND THEY SHALL CALL HIS NAME IMMANUEL," which translated means, "GOD WITH US." (Matt. 1:23).

But when the fullness of the time came, God sent forth His Son, **born of a woman**, born under the Law, so that He might redeem those who were under the Law, that we might receive the adoption as sons. (Gal. 4:4, 5)

The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet. The grace of our Lord Jesus be with you. (Rom. 16:20)

The seed of woman in Gen. 3:15 (Christ) would land a death blow to the head of the serpent. Jesus Christ, the fulfillment of this prophecy, came to 'destroy the work of the devil' (1 John 3:8), which He did through His death on the cross and His resurrection from the dead (Heb. 2:14-15; Rom. 1:1-4; 4:24-25). His sufferings are described as 'bruising his heel' in Gen. 3:15.²⁰

There is nothing greater than the incarnation of Jesus Christ. It is only when we place this story inside of the larger *Story* that we begin to comprehend the magnitude of what God did and continues to do. Christmas is not simply a celebration of the birth of Jesus Christ, but rather how God fulfilled a promise and completed a picture. In the coming of Jesus Christ, the seed of the woman would crush the head of the

serpent and complete the shadow of the slain lamb and blood atonement.

- His proclamation to the woman (v. 16)

The woman's sentence was in the context of her relationship to her husband and within the home. Her role as wife and mother were impacted by her choice to rebel against God.

- His proclamation to Adam (vv. 17-19)

Adam's rebellion against God changed creation itself. His role as provider for his family would now be marked by toil all the days of his life. In the greater scheme, Adam functions as race representative. He had ultimate culpability because he had oversight within the family unit. Adam failed to protect and shield Eve from the serpent's assault. Listen carefully to the weight of this communication.

The climax of the passage can be easily missed if we have not been listening to the story carefully. The command of God, the boundary set by God in His world, carried with it a consequence: 'In the *very day* that you eat from [the tree], you will certainly die.' The couple knew the penalty of crossing the boundary, of trying to live life outside God's order, yet they chose to violate it anyway. At this point in the story we would expect God to carry out his threat. Justice demands it.

But here we learn that God is more than a God of justice bound to a law of judgment and retribution. The curses imposed in the previous verses are heavy; but they are not death. *God does not carry out the death*

penalty. We dare not spiritualize this fact away by speaking of some kind of spiritual death. The story says nothing about spiritual death. We also should not see here a loss of immortality and the introduction of physical death into the world that would not have come if the couple had obeyed. The story is not concerned with a loss of immortality. The simple fact of the story is that God does less than His own law allowed. He lets the couple live and gives them the gift of life a second time, on the other side of the boundary! Here is a profound affirmation of the nature of God. God responds to disobedience, not with the full weight of justice, but with mercy and grace!²¹

Third, notice the nature of the demonstration (v. 21). Several elements are shadowed in this demonstration.

- Blood would be shed (v. 21)
- An innocent animal would be killed (v. 21)
- Another's garment, not made by human hands, would be worn (v. 21)
- The act would have to be accepted by the recipients (v. 21)

The clothing provided by God required shedding the blood of two animals. Illustrating the basic Biblical principle of substitutionary atonement (or "covering"), requiring the shedding of innocent blood as a condition of forgiveness for the sinner.²²

Immediately after their rebellion, (Adam and Eve) were now afraid and tried to cover themselves. But in verse 21, God took this covering away and gave them a coat of skins. Man could not stand before God in his

own covering. Rather, he needed a covering from God that required sacrifice and death – a covering provided not by man but by God.²³

They were reluctant to leave the Garden. Had they stayed in the Garden and ate from the tree of life they would have remained in their fallen state.

- God would keep them from further demise (v. 24)

The text tells us how God “drove the man out” (v. 24). Such a statement allows us to assume they were lingering. His barring them from the tree of life was merciful and gracious on His part. Through this act He protected them from further harm and set in motion future redemption.

Albert Barnes' *Notes on the Bible* provides this insight.

So he drove out the man. - **This expresses the banishment of man from the garden as a judicial act.** While he is left to the fruits of his labor for the means of subsistence until his return to the dust, his access to the source of perpetual life and vigor is effectually barred by a guard stationed east of the garden, where was no doubt its only entrance, consisting of the cherubim and the flame of a sword waving in all directions. **There is unspeakable mercy here in every respect for the erring race.** This present life in the flesh was now tainted with sin, and impregnated with the seeds of the curse, about to spring forth into an awful growth of moral and physical evil. It is not worth preserving for itself. It is not in any way desirable that such a dark confusion of life and death in one nature

should be perpetuated. Hence, there is mercy as well as judgment in the exclusion of man from that tree which could have only continued the carnal, earthly, sensual and even devilish state of his being.²⁴

It is impossible to weigh the massive bulk of sin's consequence. Where there was once spiritual intimacy and "one flesh" union, there is now only separation and isolation.

Biblical scholar John Gill noted the following.

Being unwilling to go out upon the orders given, some degree of force was used, or power exerted, in some way or other, to oblige him to depart; **the word it is expressed by is used of divorces: there was a conjugal relation between God and man**, the covenant between them had the nature of a matrimonial contract; which covenant man broke, though he was an husband to him, by committing idolatry, that is, spiritual adultery, not giving credit to him, but believing the devil before him; wherefore he wrote him a bill of divorce, and sent him away; drove him from his presence and communion with him, from his house and habitation, from his seat of pleasure, and garden of delight, and from all the comfortable enjoyments of life; an emblem of that separation and distance which sin makes between God and his creature, and of that loss which is sustained thereby:²⁵

For the idea of divorcing see further (Lev. 21:7, 14; 22:13; Num. 30:9). It is the same word used in Genesis 3:24, as noted by John Gill. **Sin divorced us from God.** Romans 7 speaks to this idea. In the imagery of God, we were "one flesh" to sin

and death. Through His death, we have died to sin and death and are now married to another. Through the life, death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ the believing are in a “one flesh” union with Christ. The believer is now married to Christ. Sin severs this union, but God restores the union.

Are you married to Jesus Christ or is there another? Do you know Jesus Christ as your Savior from sin? Only God can address your rebellious sin. He answers your fallen state. God made a way. He sent the Son, His only begotten Son to be your Savior. He has fulfilled the ancient promise and has completed the old picture. The provision of God is available for you. God is calling out and inviting. Through His Spirit, He is powerfully drawing, but you must come. Will you come?

Act 5: Re-Creation

"You Must Be Born Again"

(John 3:1-8; 2 Cor. 5:17; Rev. 21:1; Rom. 3:21-26)

Humpty Dumpty is a character in an English language nursery rhyme, probably originally a riddle and one of the best known in the English-speaking world. The earliest known version is in a manuscript addition to a copy of *Mother Goose's Melody* published in 1803.

Humpty Dumpty sat on a wall,
Humpty Dumpty had a great fall.
All the king's horses and all the king's men
Couldn't put Humpty together again.

When confronted by the same impossibility and human failure, the question asked by our Lord's disciples is on all our lips, "Then who can be saved?" (Mark 10:26). What man could not do, God did and still does. He alone can put Humpty Dumpty together again. That re-creation is the subject of our study in this chapter.

What was the function of life after creation, but prior to the Fall (Gen. 1, 2)? What made up the moments of humanity's existence? What filled Adam's days with hope and purpose? Prior to the Fall there was nothing but the stewardship of the world over which God placed man (Gen. 1:26, 28). God's design was for Adam and Eve to work the Garden until it covered the earth. He designed them with the purpose of being fruitful, multiplying and filling the earth. Prior to the Fall there was unadulterated intimacy with one's spouse and

with God. There was no shame, no guilt, nothing but harmony between all things created and God.

After the Fall what is the function of life? What makes up the moments of our lives? What is to fill our days with hope and purpose? What drove Adam and Eve to get up every day with a sense of purpose and meaning? Was their stewarding of creation secondary to some greater purpose, or was this their purpose?

The *Story* pictures Israel as a blessing to the nations (Gen. 12:3). How were they to carry out this prophecy (promise)? How does the mandate in Matthew 28, known as the Great Commission, blend with the stewarding of God's creation? How does the "mandate" fulfill God's vision of His glory covering the globe as the waters cover the sea for the joy of His people (Num. 14:21; Isa. 11:1-9; Hab. 2:14)? Is the making and maturing of disciples different from the role of reigning over God's garden? Are the two in opposition or are we to make disciples while we reign? The structure of Matthew 28 would suggest that as we are going (i.e. living) we are to be making and maturing disciples. The mandate is not dictated by vocation, but in vocation.

Is the language of abandonment in following Christ consistent with still providing for one's spouse (1 Cor. 7:33) and household (1 Tim. 5:8)? If the shadow is not intrinsically wrong and is capable of being enjoyed (1 Tim. 6:17), then should there not be a "truce" between two concepts such as evangelizing and what some call worldliness or materialism? If we are in the world but not of the world, then should we not be able to possess shadow without the shadow possessing us (John 17:15-19)?

As those who have been redeemed from sin, what does this now look like and mean in the context of our daily living? Darkness is constant, but does this mean we are without hope and victory? Is the worship of God in the context of stewardship sustainable? Is this not where all of creation is headed (Rev. 4, 5, 22)? Is this act alone sufficient to keep one going as life's provision is now done by the sweat of one's brow? Is this motive substantial enough to get us up every day with sole or primary purpose?

It is our premise that living life as a disciple of Christ in the context of His *Story* enables us to celebrate all of life and to communicate the gospel in the celebration. Some find great satisfaction in dictating and describing in detail what this life looks like for each individual. We, however, prefer to describe this life as one of constant recall as to the broader picture of God's *Story*.

What is this *Story*? God as Trinity is enough for His own eternal satisfaction and happiness. There is nothing outside of God necessary for God to exist. He chose to create of His own will. His desire in creating was for the displaying of His glory for the joy of His people. He desired for His people to know the joy known within Himself. In all of creation, only humanity was given personhood and thus reflects God's image and likeness through intellect, volition, and emotion. God and all He created enabled humanity in Adam and Eve to enjoy Him and glorify Him through their enjoyment. Adam and Eve were to steward God's creation and thus reflect God through their enjoyment of Him and His shadow. Adam and Eve, however, rejected this and thus rejected God. The consequence of their choice was indescribable horror.

God, however, reversed the curse and restored them to a place of freedom and family. Through this act, humanity once again worshipped God. This is God's *Story*, and this is the *Story* we are to live in. What does this mean for us?

First, those who accept God's answer to humanity's problem are followers of Christ. These followers are disciples. To believe is to follow. The two ideas are inseparably linked. For believers, the issue is not whether one is or is not a disciple. What discipleship looks like is dictated by personality and circumstances. One is no more or less a disciple based on vocation, activity, or possession.

Second, vocational ministry is unique to vocational ministers whose work provides their livelihood. Such a position does not determine one's worth or spirituality. Each part compliments other parts (1 Cor. 12).

How does this change our individual and corporate perspective? First, as individuals we are to celebrate our present work. Such celebration is possible as we understand how everything is from God, sustained by God, and for God (Rom. 11:36; Col. 1:15-17). Second, corporately we should enable each individual to celebrate his or her present circumstances in light of God's overarching *Story*. No one is capable of dictating what this looks like for any other individual.

The purpose of the church is to enable each individual to live in the larger *Story* of God whereby their lives answer the questions intrinsic to their existence. Herein lays biblical significance and purpose. The gathered Church should seek to worship God as the purpose and goal of their existence.

There should be intentional instruction as to the *Story's* content and how to live *Story* in various circumstances. Between the corporate gatherings, there can be weekly gatherings to encourage *Story* living. The gathered church should seek to gather others into the family of God by inviting all to know and live in the *Story*. The means of enabling are distinct to every gathered assembly, but each should seek to celebrate the grandeur of God's *Story* and thus facilitate the singular worship of God.

The re-creation and restoring of humanity with God is through the redemptive activity of God. **God restores what sin robs.** The Scripture uses such language as "new heart" and "born-again" to capture the idea found in re-creation. The creation *Story* written by God begins in the Garden of Eden (Gen. 2:8) and will end in the Garden of Re-Creation (Rev. 22:1, 2).

Paul uses such language as "new man" to grab the idea of re-creation. What Adam and Eve forfeited by their rebellion, God will return. The word for this reversal is *regeneration*.

Regeneration is the spiritual transformation in a person, brought about by the Holy Spirit that brings the individual from being spiritually dead to become a spiritually alive human being.²⁶

This subjective change worked in one's soul by the grace of God is variously designated in Scripture as a new birth, a resurrection, a new life, a new creature, a renewing of the mind, a dying to sin and living to righteousness, a translation from darkness to light, etc. In theological language, it is called regeneration,

renovation, and conversion. These terms are often used interchangeably.²⁷

J.I. Packer offers the following detailed definition. Regeneration has been defined as “an inner re-creating of fallen human nature by the gracious sovereign action of the Holy Spirit (John 3:5–8).”²⁸ The Bible conceives salvation as the redemptive renewal of man on the basis of a restored relationship with God in Christ, and presents it as involving “a radical and complete transformation wrought in the soul (Rom. 12:2; Eph. 4:23) by God the Holy Spirit (Titus 3:5; Eph. 4:24), by virtue of which we become ‘new men’ (Eph. 4:24; Col. 3:10), no longer conformed to this world (Rom. 12:2; Eph. 4:22; Col. 3:9), but in knowledge and holiness of the truth created after the image of God (Eph. 4:24; Col. 3:10; Rom. 12:2).”²⁹

The consequence of the cross is the re-creation accomplished by God. It is a return to life in the garden of God where the relationship between God and man was unhindered. What follows is suggestive and useful in celebrating the magnitude of God’s person and work. However, these ideas are not exhaustive for the depth of God’s redemptive work is infinite. The six areas considered speak of God’s reversal of man’s sin: Redemption, forgiveness, propitiation, justification, reconciliation and adoption. Each speaks to specific areas altered by the Fall and restored by God.

First, re-creation begins through God’s redemptive activity. Consider the following passages.

- Being **justified** as a gift by His grace through the **redemption** which is in Christ Jesus. (Rom. 3:24)

- In Him we have **redemption** through His blood, the **forgiveness** of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace. (Eph. 1:7)
- [God sent his Son] so that He might **redeem** those who were under the Law, that we might receive the **adoption** as sons. (Gal. 4:5)
- In whom [Jesus] we have **redemption**, the **forgiveness** of sins." (Col. 1:14)
- Who gave Himself [Jesus Christ] for us to **redeem** us from every lawless deed, and to purify for Himself a people for His own possession, zealous for good deeds. (Titus 2:14)
- And not through the blood of goats and calves, but through His own blood, He entered the holy place once for all, having obtained eternal **redemption**. (Heb. 9:12)

Leon Morris says "Paul uses the concept of redemption primarily to speak of the saving significance of the death of Christ."³⁰ The English word redemption means "repurchase" or "buy back," and in the Old Testament referred to the ransom of slaves (Exod. 21:8). "In the New Testament the redemption word group is used to refer both to **deliverance from sin and freedom from captivity**. Theologically, redemption is a metaphor for what is achieved through the Atonement [Emphasis added]."³¹ Therefore, there is a symbolic sense in which the death of Jesus pays the price of a ransom, releasing Christians from bondage to sin and death.

The work of redemption presupposes debt, captivity, slavery and bondage. When Adam and Eve chose to reject God, they sold themselves and their posterity into captivity. Whereas once there was freedom and liberty, there would now be only bondage and enslavement.

Redemption secures and provides freedom. The work of Jesus Christ frees us from sin's slavery. Whereas once we were slaves to sin and death, now we are free in Christ.

Redemption means to free someone from bondage. It often involves the paying of a ransom, a price that ensures redemption. The Israelites were redeemed from Egypt. We were redeemed from the power of sin and the curse of the Law (Gal. 3:13) through Jesus (Rom. 3:24; Col. 1:14). We were bought with a price (1 Cor. 6:20; 7:23). Redemption is defined by J. I. Packer as "Christ's actual substitutionary endurance of the penalty of sin in the place of certain specified sinners, through which God was reconciled to them, their liability to punishment was forever destroyed, and a title to eternal life was secured for them."³² Redemption is the basis for forgiveness and propitiation. It is the means whereby God's wrath against the sinner can be stopped (i.e. propitiated).

Second, re-creation provides the means for forgiveness based on the redemptive work of Jesus Christ. Consider the following passages.

- Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving each other, **just as God in Christ also has forgiven you.** (Eph. 4:32)
- When you were dead in your transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He made you alive together with Him, **having forgiven us all our transgressions.** (Col. 2:13)
- I am writing to you, little children, **because your sins have been forgiven you for His name's sake.** (1 John 2:12)

The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines forgiveness as "to grant free pardon and to give up all claim on account of an offense or debt." God's forgiveness is not based on what we do, but what He does. His forgiveness extended to us is gracious on

His part by providing the means for forgiveness to take place. He sends our sins away. This idea is captured in Psalm 103:12 and Micah 7:19.

- As far as the east is from the west, **so far hath he removed our transgressions from us.** (Ps. 103:12)
- He will again have compassion on us; He will tread our iniquities under foot. Yes, **You will cast all their sins into the depths of the sea.** (Micah 7:19)

The need for forgiveness presupposes violation or transgression. We have committed a transgression against God. Forgiveness is relational and personal. We forgive people, not animals or inanimate objects. God forgives us, but God does nothing wrong, thus He never needs to be forgiven. We wrong God and others and we need forgiveness. We have violated God's Word. Our forgiveness from God is based on the person and work of Jesus Christ.

Through forgiveness, the sentence against the sinner has been lifted. There is therefore no condemnation (Rom. 8:1). Forgiveness is a pardoning, whereby the sentence against us is dropped. Because of the cross, God's forgiveness extended to us negates sin's eternal consequence. Our forgiveness of others cannot negate the intrinsic demerit of sin.

Third, God's pre-fall disposition toward the believing repentant rebel is restored. Because God is propitiated through the redemptive work of Jesus Christ, His wrath caused by broken Law and the intrinsic need for justice is placated and His "emotion" of anger toward the Lawbreaker is gone. Consider the following passages.

- Whom God displayed publicly as **propitiation** in His blood through faith. This was to demonstrate His righteousness, because in the forbearance of God He passed over the sins previously committed. (Rom. 3:25)
- Therefore, He had to be made like His brethren in all things, so that He might become a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make **propitiation** for the sins of the people. (Heb. 2:17)
- And He Himself is the **propitiation** for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for those of the whole world. (1 John 2:2)
- In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the **propitiation** for our sins. (1 John 4:10)

Propitiation is the disposition of the judge who declares the guilty justified. A judge can be placated because justice has been served. God is satisfied because His Son's offering meets the demands of the violated Law.

In Christian theology, propitiation is accomplished through Jesus Christ in His crucifixion and sacrifice. He took the wrath and indignation of God upon Himself (1 Pet. 2:24; 3:18). The crucifixion or sacrifice of Christ conciliates God, who would otherwise be offended by human sin and would demand penalty for it.

Propitiation is translated from the Greek word **hilasterion**, meaning "that which expiates or propitiates" or "the gift which procures propitiation." The word is also used in the New Testament for the place of propitiation, the "mercy seat" (Heb. 9:5). There is frequent similar use of **hilasterion** in the Septuagint, Exodus 25:18ff. The mercy seat was sprinkled with atoning blood on the Day of Atonement (Lev. 16:14), representing that the righteous sentence of the Law had been executed, changing a judgment seat into a mercy seat (Heb. 9:11-15; compare with "throne of grace" in Hebrews 4:14-16;

place of communion, Exodus 25:21-22). Another Greek word, **hilasmos**, is used for Christ as our propitiation (1 John 2:2; 4:10).

The idea of propitiation presupposes wrath or anger. Law has been transgressed and the Lawgiver executes judgment.

Through the redemptive work of Jesus Christ and the forgiving of sin, God's justice is satisfied and His wrath satiated. The outcome of such action is one of favor. Propitiation suspends the judgment against the guilty. The work of Christ enables God to act toward us in a merciful manner.

Fourth, re-creation enables God to declare the offender justified. Consider the following passages.

- Being **justified** as a gift by His grace through the **redemption** which is in Christ Jesus. (Rom. 3:24)
- Therefore, having been **justified** by faith, we have **peace** with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. (Rom. 5:1)
- Much more then, having now been **justified** by His blood, we shall be **saved** from the wrath of God through Him. (Rom. 5:9)
- ¹⁶ Nevertheless knowing that a man is not **justified** by the works of the Law but through faith in Christ Jesus, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, so that we may be **justified** by faith in Christ and not by the works of the Law; since by the works of the Law no flesh will be **justified**. ¹⁷ But if, while seeking to be **justified** in Christ, we ourselves have also been found sinners, is Christ then a minister of sin? May it never be! (Gal. 2:16, 17)
- So that being **justified** by His grace we would be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life. (Titus 3:7)

Justification is the work of God whereby the righteousness of Jesus is reckoned to the sinner so the sinner is thereby declared by God as being righteous under the Law (Rom. 4:3;

5:1,9; Gal. 2:16; 3:11). This righteousness is not earned or retained by any effort of the saved. Justification is an instantaneous occurrence, resulting in eternal life. It is based completely and solely upon Jesus' sacrifice on the cross (1 Pet. 2:24) and is received by faith alone (Eph. 2:8-9). No works are necessary whatsoever to obtain justification. Otherwise, it is not a gift (Rom. 6:23). Therefore, we are justified by faith (Rom. 5:1).

Justification is necessary because rebels are guilty. All mankind deserves the guilty sentence against them.

God's redemptive activity enables Him to declare the sinner not guilty and provides a right standing before Him in His court of law. Justification is the consequence of being pardoned or forgiven. Redemption enables the placated judge to pronounce the guilty forgiven and thus justified.

Fifth, re-creation reconciles the alienated back to God. Consider the following passages.

- For if while we were enemies we were **reconciled** to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been **reconciled**, we shall be saved by His life. (Rom. 5:10)
- Now all these things are from God, who **reconciled** us to Himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of **reconciliation**. (2 Cor. 5:18)
- Yet He has now **reconciled** you in His fleshly body through death, in order to present you before Him holy and blameless and beyond reproach. (Col. 1:22)

“The word ‘reconciliation’ refers to the process of changing something thoroughly and adjusting it to something else that is a standard. For example, when you adjust your watch to a time signal, you are reconciling the watch to a time standard.

Or when you reconcile your checkbook, the standard to which you match it is the bank's record of your account. On rare occasions the bank must reconcile its accounts to yours."³³ God reconciles us to Himself. He never needs to adjust His balance sheet to ours since He is the standard.

Who we are in Adam is reconciled with who God is in Christ. Reconciliation presupposes alienation and therefore is necessary.

Reconciliation provides fellowship and friendship. If propitiation is the negation of judgment, reconciliation is the positive embracing of the one pardoned. Reconciliation is possible because God's judgment against sin has been placated.

Finally, re-creation results in adoption. Consider the following passages.

- So that He might **redeem** those who were under the Law, that we might receive the **adoption** as sons. (Gal. 4:5)
- He predestined us to **adoption** as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will. (Eph. 1:5)

Listen to the Westminster Confession (34).

Adoption is an act of God's free grace, whereby we are received into the number, and have a right to all the privileges, of the sons of God.

[Adoption is the] filial and familial relationship of Christians with God. 'The actions of God by which people are brought into filial relationship with Him and conferred with privileges thereof'. Not in conflict

with birth metaphor of regeneration, but simply connotes additional idea of kinship relationship. [It is the] new relationship with God as Father; the apex of privilege as part of God's family.³⁴

The need for adoption presupposes one is orphaned, without parentage. Through adoption, the orphaned are given family. Whatever existed prior to the Fall is restored with a recognition that everything changed and continues to change. The same idea of intimacy and purpose prior to the Fall continues to this day. Adoption enables the alienated to participate in the inheritance.

In the person and work of Jesus Christ, the curse is reversed. Where does this leave us? Are you living in His *Story* and thus content while you wait, or do you lack a sense of purpose, significance, and rest? As the people of God, we recognize there is an underlying restlessness as we wait for the fullest implementation of God's *Story* in both creation and for us. Yet this restlessness is not to leave us disheveled. Continuing to believe and trust is the hard work we are called to engage in. Will we right now accept the sufficiency of Jesus Christ and God's providential control over the *Story* He wrote as it relates to our lives, even while we prepare the horse for the day of battle (Prov. 21:31)? Today, God the Holy Spirit invites us to let go and recognize His *Story* over ours and how ours is His *Story* in short form.

Act 6: Worship through Joy

*“Stop weeping, the Lion . . . has overcome”
(Rev. 4; 5)*

The *Story* ends with God worshipped by His creation. As we grow in our knowledge of God’s *Story*, we see how everyone everywhere asks the same basic questions of life.

1. Is there someone or something beyond me?
2. Who am I?
3. How did I get here?
4. Why am I here?
5. Why is there pain and suffering?
6. What is the purpose of life?
7. Where am I going?
8. How does this all end?

One’s past experience and one’s present level of knowledge will determine how one answers the question. Something is controlling and informing our view of the world. Our interpretation of life will vary depending on our worldview.

For all of us, the above questions are intrinsic to our existence. Christians have chosen to answer them from the worldview grounded in the text of Scripture. Scripture tells us of God, creation, rejection, redemption, re-creation, and worship through joy. The Scripture tells us of one who is beyond us, from whom, through whom, and for whom are all things. The Scripture tells us how we got to be where we are and how we can become more than we were. Scripture speaks of our rescue from this fallen world and the restoration of all things.

Every day in every way we can answer these questions. All of this will end in the same place it began, with God.

In this chapter, let us complete the telling of the *Story*. God's design for His creation is for them to dwell with Him for their joy. Adam and Eve made a conscious choice not to worship God. Prior to their Fall from grace, everything they did was worship. For them worship was not defined by location or activity. Everywhere was sacred ground and everything was a means of worshipping God.

In a topic like this, the tendency is to over analyze what worship is or what it looks like. Personal worship is rather simple to define and experience. Corporate worship is what happens when individual worshippers gather. The content and object of worship is what makes any given activity worship. We worship many things, but only one object is the proper recipient of all our affection and energy.

The idea of worship is intrinsic to the human condition. Everyone everywhere at all times worship something or someone. The Scripture speaks of false worship as idolatry. It also speaks of the universal worship of God as inevitable. In time, this fuels us to further mission for universal worship will happen someday. Yet what is worship and how might we live as worshippers in this time context?

The context of something religious often defines worship, yet at its most basic level worship assigns worth. It recognizes an object as fulfilling its design. We place value on an object because it meets a need. When we recognize the object for what it is, we are assigning worth to it. Moreover, not all worship is the same. We assign worth, priority or preeminence to many things. The object "worshipped" has

value, but it does not pull from us much affection or energy. Some assign worth to professional athletes. They idolize individuals and teams. In many ways, significant sporting events in the context of the stadium are shadows of something much larger and grandeur. In unfortunate ways, the teams have “worshippers” and gather for the “worship” and celebration of victory. For some, this form of worship pulls significant affection and energy and gives identity and reflected worth to the worshipper. This is unfortunate.

The reason why false worship exists is that true worship exists. True worship casts a shadow, and if not understood correctly the shadow becomes the end rather than the means. For us there is only One who can answer the calling of the human heart and that is God as Trinity in Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. He alone and only gives rest to the restless heart.

The struggle with defining worship is the otherworldliness of the act itself. Is worship something done in moments of time or is worship something we can engage in 24/7? We are of the opinion that worship exists in any context and at any time. This is defensible because worship is noted both in the Garden of Eden and in the Eternal State. For us, the best way to understand the *Story's* end is to see where it began and find the common elements in each, apart from which the *Story* makes no sense. There are three common elements shared by our pre-fall and post-fall acts that we should consider as we seek to understand biblical worship.

First, let us consider worship as it existed in the Garden of Eden (Gen. 1:26-31).

²⁶ **Then God said . . . "let them rule** over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over the cattle and over all the earth,

and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth." ²⁸ God blessed them; and God said to them, "**Be fruitful and multiply**, and fill the earth, and subdue it; and rule over . . . and over every living thing that moves on the earth." ²⁹ Then God said, "Behold, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is on the surface of all the earth, and every tree which has fruit yielding seed; **it shall be food for you**; ³⁰ and to every beast of the earth and to every bird of the sky and to everything that moves on the earth which has life, I have given every green plant for food"; **and it was so**. ³¹ God saw all that He had made, and behold, **it was very good**. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day. (Gen. 1:26-31)

Genesis 2 gives more information concerning this scene.

¹⁶ The LORD God commanded the man, saying, "From any tree of the garden you may eat freely; ¹⁷ but from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil **you shall not eat**, for in the day that you eat from it you will surely die. (Gen. 2:16, 17)

What defined worship in the Garden?

- Intellectually - Adam and Eve knew from whom, through whom, and for who are all things.
- Volitionally - Adam and Eve chose to assign Him first place as to their affection and energy. This shaped how they viewed their activity. The emphasis is not on what they did, but rather on how they viewed what they did.
- Emotionally - They "felt" the benefits of their alignment with God.

They worshipped God by obeying Him. Their worship (obedience) showed itself in their stewardship of creation, their enjoyment of creation, and their willingness to have children. It is of interest to see how most pictures of the

Garden portray Adam and Eve either lounging around without clothing or being clothed and expelled from the Garden. Pictures of what existed for them between those two ideas are rare. This is evidence that we give little thought to their day to day activity, even though every moment of everyday was worship for them.

What Adam and Eve had going for them before the Fall was that there were no impediments because of sin. There was still a will that could choose contrary to what God would declare, but as of yet sin did not reside in their hearts.

Second, let us consider worship as it will exist in the timelessness of eternity (Rev. 4; 5; 21; 22).

What will define worship in the timelessness of eternity?

- Intellectually - We will know from whom, through whom, and for who are all things.
- Volitionally - We will choose to assign Him first place as to our affection and energy. This shapes how we view our activity. The emphasis is not on what we do, but rather on how we view what we do.
- Emotionally - We will "feel" the benefits of our alignment with God.

The eternal state (the period of time after the resurrection of the living and the dead) sees the fullest and final reversal of the curse. There will no longer be a will that can violate God's declared will. Unlike Adam and Eve (and us) there will be no possible way for the worshipper to rebel against God. All that resulted from the Fall will be absent from our existence.

- There will be a new heaven and a new earth (Rev. 22:1, 5).
- God will dwell in our midst (Rev. 21:3).
- He will wipe away every tear from our eyes; and there will no longer be any death; there will no longer be any mourning, or crying, or pain; the first things have passed away (Rev. 21:4)
- There will be no more disease (Rev. 22:2).
- There will no longer be any curse (Rev. 22:3).
- His servants will see His face, and His name will be on their foreheads (Rev. 22:4).
- His servants will be co-regents with Him over all things created (Rev. 22:5).
- God will render to every man according to what he has done (v. 12 [authentic absolute justice will exist]).
- Sin will be absent (Rev. 22:14, 15; Rev. 21:27).
- And the city has no need of the sun or of the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God has illumined it, and its lamp is the Lamb. The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it (Rev. 21:23, 24).

The day is coming when Jesus will return to earth and the reign of God will become an uncontested reality throughout the world. God's presence will be fully and openly with us once again, as it was at the beginning of the drama. God's plan of redemption will reach its goal. The creation will experience its own Exodus, finding freedom from its bondage to decay. Pain and tears, regret and shame, suffering and earth will be no more. At the center of it all will be God himself. He will return and make his home with us, this time in a new heavens and a new earth. We, along with the rest of creation, will worship him perfectly and fulfill our true calling. God will be all in all, and the whole world will be full of his glory.³⁵

We often oversimplify the idea of heaven by saying it is all about Jesus. However, as a qualifier it is all about Jesus. This does not absent form or shadow, but form or shadow are only means to one great end. The idea of shadow calling out to our sin (our fallen nature) will be absent. The shadow or form only exists so that a finite being might worship the infinite God. This does not lessen our affection for loved ones or shadow, but such affection will no longer compete with God. What was in the garden and what will be in the eternal state is incredible, yet we find ourselves locked between these two glorious images. We are hungry and waiting in the buffet line but we are not yet at the table itself. We exist in the state of anticipation and weakness.

Finally, let us consider worship as it exists in our present state (Ps. 150; 1 Cor. 10:31; Col. 3:17, 23).

Whether, then, you eat or drink or whatever you do, **do all to the glory of God.** (1 Cor. 10:31)

¹⁷ Whatever you do in word or deed, **do all in the name of the Lord Jesus**, giving thanks through Him to God the Father . . . ²³ Whatever you do, do your work heartily, as **for the Lord** rather than for men. (Col. 3:17, 23)

If this is what worship was and this is what worship will become, why do we tend to believe worship in our present state is different than these two defining bookends?

What defines worship in our present state?

- Intellectually – We must come to know from whom, through whom, and for who are all things.

- Volitionally – We must choose to assign Him first place as to our affection and energy. This shapes how we view our activity. The emphasis is not on what we do, but rather on how we view what we do.
- Emotionally – We can “feel” the benefits of our alignment with God. This is the only means whereby we can be at peace, reconciled, and balanced with creation, God, and ourselves. In the absence of this, we are out of alignment with His *Story*.

There are two impediments to worship between the bookends.

First, we are at fault when we think worship is controlled by form and function rather than by an attitude of humility and an awareness of living in His *Story* (John 4:20, 21). Form and function come into play when we gather corporately. Form and function only exist to assist the gathering to be done decently and in order (1 Cor. 14:40). Yet neither form nor function defines worship.

Secondly, our difficulty is worshipping God through a veil of tears and in the context of curse. These things still exist in our lives. No matter how hard we fight, there is always within us, in this context of flesh, a lingering idolatry. Even in all of our freedom and liberty, we still wear a heavy cloak of darkness. There are shackles still waiting to be destroyed that grip our hearts from loving God without distraction. There are things pulling our arms down and causing our eyes to lust after lesser things.

Yet we can triumph over our sin and in that context worship God. Do we not see this with Joseph (Gen. 50), with Job (Job

1), and with Paul (Acts 16)? God can be worshipped even when sin's weight presses down. We must resolve to never allow these struggles to define who we are and what we do. As Christians, no matter how far we fall, God still sits on the throne of our hearts whether we acknowledge His Lordship or not. He may do with us as He wills and what He does is always right. It is His rod and His staff that guide us through the shadow of death (Ps. 23). We are here to remind each other of the larger *Story* in which our stories take place.

Now, always remember how the shadow speaks to the larger reality. For example, let us consider the language used in the tire shop for wheel alignment and wheel balancing to speak to the larger *Story* of life. Wheel alignment consists of adjusting the angles of the wheels so they are perpendicular to the ground and parallel to each other. Wheel balancing, on the other hand, is an adjustment that allows the tires and wheels to spin without causing any vibrations. The symptoms of a car that is out of alignment are uneven or rapid tire wear, pulling or drifting away from a straight line and wandering on a straight level road. The symptoms of a wheel out of balance are vibration in the steering wheel, seat or floorboard at certain highway speeds, and scalloped or cupped wear pattern on the tires.

Life is the car we drive. Some of us always seem to be pulling one way or the other. Others of us are always shaking and unsettled. Perhaps it is because we are out of alignment. We are not tracking straight and we appear to be always veering off to the left or right. Some of us are out of balance. We always seem to be vibrating. There is an unnecessary restlessness. The only way to stay the course and to rest in the bumps is to live in the *Story*. The question is, "Are we?"

Today, whether a man, woman, husband, wife, father, mother, child, or unemployed, underemployed or employed, at this moment celebrate the wonder and glory of God as He moves triumphantly through time and into eternity. May the peace of God continue to permeate your conscious moments. May you be able to say with heaven's host, "Beside Him, there is no one and beyond Him there is nothing."

Epilogue

The free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.
(Rom. 6:23)

Everyone regardless of age, race, color or creed must choose the provision of God in JESUS for the forgiveness of sin and the adoption into His family. He is the only way for anyone, anywhere at any time to be full of joy. May you hear the Spirit's voice and may today you choose HIM.

ENDNOTES

(Web references as of last publication)

Act 2: Creation

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³ Jean Paul Sartre – French philosophy, play writer, and novelist (1905-1980). Norman L. Geisler, *Is Man the Measure? An Evaluation of Contemporary Humanism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1983), 40-41.

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⁵ <http://www.4truth.net/fourtruthpbscience.aspx?pageid=8589952963>

⁶ <http://atheism.about.com/od/whatisgod/a/creator.htm>

⁷ “The Son as Heir is also the Intermediate Agent (**dia**) in the work of creation as we have it in Colossians 1:16 and John 1:3.” (*Robertson’s Word Pictures*, Hebrews 1:2.)

⁸ *Robertson’s Word Pictures*, Colossians 1:17.

⁹ [emphasis added] *Albert Barnes’ NT Commentary*, Colossians 1:17.

¹⁰ [Emphasis his] <http://atheism.about.com/od/whatisgod/a/creator.htm>

¹¹ <http://wwwFOUNDERS.org/journal/fj56/editorial.html> *Founders Journal* · Spring 2004 · pp. 1-10, “All to the Glory of God,” Tom Ascol ¹ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. and indexed by Ford Lewis Battles (Philadelphia, PA: The Westminster Press, 1967), 1:6:2 (72).

Act 3: Rejection

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¹⁴ Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 568.

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Act 4: Redemption

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²⁰ <http://www.bibleanswer.com/edenprom.htm>

²¹ <http://www.crivoice.org/gen3.html>

²² http://www.icr.org/index.php?module=home&action=submitsearch&f_submit=Search&f_context_any=any§ion=bible&f_search_type=bible&f_key_word_any=Genesis+3:21

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²⁴ Albert Barnes' *Notes on the Bible* on Genesis 3:24. <http://www.sacred-texts.com/bib/cmt/barnes/gen003.htm>

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Act 5: Re-Creation

²⁶ John Piper, "Through the Washing of Regeneration," Web: 18 Nov 2009.

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³⁰ Leon Morris, 'Redemption' *Dictionary of Paul and his Letters* [Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1993]: 784.

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Act 6: Worship

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