

The Apostle's Creed: I Believe in God Maker of Heaven and Earth (cont.)

Genesis 1:1, John 1:1-3

By [Dr. J.Ligon Duncan](#)

O come let us worship and bow down. Let us kneel before the Lord, our maker, for He is our God and we are the people of His pasture and the flock under His care. Let us worship Him.

Our Lord and God, Father, Son, holy Spirit, triune God, one God, eternal God, our God through Jesus Christ our Lord, we come into your presence this day on the terms that You have proposed and through the way which You alone make possible, that blood-sprinkled way. And as we have trusted in Jesus Christ alone for our salvation, as we have rested on Your promises, as we have responded to Your word of revelation and covenant and blessing, we have been brought out of darkness into Your marvelous light. We have been changed from slaves to sons and daughters. We have been taken from the core of those who are in rebellion against You and placed into the very heart of Your family. And we bless You O God, for this. And because of this our hearts come before You this day with thanksgiving and adoration and praise and blessing for who You are and what You have done for us in Christ Jesus. Meet with us then. Grant that our hearts' desire would be to delight in You, to adore You, to hear You, to praise You, to sing to You, to hear your word read and pronounced back to us. We ask, O God, as well that You would delight in the delighting of Your people. And that You would surround us with your favorable presence. And that You would receive our prayers and our praises. In Jesus name. Amen.

If You have your Bibles I'd invite you to turn with me to the first page, the first chapter, the first verse of the Bible, Genesis 1:1. And keep your finger there, for we're going to turn to one other place as well and then come back to Genesis 1:1. We are continuing a series on the Apostles' Creed. And the last time we were together we were meditating on what it means when we stand up, as we do several times a year here at First Presbyterian Church, and say that we believe in God the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth. And the last time we were together looking at this and attempting to ground the meaning and teaching of the Creed in the Scripture. We believe it not because it's in the Apostle's Creed but because we believe the Apostle's Creed is faithfully reflecting the teaching of Scripture.

We simply addressed one point. And that one point was that in our day and time

the Christian view of the origin of the world is under no special difficulty in comparison with the only other view on the market in the secular, scientific, intellectual community as to the origins of the world. The only two views that are out there are the secular, scientific view that the universe has always been here. It's been here in another form. It began perhaps with a primary particle, potential matter, but it's always been here. There was never a time when it wasn't here. It's just always been here. And over against that the Christian view states that an intelligent, purposeful, wise, loving, good, creator God brought everything in to being at the beginning. Those are the only two views on the market. And all we really said the last time was that the Christian is at no disadvantage in discussing the origin of the world with a thinking unbeliever in comparison to the only viable secular view on the market. Why? Because the thinking person will have just as many, if not more, questions about the assertion of naturalistic science than he will the assertions of supernatural Christianity. When the scientist says, in answer to the question, "Where did this world come from?" "Well, it came from a primary particle. A primordial mass of energy and matter." And then the intelligent person says, "Oh, that's helpful. That's very helpful. Now, where did that come from?" And he replies, "It just always was." At this point, many ordinary mortals, thinking people, will scratch their heads and be unsatisfied with the answer "It just always was." And the Christian says the reason that you scratch your head is that you know that that is an inherently unsatisfying answer, because we see nothing in this world for which there is not cause and effect. And to say that the beginning of this world is without cause bothers us. That, by the way, is the root of Thomas Aquinas's famous argument for the existence of God. It is continuing to press people back to the ultimate fountain of everything. Cause. Effect. Creation. The world. Human beings. Love. Life. And so all we really said the last time we were together was the Christian is at no disadvantage in this debate.

In fact, there are several things that the Christian has to offer in this debate which are far more satisfying than the naturalistic counterpart. For instance, the person who believes that the universe is all that there really is and that it's always been here in some form, and that everything that is here now has resulted from this primordial matter, has to explain how there can be thinking, self consciousness, love, sense, purpose, and meaning in a universe which was uncaused, undesigned, not the product of an intelligent being, and not invested with inherent purpose. You see, the consistent materialist must believe that we supply the only meaning that there is, but then he cannot answer, "Why it is that we are desirous to supply meaning to a meaningless thing in the first place. How are we capable of doing that?" The Christian says, "Well there's a reason why when you look out at this world and you see irreducible complexity, and You see a vastness of size which escapes our ability even to express it, and when you see grandeur, and you see meaning, and you see things working together, and You see purpose, and you see evidence of design, there's a reason. And that reason is there is an infinite, intelligent, personal, Creator who designed that world. That's why it makes sense. It didn't just happen. He designed it." That argument resonates with every human being. Why? Because God has implanted within every human

heart a sense of deity. We inherently know that there is a Creator who has brought all things into being. That's all we talked about the first Lord's Day that we looked at the phrase "Maker of heaven and earth."

Today, we are going to try and look at some other implications and applications of that truth. So, let's hear God's word beginning in Genesis 1:1.

"In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth."

Now, keep your finger there and turn forward to the first chapter and the first verse of the fourth book of the New Testament, John, verses 1-3.

"In the beginning was the word, and the word was with God, and the word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and apart from him nothing came into being that has come into being."

Amen. And thus ends this reading of God's holy and inspired word. May He add His blessing to it. Let's pray.

Our Lord and our God, we ask that You would bless the hearing and the preaching of your word to Your people's hearts. And to those who are not Your people that You would open their eyes to behold wonderful things from your word for your own glory. We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.

There are three separate areas that I would like to explore with you this morning in which the doctrine of creation has positive and negative implications. The first area has to do with God Himself, the second concerns the world, and the third with humanity. I want to look at how the doctrine of creation impacts our view of God, our view of the world, and our view of humanity. God made the world by the word of His power. It's entirely derived from His almightiness. The size of the universe testifies to His infinite sovereignty. And His creative work tells us things about him. So, let's begin with God. That's always a good place to begin.

I. Modern theories of evolution have not and cannot disprove Creation.

The first thing that I want to say today is that the affirmation that God is the maker of heaven and earth helps check our misunderstandings of God. It helps thwart our thrusting of our own opinions upon who God is. And it teaches us to listen reverently as God tells us who He is rather than to impute to Him characteristics which we have deduced from our own selves or from creation. You see, we're told, and if you'll look with me at Genesis 1 verses 26 and 27, we're told that God made us, human beings, in His image. We read,

Then God said let Us make man in Our image according to Our likeness and let them rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and

over the cattle and over the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth, And God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created them, male and female He created them.

And so at the outset of creation one of the things that we are told that God creates is man, and man is created in God's image. Man is, as it were, a shadow of God. Man reflects God's moral quality. He reflects God's personal qualities. He has a capacity for relationship, and for love, and for choice, and for activity and for rule. And all of these things are a reflection of who God is.

But so often, even in the Christian church, we get that turned around. And we began to impute to God human qualities and create him in our image even though that's the wrong way around. He created us in His image, and one theologian has said that ever since we've been trying to return the favor. And that's a problem. Any time we hear someone began a sentence with, "Well I know that the Bible says... but I like to think of God as..." Whatever the end of that sentence is, is heresy. Because what the person is saying is, I'm not comfortable with the Bible's teaching, or I'm not comfortable with the Bible's emphasis, or I'm not comfortable with the Bible's affirmation about how God is. I like to think of God in another way. And that is in and of itself an attempt to make God in our image. Paul talked about that once didn't he? In Romans chapter 1 he spoke of those who worshipped and served the creature rather than the creator. And the doctrine of creation says to us, "Don't do that. You're made in His image." It's not that He is a projection of your thoughts, as so many moderns attempt to say that God is, God is just a projection from our thinking and wishing and personalities and desire for meaning. No, no, no. The Bible says no, no, no. If anybody's a projection, it's you. You're the shadow. He's the reality. He's the archetype. You're the type. He's the original. You're the finite copy. And the doctrine of creation, at least for Christians, helps keep that in proper perspective.

II. The affirmation that God is maker of heaven and earth helps check our misunderstandings of God.

Secondly, however, the affirmation that God is maker of heaven and earth helps us check our misunderstanding of God in the area of His sovereignty. When one looks at the universe as described in Genesis 1, when Genesis 1:1 says that "God created the heavens and the earth," that's a Bible way of saying, "God made everything." There's nothing up there and out there, and there's nothing down here or under here, that God didn't make. It's a Bible way of saying that God made everything. We the specifics of it in Genesis 1 and then we ourselves look out at the vastness of this universe that too large for us to even comprehend. Scientists us the numbers of stars and galaxies and it doesn't even make sense. You can't take it in. And when we contemplate that vastness well, it is necessary that if God created that, then He is not limited, He's sovereign, He's almighty, and He's not dependent upon us. If He is big enough to create this,

then there can be no question of His sovereignty.

You know, in our day and time there are people that are working overtime, even within the Christian church, to scale down God. To make Him one who comes along side you and who says, "I feel your pain." And however comforting that may be to some, the Bible says that's not a comforting thought at all, that God isn't in charge, that God isn't in control, that God doesn't know, that God would like to help but He's not able to. That's not the picture of God in the Bible at all. And You know, I'd rather serve the God who is, who's unmanageable, who's undomesticatable, who's dangerous, who's sovereign, and who's working all things for the good of His people according to the counsels of His eternal, wise and gracious purposes. I'd rather love and serve that God than a God who couldn't do anything about the problems of life. And the doctrine of creation, just by pointing to the reality that this created order, as vast as it is, is brought into being by God, points to the almightiness of God.

There are some people try and get rid of God's sovereignty by getting rid of the doctrine of predestination. Now that's not our topic today. We'll have to come back to that some other time. But let me just say, you can't get rid of the doctrine of sovereignty by getting rid of predestination. Some people try and get rid of the doctrine of God's sovereignty by getting rid of His knowledge, His foreknowledge of future events. But you can't get rid of the doctrine of God's sovereignty without getting rid of the doctrine of creation. Because if He is the one who brought this enormous, intricate, beautiful, functional, meaningful world into being, then He is so sovereign that we can't even comprehend it. You see, the doctrine of God's sovereignty is grounded in creation. That's a second thing we learn from creation.

III. The affirmation that God is maker of heaven and earth helps check our misunderstandings of the world.

Thirdly, however, we also learn of God's concern for the whole of His creation. Now let's go back to that idea of predestination again. You and I have had people from time to time say, "Oh, you're one of those Presbyterians. You believe in predestination." And with a look of horror, like a caveman has just appeared in their presence. And they say, "Well if you believe in that then you believe that God only cares about your little group."

Now, of course, that is a horrific misunderstanding of the doctrine of predestination and that is not our topic today. But let me just zero in on one thing. You know, if that were the only doctrine in the Bible, it's logical to see how someone might make that deduction, that if God forechooses then He's only concerned about one little group. But the Bible teaches more than one doctrine. And the Bible begins with the doctrine of creation which tells us that God cares about the totality of His creation. You know, Jesus drew on that doctrine when he spoke to His disciples. He was attempting to encourage them in the midst of their

anxiety, and He said, "Look at the flowers and look at the birds. God cares about those flowers and birds. And if God cares about those flowers and birds, He cares about you, too, who are the crown of His creation." You see, He goes to God's total concern for the whole of His creation and He says, that assures you that God's providence is caring for you, too.

Well, the doctrine of creation reminds us of those universalistic creational concerns that He has. He's concerned for His whole universe. He's more concerned for His whole universe than we are, than the most benevolent person could possibly be.

IV. The affirmation that God is maker of heaven and earth helps check our misunderstandings of humanity.

But there is fourth thing that what we've just read that teaches us about God. The affirmation that God is maker of heaven and earth, in light of what John says J 1 verses 1-3, teaches us something very important about the Christian view of Jesus Christ. John, echoing the language of Genesis 1 "In the beginning God," says "In the beginning was the Word." Now, as you know, "The Word" is John's name for the second person of the Trinity before He came into this world in human flesh. And he tells you two things about that *Word*.

First of all, he has already told you that "the Word" was in the beginning which would have taken the breath away of any good Jewish listener. But he goes on to say "And the Word was with God" which immediately starts making you ask all sorts of questions about the oneness of God, and impresses upon you the doctrine of the Trinity. And then he goes on to say "And the Word was God." Ding, ding, ding, ding, ding. The bells go off. What is John saying? He's saying that Jesus is divine, that Jesus is deity, that Jesus is God.

And then he goes on to cap it off in verse 3 by saying "All things came into being through Him." Jesus is the Creator. You see, Christians worship Jesus not as a great moral prophet; not as the godliest man that ever lived; not as an exceedingly wise, religious teacher; they worship Him, we worship Him as Creator God. He is the one through whom all that is was brought into being. You know, it is rather astounding that John can say this, isn't it? John is a man who had lived with Jesus. He'd eaten with Jesus. He'd ministered with Jesus. He'd walked with Jesus. He died in loneliness and isolation for Jesus. And here he is talking about this man that he knew very well. And he's saying, "Let me tell you about Jesus. How can I describe Him to you? He's God and He's the Creator. Let me start that way. He's God. And He's the Creator."

Now, let me ask you this. Have you ever gotten close to having an inkling of that estimation of someone that you know, of someone that you've lived with, of someone that you've worked with, of someone that you've lived with and

ministered with and served with? Wives, ever gotten close to thinking that about your husband? No! Now here's John. "Let me tell you something about this Man, this Man that I knew. For years and years I was with Him. He's God and He created the world." You'll not find that assertion about any human being anywhere else in any culture in any part of the world. It's absolutely unique. And that is at the foundation of Christian worship. You see, in the doctrine of creation and the doctrine that Jesus is Creator God, it changes everything for the Christian.

That's why when the very polite Muslim comes to us wanting to try and hold out an olive branch and says, "Oh but we do believe that Jesus Christ is a great prophet among the greatest." That's why the Christian says, "Oh my friend, that's not enough. That's denigration. No, no, no, He's the Creator God!" And, of course, that statement itself is blasphemy to our Muslim friend. No, the Christian worships Jesus as the Creator God. That's at the very heart of what we are and do.

So, those are four things that the doctrine of creation teaches us about God. Let's think about some things that the doctrine of creation teaches us about the world. The affirmation that God is maker of heaven and earth teaches us a number of things about the world. One thing it teaches us that pantheism is wrong. That the idea that God is in everything is wrong. When you went to the movie, *Pocahontas*, with your child you were seeing unabashed pantheism courtesy of Walt Disney. The trees are god, and the mountains are god, and the sky is god, and god is in all these things. Beautiful. Pantheism. New age. Spirits. Pantheism. Cute movie. Pantheism. Okay And the Bible is saying, "No, no, no." When Moses kept saying in Genesis 1, "And God said" "And God said" "And it was so" "And it was so", it was not because Moses was a really boring guy and couldn't come up with a good transition sentence to move from one day to the next.

Moses, when he said "And God said" "And it was so" "And God said" "And it was so", is stressing to you that God spoke the world into being and so the world is not a part of the stuff of God, nor is God a part of the world, but He is distinct from it and over it. And He brought it into being out of nothing simply by speaking the word of His power. So, He's not the god in the trees and in the sky and in the sun and in the rivers and in the streams and in the fishes and in the people and in the everything else. He's the God who brought those things into being. He brought that stream into being, but He's not in that stream. That stream is the product of His creative work, and He is distinct from it.

And that is such an important lesson in our own day and time. There are very intelligent people out there telling you today that you can become God. There are Christians on the TV as I speak, telling hundreds and thousands of people that they are little gods. And here's Moses in Genesis saying, "Oh yeah, remember this, first point of theology: He is God. You are not and never will be." The first point of theology is right there in Genesis 1.

But it also tells us something about His world. It tells us that He is Lord over creation. You know in Moses' time the two most widely worshipped deities were the sun and the sea. You've found sun worship everywhere in the near eastern world. And you notice what Moses tells you in Genesis 1? When is it that God creates the sun? Right. He doesn't get around to it until the fourth day. Now, I understand that modern scientific types have a problem with that. But Moses didn't. That was His precise point. The point is that God is so sovereign, if He wants to give you day and night, light and darkness, He can do it without the sun. And He'll get around to the sun when He needs to. That's how much Lord He is over creation.

And then there's this whole business about the sea. The Hebrews have never been known for their navy. They're really not into boats and oceans. And furthermore, the people in the cultures around them worshipped a god, Tiamat, the god of chaos, the god of the sea. The sea reflected chaos and disorder and mystery and power, the waves crashing, and storms coming suddenly, and notice what Moses says in Genesis 1, that God separates the waters from the land. And you know every Hebrew who's in the audience hearing that for the first time is going, "Whew isn't that wonderful. He's sovereign over the sea. He controls its boundaries. He sets its boundaries. He's Lord over His creation."

And what does that do for us? What's the implication of that? Well, for one thing it allows for scientific enterprise. If the creation is filled with a bazillion demons and deities, if that tree has a demon in it, I'm not going to take a section of that tree to study it for my science project. I might be possessed. If that river is under the control of a witch queen. Well, I'm certainly never going to go about studying the qualities of the water in it and its flow and its course. But when you realize that God is the Lord of creation, it allows you to worship Him in the study of His creation. And that is why precisely in the Protestant world that the enterprise of science developed. God is Lord of creation.

God's creative work also shows us that the creation itself was originally good. God's telling you in Genesis chapter 1 that the way things are now are not the way they used to be. "When I created this world it was good." And He's sending a huge message. And the message is this: Matter is not evil. People are. Things aren't evil. People use them in evil ways. The stuff that I created was not bad. It's what you did with it. You see, and that has tremendous effects on the way you view salvation. For Christians, because we know that God's design for matter, even our bodies, is an eternal design, we're not satisfied with the *hope* that when we die our souls go immediately to heaven to be with Christ, though that is a glorious and comforting truth. We're not satisfied until the day of resurrection when our bodies, our material bodies, reformed in their glorified state are reunited with our souls and in our flesh we see God. You see, God has plans for a reconstituted universe which will not only have spiritual but material qualities, because matter is not evil, over against all those religions that teach that

salvation is escape from matter, and so you need to escape from sex, or you need to escape from food, or you need to escape from whatever else is that we're escaping from that day that is material. Over against that, the Christian says, "No. God created these things and they were originally good, though we've spoiled them. And one day He will fix them."

One last thing let me share. There's another side to the doctrine of the goodness of original creation that reminds us that the way it is now is not the way it used to be or one day will be. Sometimes when we sing "This is my Father's world" we're singing it in our hearts because we're so moved by the glory of what we're seeing around us. It may be a sunset. It may be a mountain. But sometimes we're having to sing "This is my Father's world" through tears and in defiance of the hurt and the pain of a fallen world and the inscrutable providences that have surrounded us. Sometimes we're having to say, "I know this has happened to me but this is my Father's world."

Just this last week a young, vibrant, Christian girl from Ole Miss was laid in the ground. Asleep in Jesus to await the resurrection because of the reckless act of another human being. And it's the doctrine of creation that says to us, "This is not the way that it used to be. And this is not what God has intended for His people. And this is not the way that it will be because in that reconstituted universe. There will be no more tears and there will be no more crying and there will be no more sorrow because He will have remade the world through Jesus Christ, nevermore to experience the effects of the fall." And because of that we sing through tears "This is my Father's world." He has a purpose in this. There's no wasted suffering. There's no meaningless action. There's no random loss of life. His purpose is working inexorably to the end of the reconstitution of His universe. And it gives us help to go on. That's the doctrine of creation. Let's pray.

Our Lord and our God, we believe that You are maker of heaven and earth. Help us to live like it. In Jesus' name. Amen.

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