

# Gospel Gleanings, "...especially the parchments"

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## The Word and Creation

*"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made." (John 1:1-3)*

In these verses John takes us gently by the hand and leads us, step by careful step, through deep waters. He moves from the existence of the "Word" in the beginning to the full deity of the "Word," to the eternality, the eternal existence, of the "Word," to the fact that all created things were created by the "Word."

How do you deal with error? The practice of apologetics focuses on error. To be sure, Peter uses the word translated into English as "apologetics" (1 Peter 3:15) as he instructs us "to be ready always to give an answer" for our faith. In earlier chapters of this work we examined a major historical error regarding the nature of the "Word," specifically the Arian heresy that taught that Jesus was a created being, the most noble of God's creation, but that in fact He had a beginning, and that He is not God in the most proper sense of that word. Christians should seek a godly balance in their studies of historical theology and the related examination of error. On one side we can become so obsessed with error as to focus more on the error than on the more important truth of Scripture. On the other side we can become so naïve as to pretend that error doesn't exist, allowing it to invade the church and destroy the faith of simple or uninformed believers (2 Timothy 2:16-19).

Neither of these faulty strategies finds support from Scripture. The Biblical method of dealing with error is to confront it when it threatens the stable faith of people in the church, but never to focus so intently on error as to neglect truth. John models this balanced strategy in our study passage. If you didn't know about the Arian heresy, you would hardly notice John's precise wording in these verses, but if you do know about it, you are amazed that John so efficiently dismissed it with a simple statement, "All things were made by him; and without him

was not anything made that was made." If Jesus is a created being, and if nothing was made other than by Him, we are confronted with the logical dilemma; did He create Himself before He existed? John refutes the error in one simple sentence, but he doesn't bother to give us a thesis on future errors that shall invade the faith and lead away simple minded disciples. He maintains his focus on the more important truth of the gospel. We should never allow refutation of error to become our primary teaching objective. Scripture draws a common analogy to preaching/teaching God's children. It is feeding and shepherding sheep. True enough a faithful shepherd must constantly watch for sheep enemies, but most of the shepherd's defense of the flock occurs outside the flock's awareness. He confronts their adversaries and protects them while they are peacefully grazing in green pastures to which he has led them. Pastors should follow this example in their preaching and teaching. Sheep are not carnivorous animals. They do not naturally feed on other sheep's blood. When a preacher makes refutation of error his primary preaching/teaching objective, he is effectively trying to feed sheep with the blood of other slain sheep. Whether it be a pastor in the pulpit or a teacher in any other philosophy or professional career, focus primarily on the negative—what we oppose, what we criticize and dislike—fosters paranoia and dooms its advocates to ultimate defeat.

At the end of the day John will lead us to bow in adoring worship of the Word who is eternal, who is God—equal with the Father in every sense—and who created every thing that exists in the material universe. It should be noted that Scripture consistently rejects the idea that God created sin or in any way gives His divine approval to it.

Beginning in the Garden of Eden and continuing to the final verse of Revelation, Scripture consistently affirms that God created man as a moral creature, in that sense like Himself, and charged man with living up to His moral commandments. Man's obedience would/will bring God's blessing, and man's disobedience would/will bring God's severe judgment. When John affirms that the Word created all things that were made, he is not referring to moral—or more properly, immoral—conduct, but to material things.

The occasional pessimistic attitude of living in this “low ground of sin and sorrow” is diametrically opposed to the joyful attitude of life that Scripture affirms. Such a low view of life as it now exists for God's chosen people is far more akin to ancient Gnostic heresy than New Testament Christianity. Without question, the world in which we live bears the marks of fallenness and sin, specifically imposed as a divine judgment after man's sin, but man's fall did not remove God from His throne, nor disenfranchise Him from righteous and moral governance of His created universe. Paul urges quite a different attitude in believers; so should we.

*"Charge them that are rich in this world, that they be not highminded, nor trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God, who giveth us richly all things to enjoy;" (1 Timothy 6:17)*

Rather than trusting in riches, material wealth, or sacrificing our lives to gain material wealth, the wise and godly believer will focus on the immaterial, spiritual wealth that God has already given freely and enjoy life as it is, not pursue a materialistic life that is often evasive—and always deceptive, not at all conveying the peace or joy that it promised.

The ancient Gnostic heresy that John rejects in all of his writings viewed the whole material universe as a colossal mistake and, therefore, altogether to be avoided and held in contempt. Quite the opposite, John affirms that the “Word” created the material universe. Therefore we are to view it as a divine blessing, a visible declaration of His handiwork, His love for beauty, and His commandment that we live life in His world, joyfully celebrating Him and His creation.

A literal interpretation of Second Peter chapter three will lead us to consider that heaven itself may well be this material universe, recreated without the cataclysmic impact of sin and rebellion on it—a universe wholly devoted to the glory of its Creator and available to be enjoyed by God's people throughout eternity. Often people tend to view this chapter as a highly symbolic passage, but the context does not lend itself to allegorical—or for that matter any other symbolic or representative—interpretation. As the hymn writer states, “This is my Father's world....” If the material universe is in fact “my Father's world,” we should live life enjoying and wisely using its resources to glorify its Creator and our God. The material universe, no less than our spiritual creation in Christ Jesus, should give each of us sufficient reason to live life with joyful hearts and contented minds.

We should not overlook the obvious fact. In John's introduction to his gospel the first thing he affirms after establishing the full deity and eternity of the “Word” is the fundamental truth that the material universe is God's creation, specifically brought into existence through the same Word who became flesh and died for our sins! Why would John give such prominence to the Word's creation of the material universe?

Occasionally we follow the helpful systematic theology texts in a focused study of all the essential divine attributes, of all those unique qualities that affirm God's exclusive character and nature as God. The leading attributes are familiar words to most Bible students; omniscience (all-knowingness), omnipotence (all-powerfulness), omnipresence (everywhere present; no where absent), and the list goes on. I have never seen a systematic theology list of the divine attributes that include the idea of beauty. Yet Solomon affirms God's love for beauty. *“He hath made every thing beautiful in his time: also he hath set the world in their heart, so that no man can find out the work that God maketh from the beginning to the end.”* (Ecclesiastes 3:11) I suggest that Solomon and John join in affirming that God loves beauty, both material and moral beauty, so much so that He has created us in this amazing world where we may see and enjoy Him and His handiwork. Praise God for both creations, natural and spiritual!

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Worship service each Sunday 10:30 A. M.  
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