

Systematic Theology
CHBC, Core Seminars
5 Oct 2014

Week 6: Creation Part 2

Class Introduction:

I. REVIEW & INTRODUCTION

Where did we come from? Why are we here? Is there a purpose, a goal behind all that we see and experience? Or is life one big cosmic accident - directionless and purposeless? These are straightforward questions, to which the Bible has straightforward answers.

Turn back with me to Gen 1.1. *“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters. And God said..., and God said...”* (Gen 1.1ff)

In the beginning, *God* created. Creation owes itself not to chance and impersonal forces, but God. Origins, begin with him.

He created *ex-nihilo*, *out of nothing*. *“In the beginning...,”* not *“when God began to create”* as if there was this timeless matter, some cosmic play dough that God stumbled across one day and decided to refashion and shape. This was the Greek idea behind the cosmos. But according to the Bible, in the beginning, not matter, but God. He’s eternal, self-existent. Everything else owes its existence to him.

He created by his *word*. One of the constant refrains of Gen 1.1-2.3 is this, *“and God said, and God said.”* The picture is not one of God toiling over his work. It’s not a picture of trial and error, like some frustrated inventor burying his head in his hands. His words are power (they create) and perfection (they create exactly what he intended them to create).

He created *all things*. That's what Gen 1.1-2.3 is about. It's the all-encompassing account of our origins - from stars and galaxies to the tiniest creatures that crawl upon the ground.

Gen 1.1-2.3 is the google-earth view of creation. The big picture. And then in 2.4ff, we go to google-street view. We zoom in on the creation of mankind and all that transpires. Not two separate accounts, but complimentary accounts from different perspectives.

We should remember that the chapter divisions and verse numbers were placed in the Bible until the 16th century. Moses intends for the second chapter to be read closely with the first and for each chapter to be identified as part of the same event. The theological theme of humanity being created in the image of God is continued in chapter 2, and so the theme of the likeness between God and man finds further explanation.

Last week Charles gave the 6 current and dominant views on creation and the advantages and disadvantages to each view. And ultimately the class concluded with the understanding that the Bible doesn't give us all of the details necessary to understand exactly the age of the earth. What is important to God is that we understand *who* created the earth--God himself---and *why* he created it ... for his glory, ultimately shown in and through the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Today: we take a step back and first ask, what is God's relationship to the creation he has made? How we understand that question makes all the distinction between Christianity and false religions. And so first, we're going to look at four view non-Christian views. Then we'll look specifically at how the Bible describes God's relationship to creation. And finally, we look at the crown jewel of creation – humankind. God created male and female in his image to extend his kingly dominion over creation. What does that mean for us and who we are?

Comments, questions?

I. Four Non-Christian Views of God and Creation

There have been many philosophical worldviews put forth to explain God's relationship with his creation. The first view is an old view, that's enjoying a bit of a renaissance.

- 1) **Pantheism** (Stoics of first century, Buddhism, Eastern and New Age religions today) – teaches that God is everything (pan=all), and thus everything is God. Oprah Winfrey, in an interview says this about her definition of God, “My definition of God is the *all*...the *all* in the *all*, through the *all*, above the *all*, in the *all*.” Oprah Winfrey is a *pantheist*. So according to pantheism what we need to do then is “get in touch” with, “become one” with the divine “in here,” and the divine “out there.” God has no distinct personality. He's not immutable or unchanging, because the universe always changes. God isn't in any sense morally holy, because the evil in the universe is also a part of God.

One great challenge to Pantheism is that the divine exists as much in the most morally reprehensible acts as it does in beauty or delicious food. Even more importantly, there's no God on the outside who can break in and rescue us. There's no hope of *deliverance*, only *acceptance*. This is why for many of the first century stoics, and many increasingly in the West, the only viable response is suicide.

- 2) **Dualism** – Dualism is the idea that there are two ultimate forces in the universe, good and evil, sometimes presented as God and matter. Much of Platonic and Gnostic thought is dualistic. An easy way to remember what dualism is, is to think of the word with it's multiple spellings. Dual = 2; Good and Evil. Duel = A Battle. Thus dualism is a battle b/w good and bad. And good and evil are in a long, protracted cosmic battle for supremacy.

This is the worldview underlying the *Star Wars Series*. There are the jedi lords, and the sith lords, dueling forces of good and evil. In dualism the spirit is good, but the body is evil. The desire is to then escape the material realm for higher realm of forms (spiritual realm). But dualism denies God's Lordship of creation and the goodness of the

created world. In the new heavens and the new earth, we won't be disembodied spirits, but souls with recreated and renewed bodies.

- 3) **Deism** – Deism is the view that God is not presently involved in creation. He created it, but is now distant and removed from what He made. So if you have any family, friends, or coworkers who are happy to affirm that there's a god that created the world, but that he doesn't have anything to do with it anymore, they're essentially communicating a deistic worldview. In other words, God is the divine clockmaker who created the "clock of creation," wound it up, and is now letting it run on its own. This runs counter to Christianity because Christianity asserts that not only is God presently acting to sustain creation, but that's also acted in creation throughout history, most notably in the Incarnation.
- 4) **Materialism (or naturalism)**. The materialist view of the world is not one where it's followers are looking to get rich and buy nice clothes. Materialism is the view that the material universe is all there is. Men like Richard Dawkins and Sam Harris are contemporary advocates of this view, as well as the late Christopher Hitchens, whose writings live on.

Materialism also goes by a number of different names. So if someone calls himself a naturalist, a physicalist, or a philosophical naturalist, then they are a materialist. Materialism says we live in a closed world. No force from the outside, call it God or whatever you like, can enter in and disturb the physical world. Our lives are governed purely by impersonal laws operating over strictly natural phenomena.

Renown atheistic philosopher Bertrand Russel put it like this, "... man..., his origin, his growth, his hopes and fears, his loves and his beliefs, are but the outcome of accidental collocations of atoms. ... all the labors of the ages, all the devotion, all the inspiration, all the noonday brightness of human genius, are destined to extinction in the vast death of the solar system, and the whole temple of Man's achievement must inevitably be buried beneath the debris of a universe in ruins. ... *only within the scaffolding of these truths, only on the firm*

foundation of unyielding despair, can the soul's habitation henceforth be safely built." (Quoted in Driscoll and Breshears, *Doctrine*, pg. 105.

Creation is not a gift given by a loving creator, but an "epic, purposeless accident." You owe your own existence this morning to an epic, purposeless accident! Doesn't that make you feel all rosy inside? Richard Dawkins was asked if such a view made him depressed. He said, "no... but if somebody does, that's their problem... The universe is bleak, cold and empty. But so what?"

If this created world is reduced to mere matter in motion, concepts like "good" and "evil" are merely human constructs. But in the end, such a worldview is false, and eventually leads to nihilism - sense of meaninglessness and despair. We are forced to argue that the actions of rapists, serial killers, child predators are not really "wrong" in any objective sense. In a materialist universe, actions are not moral or immoral. They just are. If that's all life is, then we might as well throw up our hands "*eat, drink, and be merry for tomorrow we die.*"

These first four views run contrary to the Biblical account, for they either deny God's superiority over his creation or they obliterate his relationship with it.

Comments, questions?

II. God's Relationship to Creation

God is distinct from creation; yet God is always involved in creation and creation is always dependent on God. As we have mentioned, creation isn't self-created, and so it's not self-sustaining. The stability of mankind and the entire universe depends on God's sustaining power. Paul affirms mankind's dependence on God when he says that God "*gives to all mankind life and breath and everything*" and that "*in him we live and move and have our being*" (Acts 17:25, 28).

Yet, the gospel tells of a God who is above all of the earth and is so concerned for his creation that he sent his Son Jesus Christ into the world to

6
save it. And so the traditional way that Christians have spoken about God's relationship to the world is in terms of his transcendence and his immanence...

1) **Transcendence**

When we speak of God's transcendence, we are speaking of his *kingship, majesty, and holiness*. God's transcendence means that God is distinct from and sovereign over his creation.

So, he's distinct from it. He's not part of it because he made it and rules over it. Consider the following references to God's transcendence...

Isaiah 55:8-9- "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, says the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts."

Psalms 113:5-6- "Who is like the Lord our God, who is seated on high, who looks far down upon the heavens and the earth?"

John 8:23- "You are from below, I am from above; you are of this world, I am not of this world."

Or picture the scene from **Isaiah 6:1-5** where Isaiah see the LORD sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up.

So the transcendence of God is best understood, not as a spatial concept, but as a reference to his kingship. His transcendence means he is sovereign over his creatures

But, we don't want to make the mistake of believing that God is so *other* that he doesn't interact with creation, that would be to fall into *deism*.

2) Scripture clearly teaches that not only is God transcendent, but he's also **immanent**, or present. Immanence refers to his presence on earth, and especially to his nearness to his people. Consider the following passages:

Deut. 4:39- Acknowledge and take to heart this day that the LORD is God in heaven above and on earth below.

Joshua 2:11- The LORD your God is God in heaven above and on the earth below.

Isaiah 57:15- For this is what the high and lofty One says-- he who lives forever, whose name is holy; "I live in a high and holy place, but also with him who is contrite and lowly in spirit, to revive the spirit of the lowly and to revive the heart of the contrite.

Immanence then refers to God's covenant presence, in his creation and among his people. Consider the implications of this in your life. We often think of Systematic Theology as dry or boring, but what could be more relevant, more exciting, more important for you than knowing that the holy and transcendent God of the universe who dwells in unapproachable light, also draws near to you. "The LORD is near to all who call on him, to all who call on him in truth," (Psalm 145:18).

But God is also very much involved in creation. Creation is continually dependent on him for its existence and proper functioning. He's immanent, meaning "remaining in" creation. We see this in Hebrews 1:3 where Jesus is described as *sustaining* all things by the power of his word.

In the biblical worldview, heaven and earth aren't one and the same (pantheism), or completely separated (deism/naturalism), but in some ways God interlocks (cf. NT Wright quoted in *Doctrine*) heaven with earth. We see this in Jacob's vision of a ladder coming down from heaven; in the pillar of cloud by day and fire by night; in the tent of meeting which served as a portable meeting place between heaven and earth; and in Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh. Transcendence, and immanence.

Questions or comments?

II. God created Adam and Eve.

Next, really the climax of the whole creation account is when God created Adam and Eve. *“The LORD God formed man of dust from the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being”* (Gen. 2:7).

After that, God created Eve from Adam’s body. Verses 21 and 22 read, *“So the LORD God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep; and while he was sleeping, he took one of the man’s ribs and closed up the place with flesh. The LORD God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man.”* (Gen. 2:21-22).

Though distinct as male and female, as distinct sexes with distinct roles, Adam and Eve first share something that makes them both equal and qualitatively different from the rest of creation. What is it? They’re made in the image of God. *“So God created man in His own image; in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.”* (Gen 1.27)

The special creation of Adam and Eve shows that we may appear like the rest of creation with respect to our physical bodies, nonetheless we are very different. We’re not merely grown up animals. We are uniquely “in God’s image.” What does that mean? Three things. We image God (1) in our essence/nature; (2) functionally; (3) relationally.

First, in our **essence or nature** man uniquely is found to be intellectual, rational, moral, and spiritual. **Beavers** aren’t building altars to beaver gods and bowing down to them. **Elephants**, though highly sophisticated socially (even have their own form of burial), they don’t write books and build libraries to contain their growing knowledge. It’s not that we possess the image of God to a different degree than other animals - it’s a matter of kind. Mankind in our essence, who we are, are uniquely made in God’s image.

Second, **functionally** we image God in that we are meant to rule. Gen 1.28 mankind is commanded to multiply, fill the earth and subdue it. We’re to *rule* over it, the Bible says in Gen 1.29. Not as tyrants who destroy it for their own advantage, but as those who’re given a stewardship to *“work it and watch over it”* Gen 2.15. We’re God’s vice-regents, exercising his good

authority over what he has made and declared to be good. In this rule, functionally, we're meant to image God.

Thirdly, we image God **relationally**. We were created to have relationships with one another, but most fundamentally, to God. I joked about the beaver earlier, but it's simply the case that animals don't fashion idols or build temples in an effort to commune with something outside of them. We do because we were uniquely made to be in relationship with God, even though sin has severed that relationship and perverted our worship.

Practically, it's because we made in his image that human life is sacred. It has value. We're not like dogs. We don't choose to simply put another human being "down" when it can't function well, or because we've lost our utility. We've "found" euthanasia only because we've first "lost" what it means to be made uniquely in God's image.

But because we're made in his image, true knowledge of God isn't some pipe-dream, it's possible. We're not blindly groping about in the dark, into the unknown. Is there a God or gods? Could I ever know anything about him, or her, or it? Because God has made us, and made us to be in relationship to him and all he's made, and it's orderly and good, we can know much about the world, and even about him. The biblical account of creation grounds our ability to know true things about God. Critically important.

Some may object and say that Genesis does not intend to portray Adam and Eve as literal individuals. This is a live and hotly debated issue today, not just in more theologically "liberal" denominations, but in historically very conservative denominations like the PCA. Why would someone not want to portray Adam and Eve as a literal man and woman? Usually because they have prior commitments (i.e. evolutionary commitments) that depend upon not just one man and woman, but depend upon the natural processes of mutation and natural selection, such that there wasn't just one man and woman, but thousands across the earth.

What do we say? The historical narrative in Genesis is to be understood as a faithful telling of history. It's not presented to us as a scientific textbook, for it's highly stylized and often poetic, but it's nonetheless true.

Furthermore, the biblical genealogies present Adam and Eve as historical figures. Jesus assumes a literal Adam and Eve in Mt 19 when discussing divorce. Paul assumes the same in Rom 5, 1Cor 15, 1Tim 2. Looking at Romans 5 and 1 Corinthians 15, Paul affirms the existence of the “one man” Adam, through whom sin came into the world, and bases his discussion of Christ’s representative work as the second Adam, patterned after the first Adam. Rom 5.19, *“For just as through one man’s disobedience the many were made sinners (Gen 3), so also through one man’s obedience the many will be made righteous.”* Here’s the key. If there’s no Adam, the Bible is not just wrong on creation, but wrong about sin and salvation.

****ADD a section on Biblical anthropology – body/soul unity?**

Any comments or questions?

Conclusion: Why does the doctrine of creation matter?

God of covenant is God of creation.

God of creation, has the power to bring about a new creation. Our future hope of salvation, is built upon a God who has the power to make all things new.

Look through Frame’s chapter on Creation in Doctrine of God. Good stuff on connection between Israel’s deliverance from Egypt and God of creation. In same way made dark in plagues, makes light. same way makes frogs teem, so makes ground teem with animals. same way parts waters of red sea, parts seas, etc.

