

## ***Session 2***

### ***A Part of the Creation***

Opening Question: “What’s the purpose of your life?” What are some of the ways that people in the world answer this question? How would you answer it?

Watch the video for session two.

1. Do you think most Christians have a positive or negative attitude toward the material world? Why is this? How might understanding Genesis 1:28 as the first great commission impact our thinking about the creation?
2. Read Romans 8:18-25. What do these verses teach us about the value and importance of the material creation that surrounds us? In what way is it fitting for a Christian to have sympathy for the creation?
3. How does one affirm the goodness of creation and man’s role as overseer, without succumbing to a “tree-hugger” mentality—or is such heightened and excessive concern for the environment an appropriate Christian attitude?
4. Read Genesis 2:7. What does this verse teach us about the definition of a human being? Why is it important for us to remember our fundamental connection to the earth?
5. Read Revelation 21:1. What are the eschatological or eternal implications for a hearty affirmation of man’s physical nature and the material realm?
6. What difference does it make to see the world not as mere scaffolding for some greater purpose, but as the very object of God’s redemptive and restorative work? In what sense is it right for Christians to be “worldly”?
7. In Christ, you are made “fully human.” How should this truth impact the way that you prioritize and think about your daily work and activities?

## Session 2 Answers

Opening Question: As with any initial question, the goal is not so much getting people to realize a correct answer as much as it is warming the group to the topic at hand and encouraging an atmosphere of inquiry and discussion. Encourage the group to think beyond the ‘pat’ answers of money and happiness.

1. Many Christians have been taught that the world is evil and that it’s “all going to burn, anyway,” and so have at best a dismissive attitude toward the material world. Recognizing the creation as God’s good work challenges that understanding and forces believers to reconsider their relationship to the surrounding creation. Remember that when Paul or John warn against “the world” or “the flesh,” this is invariably a term used to describe the fallen world in rebellion against the Creator. It should not be understood in a Platonic or gnostic way that regards the material, physical world as inherently evil simply by virtue of its materiality.

2. These verses are critical as they present the creation as good and as suffering for the sins of man—sucked down into futility by no choice of its own, and so waiting eagerly for man’s full redemption so that it may also experience God’s redemptive work. Considering the creation’s “innocence,” man who is culpable for rebellion against God and for the resulting desecration of creation bears responsibility and should rightly feel sympathy for the plight of the broken creation.

3. Probably most Christians would do well to pay more attention to the ways that they care for the environment—the surrounding world is God’s good work, and a great gift that will be restored on the Last Day. Yet, we do not worship the creation or accord it too high a standing. God alone receives worship, and man is not somehow an alien invader of a pristine natural world. Caring for the creation means caring for other human creatures who belong in the creation as much as any other “natural” part. Man has always had a key role to play in his dominion of the creation. Keeping God first and understanding what it means to “subdue” the creation will foster right attitudes toward each and help the Christian come to a good understanding of what it means to care for the creation without treating the creation as divine.

4. In *Creation and Fall*, Bonhoeffer declared that man does not have a body and a soul, but that man *is* a body and a soul. To think of ourselves as essentially physical is a significant departure from the prevailing “Greek” thinking of our western world. By definition, humans are bodies animated by God’s breath. This is why we anticipate the resurrection of the body—not just an eternal incorporeal existence in some translucent, vapid realm of “spirits.” Remembering our physicality keeps us grounded and firmly bound to the rest of creation.

5. This question is intended to make explicit what has been implicit throughout this discussion. God’s final work of resurrection and restoration results in a material eternity. We will be bodily beings in the eternal kingdom of our Lord. Hence, working now in the material world for physical goals and objectives is not antithetical to Christian faith, but a fitting consequence of faith.

6. While the brokenness will be made right—and in such a dramatic way as to constitute a “new creation,” there remains a continuity between what is and what will be. The creation is God’s good work and the object of His love in Christ. For any follower of Christ, a dismissive attitude toward the creation is wrong. Seeing the creation in such a positive light should reinvigorate our work in and for the created realm—this is holy work that fits into God’s eternal intentions for his creation. Such work matters. Bound to the created world, and invested in its care, Christians should be altogether worldly!

7. At the resurrection we will be completely and fully human—all that God intended us to be when he first created Adam and Eve. As humans, we will have physical bodies—but bodies that are glorified and finally and fully freed from the decay and corruption of sin. Since we recognize the innate goodness of the created realm and its lasting significance in God’s plan, we can reevaluate the way we think about our “material” work that occupies us now. It is not a mere diversion from what “really matters.” It is important work that flows from the plan and purpose of God. The work we do and for the surrounding creation (including other people) is good and holy and wholly God pleasing...but, of course, never salvific or ultimately relevant in our vertical relationship with God.