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THE MOST FUNDAMENTAL QUESTION: WHY DO WE EXIST?

At this point in our study of the spiritual life, I want to leave the introductory matters discussed in chapters one and two and plunge more deeply into the subject before us. In the next four chapters, I will address certain theological topics that are fundamental to conceptualizing the spiritual life. It may seem strange to begin our deeper study with the fundamental question of existence, yet sometimes simple questions provide profound insight. Why did the all-sufficient, self-existent God, who was not seeking to remediate any personal deficiencies, create all that we see around us? Can an answer to that question help us understand the spiritual life more clearly?

THE BEING OF GOD

What words come to your mind when you think about God? What terms would you choose? It is most common, when answering such questions, to speak of the attributes of God; that is, the character of God revealed in His names and actions (what do they tell us about Him?). However, the question I am proposing is a more general one. Taking all the evidence in the Bible about the character of God, what few overarching descriptive words would you chose?

Maybe you would choose the noun *perfection*, an intrinsic quality, since God does all things in conformity with unsullied congruity to flawlessness, precision, exactness, and rightness. In fact, He is the definition of all those terms. A second term you might suggest is *beauty* because God's multi-faceted character, when seen as a whole, is the epitome of symmetry, plurality, and proportions, a workable general definition of beauty. Another term might be *love* as we reflect on the apostle's statement that 'God is love' (1 John 4:8), suggesting that all of His actions are a function of His character. In fact, it may be argued that love is the highest kind of beauty because it is never blighted in any way in the being of God.

THE PURPOSE OF THE DIVINE CREATION

This brings me to the point, given all that we know about God – His independence, self-existence, and complete self-satisfaction – for the reason of His creative action. Is there a clue in this to the meaning of the spiritual life? It is clear that God has no deficiencies that He wanted or needed to correct and so sought to resolve them by creative activity. We can also say that, since nothing existed outside of God before He created,¹ there was no external necessity for His creative activity. Thus, we can say that God's motive is rooted in His own internal desires.

The answer for why God created is found within His holy, self-determining self. It seems that it is rooted in the inter-trinitarian delight of God to manifest or reveal His own character. His motive for creation was to multiply the adoration and praise of Himself. God delights in the effusion, the emanation, of Himself and so created

1. '... by Him all things were created' (Col. 1:16); 'For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things' (Rom. 11:36).

an external manifestation of His character, a world of beauty, harmony, and love. 'Let all the earth fear the Lord; let all the inhabitants of the earth stand in awe of him' (Ps. 33:8). God rightly seeks His own glorification which is not an empty boast simply because He alone is altogether beautiful.

The Bible expresses the notion of God's self-glorification by the word *glory*. The term has two essential nuances in the Holy Scriptures. For example, glory is frequently used to express God's internal qualities, what theologians describe as attributes. When used as such, it has reference to His excellency, dignity, worthiness, greatness, or beauty (the perfect symmetry and balance of those qualities, and more). Yet another usage, pertinent to this discussion, is that glory often refers to the display or manifestation of those internal qualities. Ezekiel proclaims, 'And behold I saw the glory of the God of Israel coming from the way of the east. And the earth shone with His glory' (Ezek. 43:2). The phrases 'name of God' and 'glory of God' are often used interchangeably in the Bible. God says to Moses in Exodus 33:19: 'I Myself will make all My goodness to pass before you.' In Psalm 8:1, David exclaims: 'O LORD, our Lord, How majestic is Your name in all the earth, Who have displayed Your splendor above the heavens!'

The superb manifestation of divine glory was in the Lord Jesus Christ. 'No one has seen God at any time, the only begotten of God who is in the bosom of the Father, He has explained Him' (John 1:18). In our Lord's prayer before Gethsemane, He said, 'And now, Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You before the world was. I have manifested Your name to the men whom You gave Me out of the world' (John 17:5-6). In John's grand description of the redeemed in heaven, he says that 'they will see His face,

and His name shall be on their foreheads' (Rev. 22:4), meaning righteousness will describe them.

If God's own self-glorification is the ultimate cause of creation, then we can make the claim that the purpose of the divine creation is to glorify Him, to reflect His glory, His character, and only that. Who does not stand on the edge of the Grand Canyon, observing the vastness of the cleavage of the earth, the changing colors as the clouds pass by, and think of the divine Creator? Can you watch a majestic stallion trot so effortlessly and not think of Him? Sit on a beach beside a large body of water and observe the changing hues, the plethora of colors, as the sun sets, and who do you think of in the quietness of a meditative moment? The Psalmist said it for all of us: 'The heavens are telling the glory of God and their expanse is declaring the works of His hands; Day to day pours forth speech, and night to night reveals knowledge' (Ps. 19:1-2).

Paul states the case bluntly: 'Because that which is known about God is revealed to them for God made it evident to them. For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made so that they are without excuse' (Rom. 1:19-20). God created the natural world so that it would reflect His beauty back upon Himself. The natural world was created to show forth the symmetry and beauty of God in a lower way than His image-bearers; He made us so that we might join all nature in a chorus of adulation and praise. William Henry Draper (1855–1933) composed the lyrics of an English Christian hymn often sung at Easter; the idea was gathered from a poem by St Francis of Assisi based on Psalm 148.

All creatures of our God and King,
 Lift up your voice and with us sing,
 O praise Him, Alleluia.
 Thou burning sun with golden beam,
 Thou silver moon with softer gleam,
 O praise Him, O praise Him,
 Alleluia, Alleluia, Alleluia.

Thou rushing wind that art so strong,
 Ye clouds that sail in Heaven along,
 O praise Him, Alleluia.
 Thou rising moon in praise rejoice,
 Ye lights of evening find a voice,
 O praise Him, O praise Him,
 Alleluia, Alleluia, Alleluia.

Let all things their Creator bless,
 And worship Him in humbleness,
 O praise Him, Alleluia.²

THE CREATION OF HUMANITY

If the divine purpose of the creation was to multiply and reflect God's greatness and beauty, and since the creation of mankind is His greatest and highest creative achievement, it is logical, and biblically accurate, to say that our creation was for the same reason. The prophet Isaiah, speaking for God, said: 'Everyone who is called by My name, and whom I created for My glory, whom I have formed, even whom I have made' (Isa. 43:7). Paul says it this way: '... from Him, and through Him, and to Him are all things. To God be the glory forever. Amen' (Rom. 11:36).

Men and women stand in a unique relationship to God and to each other, an intimacy unlike that sustained

2. This traditional Christian hymn has appeared in numerous hymn books beginning in the early twentieth century. I am quoting the lyrics from *Great Hymns of the Faith* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Corporation, 1974), 31.