

Graduate Student Theology Group

The Biblical Doctrine of Creation

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I. The Importance of the Biblical Doctrine of Creation

A. Foundational to all Christian Thought

1. The First Statement in the Bible

In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. (Genesis 1:1)

2. Paul's Preaching in Athens

The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in temples made by man, nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything. And he made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place, that they should seek God, in the hope that they might feel their way toward him and find him. Yet he is actually not far from each one of us, for "In him we live and move and have our being" (Acts 17:24-28).

3. Historic Creeds of the Church

I believe in God the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth. . . (The Apostles' Creed)

I believe in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible. . . (The Nicene Creed)

B. An Essential Doctrine for Christian Faith

1. Not possible to know the God of the Bible personally without believing that he is the Creator, as this is one of the most basic things we are taught about God in the Bible.

Thus says God, the LORD, who created the heavens and stretched them out, who spread out the earth and what comes from it, who gives breath to the people on it and spirit to those who walk in it. . . (Isaiah 42:5)

2. Summary: Christians may have different views about *how* God created (a secondary issue theologically) but it is not possible to be a Christian in any meaningful sense without believing *that* God created (an essential doctrine).

II. A Statement of the Biblical Doctrine of Creation (3 points)

A. The entire universe exists only because God has brought it into existence, and because God sustains its existence moment by moment.

1. Original Existence (Origins or Absolute Beginnings)

In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. (Genesis 1:1)

By faith we understand that the universe was created by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things that are visible. (Hebrews 11:3)

2. Continuing Existence

Let this be recorded for a generation to come, so that a people yet to be created may praise the LORD. (Psalm 102:18)

When you hide your face, they are dismayed; when you take away their breath, they die and return to their dust. When you send forth your Spirit, they are created, and you renew the face of the ground. (Psalm 104:29-30)

He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities- all things were created through him and for him. And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. (Colossians 1:15-17)

B. Men and women alone are made in the *image of God*, and are therefore called by God to rule over his creation on his behalf.

Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth." So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. And 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 heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth." (Genesis 1:26-28)

When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, what is man that you are mindful of him, and the son of man that you care for him? Yet you have made him a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned him with glory and honor. You have given him dominion over the works of your hands; you have put all things under his feet. (Psalm 8:3-6)

C. The entire universe, as *God's creation*, is inherently good, and is therefore to be studied, enjoyed, and used with thanksgiving in the ways that God intended.

And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good. (Genesis 1:31)

And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, "You may surely eat of every tree of the garden. (Genesis 2:16)

Now the Spirit expressly says that in later times some will depart from the faith by devoting themselves to deceitful spirits and teachings of demons, through the insincerity of liars whose consciences are seared, who forbid marriage and require abstinence from foods that God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth. For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving. (1 Timothy 4:1-4)

"You say grace before meals. All right. But I say grace before the concert and the opera, and grace before the play and pantomime, and grace before I open a book, and grace before sketching, painting, swimming, fencing, boxing, walking, playing, dancing and grace before I dip the pen in the ink." (G.K. Chesterton)

III. Some Implications of the Biblical Doctrine of Creation

- A. Transcendence – God is completely distinct from and independent of everything that he has created (i.e. everything else that exists).

For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares 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. (Isaiah 55:8-9)

1. In reply to the Russian cosmonaut who said, "I have been to heaven, and I did not see God there," C.S. Lewis famously stated, "This is like Hamlet going to the attic of his castle and saying, 'I did not see Shakespeare there.'"
2. God's transcendence has very practical implications for how we know and relate to him. We do not have direct experience of him as we do other created things, but can only know him through his revelation of himself, primarily Jesus and Scripture.

- B. Immanence – God is intimately involved in *everything* that is happening within creation.

You cause the grass to grow for the livestock and plants for man to cultivate, that he may bring forth food from the earth. (Psalm 104:14)

For you formed my inward parts; you knitted me together in my mother's womb. (Psalm 139:15)

For he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. (Matthew 5:45)

Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. (Matthew 6:26)

1. The Bible has no concept of nature functioning independently of God. The regular events occurring in the natural world are as much the activity of God as are miraculous events which are exceptions to the normal order of things.
 - a. God's ordinary work in creation provides the necessary backdrop against which his extraordinary works may be seen to be miraculous, but both are God's works.
 - b. God's miraculous works are by definition very rare, and have a specific function. They are performed in the presence of human observers for some revelatory or redemptive purpose.
 2. This aspect of the doctrine of creation has enormous implications for science. From a Christian perspective science is possible because God sustains the universe moment by moment and insures that things continue to be the way they are and function the way they do. It is not surprising that science has historically flourished in cultures deeply influenced by biblical thought. The scientist, then, is *always* studying the work of God in creation.
 3. The above verses then are rightly seen to be theological (not scientific) statements about God's ordinary work in creation. The fact that "God causes the grass to grow" in no way contradicts the scientific principle of photosynthesis. They are two different ways of describing the same reality (tea pot illustration).
- C. Moral – Because God is the Creator of all things, all things belong to him, including ourselves. Our lives and every good thing we enjoy are gifts from him. Therefore he is entitled to our love, worship and obedience.

Worthy are you, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they existed and were created. (Revelation 4:11)

1. The doctrine of creation explains why sin or rebellion against God is such a serious matter, namely because as the Creator God is entitled to our love and obedience.
 2. The gospel of Jesus Christ, which is ultimately a message about redemption and the forgiveness of sins, is therefore based upon the doctrine of creation. We must first explain that God is entitled to our love and obedience, then how we rebel against him by failing to give him what he deserves, along with all the awful consequences of that rebellion, and only then how God has graciously dealt with our rebellion in Christ.
- D. Work – God has made us in his image to rule over the world on his behalf, and the various kinds of work that he gives each of us to do is at the heart of the way in which we exercise our dominion over the creation.

The LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it. (Genesis 2:15)

1. By his work in creation, God brings glory to himself and blessing to all his creatures. In our work we image God by bringing glory to him and doing good to the creation.
2. Our work involves understanding the world God has made, and drawing out it's full potential for beauty and goodness, all to the praise and glory of God.
3. Our work is not "unspiritual" or unimportant to God, but is an essential part of what it means to be human and to bear God's image. We serve God through our work.

So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God. (1 Corinthians 10:31)

And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him. (Colossians 3:17)

Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men. (Colossians 3:23)

- E. Environment – Because the entire universe is God's creation, and is therefore inherently good, part of our calling as God's image bearers is to preserve the goodness and beauty of the creation, as well as to develop it.

And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good. (Genesis 1:31)

The LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it. (Genesis 2:15)

1. The biblical doctrine of creation leads to the notion of being good stewards of the gift that God has given us in the creation.
2. Biblical stewardship of the creation means that we neither view the creation itself as being divine (i.e. lose sight of God's transcendence) nor abuse the creation for our own selfish ends (i.e. lose sight of our calling to preserve the creation as God's image bearers).

- F. Redemption – Since the entire universe is God's creation, and is therefore inherently good, it is inconceivable that God would not redeem and renew the entire creation along with us.

For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. (Romans 8:20-21)

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every

tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away."
(Revelation 21:1-4)

1. The ultimate goal of God's redeeming work in Jesus is not to deliver us from the created world to some disembodied, heavenly existence, but rather to redeem us, body and soul, along with the rest of the physical creation.
2. "Going to heaven" is not the best way to describe the goal of our salvation in Christ. At death we are indeed "with the Lord" while apart from our bodies, but this is only a temporary, intermediate state. Our great hope, and the goal of our faith, is the resurrection of our bodies, and life eternal in God's (re)new(ed) creation.

And this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up on the last day. For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day." (John 6:39-40)

Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith- that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead. (Philippians 3:8-11)

. . . I believe in the Holy Ghost; the holy catholic church; the communion of saints; the forgiveness of sins; the resurrection of the body; and the life everlasting. (The Apostles' Creed)

. . . And I believe in one holy catholic and apostolic Church. I acknowledge one baptism for the remission of sins; and I look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come. (The Nicene Creed)