PART TWO

GOD AS CREATOR, OWNER, AND
PERFECT GIFT-GIVER

I. GOD AS CREATOR. To understand Christian stewardship we must accept that God is the creator of everything, owner of everything, and the perfect gift giver. We begin by examining God as creator of everything. In Genesis, we see God as creator of everything worldly and heavenly, tangible and intangible.

A. God is the creator of all things. Only God creates out of nothingness. When we create, even today, we create by using what God has already created.

1. “In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters.” (Genesis 1:1-2). The balance of chapter 1 gives the account of the creation of the sky, the earth, the waters, all creatures, and humankind. “So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.” (Genesis 1:27)

2. In Genesis 2, the creation story and the power of God as creator is re-told: the Lord God made, formed, planted, made to grow, and commanded. God finished his work after six days, and rested on the seventh day. God blessed the seventh day and hallowed it, thereby creating a time for rest and worship.

B. After creating humankind, God established a stewardship relationship between humankind and the rest of his creation. Genesis 1:28 says that “God blessed them, and God said to them, ‘Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth.’” Genesis 2:15 says that “The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to till it and keep it.” Even after sin entered the world and God sent humankind out of the garden to till the ground from which he was taken, the stewardship relationship between humankind
and creation continued (Genesis 3:23). Genesis 4:1-5 recounts the story of Cain and Abel — the first stewardship story in the Bible. This story illustrates how Cain and Abel each cared for a portion of God’s creation, made offerings to God from the fruits of their labor, and tells why one offering was acceptable and the other was not. This story is the first mention of firstlings (first fruits) offerings.

C. What does it mean for us to have dominion over God’s creation? Too often this phrase is invoked as a justification for abuse of God’s creation. The Psalmist says that dominion belongs to the Lord — the Lord has dominion over the past (the dead), the present (the living), and the future (those yet unborn) Psalm 22:28. Daniel 7:14 says that God’s dominion is everlasting and shall not pass away. Revelation 1:5-6 says “… to him who loves us and freed us from our sins by his blood, and made us to be a kingdom, priests serving his God and Father, to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.” It is clear that whatever dominion God granted to humankind in creation is still subject to God’s ultimate dominion. Therefore, our dominion is a gift which is to be exercised as part of the stewardship relationship that was created between God and humankind.

D. Genesis clearly reveals God is creator of everything — everything in, on, under, and above this world. In addition, God is shown to have created the first relationships between man and woman, humankind and creation, and humankind to God. God even created a day of rest and, because of God’s abundant gifts to humankind, a reason for humankind to give thanks. God is affirmed as both creator and sustainer in Psalm 104 and Psalm 136.

II. GOD AS OWNER. Because God created (and still creates) all things, all things belong to God as owner. As seen in Genesis, we are stewards of God’s creation and have been given dominion (the right and duty to manage and care) over it. However, this does not mean that God has relinquished ownership or control of creation. The Bible recognizes and affirms God’s ownership and control over creation.

A. Psalm 24:1: “The earth is the Lord’s and all that is in it, the world, and those who live in it.” Paul affirms God’s ownership of everything in 1 Corinthians 10:26: “for ‘the earth and its fullness are the Lord’s.’”
B. King David acknowledged God as creator and owner by saying “blessed are you, O Lord, the God of our ancestor Israel, forever and ever. Yours, O Lord, are the greatness, the power, the glory, the victory, and the majesty; for all that is the heavens and on the earth is yours; yours is the kingdom, O Lord, and you are exalted as head above all” (1 Chronicles 29:10-11).

III. GOD AS PERFECT GIFT-GIVER. What makes God the perfect gift-giver? First of all, God is love (1 John 4:8). Because of God’s love, Adam and Eve were given everything they needed. Although sin entered the world through their disobedience and their disobedience condemned them (and us) to lives of toil, suffering and eventual death (Genesis 3:19), the story didn’t end there. “God’s love was revealed among us in this way: God sent his only Son into the world so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins” (1 John 4:9-10).

A. Because God is love, God wants to be generous to us. “Put me to the test, says the Lord of hosts; see if I will not open the windows of heaven for you and pour down for you an overflowing blessing” (Malachi 3:10b). Paul compares God’s gift of love to the gifts of tongues, prophecy, faith, and giving and concludes by saying that the greatest gift is love (1 Corinthians 13:1-3, 13).

B. Jesus was the fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecy of a new covenant with the houses of Israel and Judah (Jeremiah 31:31-34). Jesus was not at odds with the Old Testament, he came to fulfill it. “Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets; I have come not to abolish but to fulfill” (Matthew 5:17). The writer of Hebrews refers to the promise of a new covenant and calls Christ the “mediator” (between God and mankind) of a new covenant (Hebrews 9:15).

C. Through Jesus and because of God’s love, God gives us the gift of salvation. Although law was given through Moses, grace and truth were given with the gift of Jesus Christ (John 1:17). Just as in the Old Testament when sacrificial blood was shed to atone for sins and wrongdoing, Jesus’ blood was shed to atone for our sin and wrongdoing. Only by the shedding of his blood do we receive the promise of eternal life. The writer of the Fourth Gospel says that “… just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, so that whoever
believes in him may have eternal life. For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life. Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him” (John 3:14, 16-17). The gift of Jesus’ death and resurrection for our salvation (the perfect, ultimate gift) is evidence of God’s boundless love for us.

D. How can we possibly believe that Jesus’ death and resurrection is for us in this age? Paul, writing to the church in Ephesus, says “for by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not the result of works, so that no one may boast” (Ephesians 2:8-9). Therefore, even our faith is a gift from God. Jesus, speaking to Thomas in the upper room, says, “have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe” (John 20:29).

E. No discussion of God as perfect gift-giver would be complete without a mention of wealth. Wealth and the power to obtain wealth are gifts from God. “But remember the Lord your God, for it is he who gives you the power to get wealth…” (Deuteronomy 8:18). However, as will be seen later, wealth comes with both risks and opportunities.

F. God has a double claim on us: first by first creating us and then by atoning for our sins through the death and resurrection of Jesus. Paul says that “He who did not withhold his own Son, but gave him up for all of us, will he not with him also give us everything else?” (Romans 8:32). “Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift!” (2 Corinthians 9:15). The indescribable gift Paul is referring to is Jesus (see John 3:16). Paul confesses the duality of God as Father and Son, and points to the importance of each aspect when he says “…for us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist” (1 Corinthians 8:6). In this passage, Paul acknowledges one God, the Father, as Creator, Owner, and Perfect Gift-Giver, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, as the instrument (through His death and resurrection) of our salvation.
G. In baptism God gives and we receive the gift of the Holy Spirit (Mark 1:8). God later equips us with the gift of the Holy Spirit when we act upon God’s commission (see Matthew 28:19) and go into the world (see Acts 2:4).

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Why is the “stewardship relationship” an important part of the creation story?

2. What does it mean for humankind to “have dominion?”

3. Why is God the “perfect gift-giver?” What are the most perfect gifts you have ever given or received?

4. What role does faith play in shaping your beliefs?

5. What is God’s “double claim” upon us? Why is it important?