

Work and the Hebrew Worldview

What kind of world do you live, work and have your being in?

What kind of church and what kind of Christian will emerge for a postmodern time? At this time we may not know all there is to know about the church of the future, but I believe we can begin to envisage what it might look like. In many ways we are already crossing the border into a new expression of the church. Whether we plan it or not, whether we like it or not, we are being moved by divine providence and cultural necessity into a new landscape. That is what the present dying process in the church is for and that is what the renewal is about.

My conviction is that the postmodern period gives the Christian and the church the ability to come out from under centuries of Greek influence and take hold of the worldview God intended us to have all along. That worldview is the one given by God to the Hebrew people. It is the vision of life carried by Jesus and Paul and it formed the foundation and set the context for all that they said and did.

The Greek worldview divided the spiritual realm from the created realm; the Hebrew worldview unites them. The Greek vision of reality has made the church something separate from much of the saints' life and work; the Hebrew worldview can bring these back together under one divine strategy and eternal purpose. The Greek paradigm has confused our understanding of the way in which God comes to, and exists in our world; the Hebrew vision can clear a way through, that will enable the revelation of God to engage every facet and dimension of our life in creation. The Hebrew vision of life has, I believe, the ability to accomplish this. It has the clear vision we need if we are to see change come at this critical time.

The first stone

The first major foundation stone of the Hebrew worldview (or cosmology) related to their understanding of the way in which the creation was made. We read in Genesis that in the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. God taught the Hebrews that creation was made up of three heavens (orders of creation) existing from the earth right through to the highest heaven. Man lived on the earth and inhabited the first heaven. The heavens above were the dwelling of angels who visited the earth and interacted with man. The third or highest of these heavens was the place where the throne of God was established. Whereas, Sheol, the place of the dead, was under the earth. Through this vision of creation **the Hebrews came to understand that heaven (the heavens) and earth existed in space/time relationship with each other.**

Shining down from heaven

The second foundation stone of the Hebrew's worldview has to do with the way they saw and encountered divine reality in their everyday life and work in creation. Romans 1:20 says that in the beginning the eternal God created man and intended him to come into relationship with him through **"that which is made"**. We see here that it is through every facet of our life in the creation that we finite beings were meant to come to an understanding of and encounter with the infinite God. This statement from Romans reveals the amazing extent of God's revelation of himself in and through the created order. Paul says that God's **"invisible attributes, his eternal power and divine nature"** were to be **"clearly seen"** through all the things he had made. As Paul said in Ephesians, God is not only **"over all (things) and through all (things)"**, his attributes, nature, and power are in reality also **"in all (things)"** (Eph 4:6). Scripture plainly teaches that God's 'unseen' nature and presence exists in and is expressed from every created thing.

Bringing these two foundational Hebrew truths together we can conclude that God's revelation of himself emerges, or is manifest, from every created thing, from the earth through to the highest heavens above us. **For the Hebrew the spiritual or**

unseen realm was one with the created realm. It did not exist in a separate or removed dimension; it was in union with all of life in creation.

So, what is the creation that the Son of God came to fill, made of?

Understanding the makeup of the unseen created order

We know from Genesis about the creation of the heavens and the earth, the fish and the birds, the plants and the seeds and mankind. These are the 'seen' things of creation. To look more closely at the 'unseen' things of creation we turn to Genesis 1: 27, 28. There we read: *"And God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; **male and female** he created them. And **God blessed them**. And God said to them, '**be fruitful and multiply** and **fill** the earth and **subdue** it; and **rule over** the fish of the sea and the birds of the air (first heavens) and **over every living thing which moves on the earth.**"*

Looking at this foundational verse in Genesis, we see three unseen and created spheres that God has made for man. The first is **Marriage**, the second is **Family** and the third is **Work**. These three spheres are the primary building blocks of mankind's created reality. They both constitute and set the agenda for the "all things" of creation. That is, the character of all of creation – work, relationships, the physical heavens and the earth and the angelic realm – is predominantly determined by and oriented around these three spheres.

The first ceremony God conducted, after Adam had named the animals and Eve was created, was to join male to female in marriage. The blessing of God was on them to multiply and create the family. Man's purpose unfolded from this place of identity and nurture. God placed man in the garden and called him to cultivate it. As we saw in the garden setting, the divine call to rule over the works of God's hands was to be accomplished through work. The unseen systems of created reality which work uses to engage the world of man and nature are **Government, Health, Education, Business and Recreation**.

Because every man, woman and child's reality is wrapped up and one with the creation spheres of marriage, family and work, we definitely need to take account of their place in the divine strategy. It follows that if Christ is to *"fill all things"* then he must fill these unseen spheres of the created order. So how does Christ do this? To answer this we need to consider the purpose and strategy of God for the church.

The church – the fullness of the created order

What is the purpose of the church? The body of Christ can have no other purpose than that of Jesus Christ, and his purpose is to *"fill all things."* This truth is confirmed by the phrase from that key verse in Ephesians – *"his body, (is) the fullness of him who fills all in all."* We can conclude from this that **the purpose of Christ for his body the church is to be the fullness of "all things" seen and unseen of the created order**. It follows from this revelation of Scripture that the church can only come to fill the creation through the spheres of marriage, family and work. These are the means by which we access and relate to the "all things" of creation. Only through these spheres of creation can our identity and purpose be expressed and realised. It is through these, and only through these, that we can grow, mature and reach the *"stature that belongs to the fullness of Christ"* (Eph 4:13) in the heavens. There is no other way for his body the church to become the fullness of him who fills all in all. In this unambiguous way the Word of God, via the Hebrew vision of all things, speaks to us of a divine strategy for the church that encompasses all of our life in creation.

What does it mean to 'fill' a sphere of the created order? Briefly, the best way to explain this concept is to look at the word 'fulfil' that takes up the sense of the word 'fill'. To fulfil something is to realise or draw out its full potential or maximum benefit. For us this will be the discovery and enjoyment of the nature, attributes and power of God within the creation spheres. Everything in creation contains the glory of God in different measures. We are called to search out that glory and thus inherit

the measure! We can see immediately how this relates to our experiences in marriage, family and work. To draw out and realise the full meaning and divine intention of these creation realities is the fullness and privilege of the saints. To do this we will have to journey through the suffering and the dying of Jesus. But our resurrection into our inheritance is assured because of the finished work of Christ. This inheritance is ever waiting for us in and through life in the three unseen spheres of human existence.

How does 'good work' work?

This placement of the saint's good works at the heart of the divine strategy arises naturally from the creation reality God established in the beginning. Man and creation are mutually dependent, unable to come into their created purpose apart from each other. Creation needs man's work to come into its fulfilment and man needs to steward the creation through his work to come into his inheritance. It follows from this that, if God declared the creation to be "good" and if man is called to work the creation, then by this work he must be able to bring forth, or realise, that "good". The goodness of creation is another way of expressing its "fullness". This is evident in the well-known verse – *"The earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof" Ps 24:1 KJB*. The goodness of the earth is to be brought forth, made manifest and enjoyed through all of the saints' works in the creation.

The major focus of Scripture, when speaking of our purpose as saints on the earth, centres on our good works. This is why there exists so many references to "good works" in the Scripture. From the very foundations of the earth these works were prepared for us by our Father, readied by him for us to walk in. The references are too many to list here, but a browse through a concordance will amply demonstrate the place of good creation works, that being all of our work, paid and unpaid, in the plan and purpose of God. I will simply mention here that well-known statement by Jesus: *"Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works and glorify your Father who is in heaven."* Matt 5:16

In and through our work in the unseen orders of the creation we are called and privileged to find the justice and holiness of God in government; the beauty, suffering and playful delight of God in art, literature and leisure; the power and supply of God in business; the wisdom and knowledge of his Spirit in education; the wholeness of God in the wonder of our physical life and in the healing disciplines. This justice, this beauty, this wholeness and wisdom is found in the relationships we engage as we discover and uncover the attributes, nature and power of God in others. The eternal creator God, no longer safely removed by rationalism or mysticism from our life in creation, no longer hidden behind the thorns and the travail, is in this way made manifest and enjoyed in all things, through all things and over all things. We have the right to name, we have the call to occupy – we were made for this! Is it any wonder that God prepared all those good works before all time for us to walk in?

Our work, all of our work, matters to God. It matters to the creation and, because of that, it must matter to us!

From the book, "The Church – Beyond the Congregation"

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