

What We Believe: Knowing and Loving our Doctrines  
 Adult Sunday Studies 2023-24  
 8 | Doctrine of God the Creator

## DOCTRINE OF GOD THE CREATOR

**Review:** The Story We've Told So Far -

How do we know anything? => General & Special Revelation

Revelation in Scripture => God Revealing God

Who God is => What God Does

**Remembering our Doctrine of Scripture:**

- **Interpretation:** WCF 1.6 - "The whole counsel of God concerning all things necessary for his own glory, man's salvation, faith and life, is either expressly set down in Scripture, or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from Scripture."
- **Purpose & Genre:** Reading Scripture according to God's intended purpose, so that we may not speak more or less than what God's Word says.

### The Importance of God as Creator, Outside of Genesis

1. **Job's Response to God:** Job 40:4, 5; 42:2-6. Why is God as Creator significant?
2. **Psalms** - especially Ps. 8, 19, 29, 33, 65, 104 & 139.
3. **In Christ** - *"He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. 16 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. 17 And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together."* (Col. 1.15-17)
4. WCF 4.1 explains, "It pleased God the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, for the manifestation of the glory of his eternal power, wisdom, and goodness, in the beginning, to create, or make of nothing, the world, and all things therein whether visible or invisible, in the space of six days; and all very good".
  1. **This is "doctrine of the Creator" first, before any "doctrine of creation."** Aquinas described God as "the all-embracing cause of existence entire" and creation as "the introduction of being entirely." Basil of Caesarea (4th C.) writes, "It is he, beneficent nature, goodness without measure, a

worthy object of love for all beings endowed with reason, the beauty most to be desired, the origin of all that exists, the source of life, intellectual light, impenetrable wisdom—he it is who ‘in the beginning created heaven and earth.’”

2. We need to be sure of who God is in order to rightly understand creation. See previous lessons on God as all-sufficient goodness. He does not need creation. Hence, “pleased” and “manifestation” in WCF 4.

### **The Creation Account Itself**

Read Gen. 1-2.3 - try to hear it as if for the first time.

#### **1. Historical Background**

1. *Aspects unique among contemporary Canaanite religions*
  1. Universal Creator and Ruler over all
  2. Morals based in creation
  3. We are not divine or semi-gods
2. *Literary Context* - Written by Moses when Israel was in the wilderness, so he is defining their nation and mission over against others – that is, not written by a philosopher or scientist abstractly.
  1. **“Each day of creation dismisses an additional cluster of deities.** On the first day, the gods of light and darkness are dismissed. On the second day, the gods of sky and sea. On the third day, earth gods and gods of vegetation. On the fourth day, sun, moon, and star gods. The fifth and sixth days take away any associations with divinity from the animal kingdom. And finally human existence, too, is emptied of any intrinsic human divinity – while at the same time *all* human beings, from the greatest to the least, and not just pharaohs, kings, and heroes, are granted a divine likeness.” - B. Waltke, *An Old Testament Theology*
3. There are an interesting number of similarities with other contemporary creation narratives (like *Enuma Elish* from Babylon), but also significant differences in theology. This is to be expected, since the biblical writers are human and part of their context just as the non-biblical ones could discern naturally some truth. Think Romans 1 on the knowledge of God.

2. *Covenant of Creation as part of a "Suzerain-vassal" treaty* comparable to other treaties from 1st and 2nd Millennium BC:

1. A "suzerain" was a lord or master over a weaker party, the vassal. When these two parties entered into a treaty, it took the form that has been discovered as similar to that of the Pentateuch. The form had three main parts:
  1. *Preamble*: would include the name and titles of the suzerain, as well as a *historical prologue* on just how much the suzerain has done to protect and establish the vassal.
  2. *Stipulations*: what you are to do and not do - i.e. don't eat the tree
  3. *Blessings and Curses*: if...then... - i.e. have life if obey or death if disobey
  4. Thus, Gen. 1.1-2.3 should be read as the preamble of a treaty between God and humanity. Gen. 2.4 begins the stipulations and then blessings and curses.

3. *Eden as a Temple*

1. Represents heaven or utopia – God walks there, its water supplied the whole earth
2. "Garden" simply means enclosed or protected area designed to produce food and symbolizes blessing and well-being
3. Set apart from the rest of creation as a unique place (v. 2.8), where humanity can enjoy God
4. Where humans are designed to live
5. A Temple – God is uniquely present here unlike elsewhere
  1. Sanctity protected by cherubim (see Exod. 26.1-2, 2Chron. 3.7)
  2. Solomon's Temple is designed to reflect the Garden – God's unique presence (1Ki. 8)
  3. Paradise in Rev. 20-21 is a Temple, where God dwells with humanity
6. "Eden" means luxuriance – the garden as the supply of the world's water and symbolizes a land of bliss
7. Tree of Life – source of immortality – it's a good thing we couldn't eat of it after the Fall!

#### 4. *God's Work*

1. Creation is depicted as a personal and good God works with no opposition
2. All very planned out and according to God's design
3. All performed with ease, emphasizing His might and total control
4. "Created" is unique to God – the verb is not used of humans, which would be "made". Hence, creation out of nothing.
5. Progress from "*Kingdom/Form*" to "*King/Fill*"
  1. *Day 1* - Light *Day 4* - Lights
  2. *Day 2* - Sky/Seas *Day 5* - Birds/Fish
  3. *Day 3* - Dry Land, Veg. *Day 6* - Animals, Humans
  4. "Therefore if we are to read Gen. 1 right - it is a covenant theology concerning the kingdom of God - that under God there is appointed many 'servant-kings' who are then to rule on God's behalf and for his glory!" - Preston Graham
    1. There are kings, and then there is the King of Kings
6. These "Day-Frames" provide a structure and order to creation, but their exact length (i.e. 24 hrs or more) is left ambiguous, and thus Scripture does not bind us either way to a strict, literal 24hr. 6-day creation. (see Excursus below)

#### 5. *God's Rest – Gen. 2.1-3*

1. Was He tired?? No!
2. **Unique day:**
  1. Only day God blessed – done so because His 'rest' marks His **completion**
  2. Has **no evening** to end it, symbolizing no death – thus we get a foretaste of the resurrection, of the world to come – Rev. 22.5! (Isa. 60.19).
3. "**Resting**" in this literary context also means He is seated on His throne after His work is complete, like a King, and now He reigns
4. In the Ten commandments we see the command to imitate God in His rest; and Deut 5.12-15 writes that the Sabbath is a reminder of Israel's release from slavery – thus, God's creation has a liberating aspect, God's controlling sovereignty frees us as He brings order out of chaos, as

opposed to other myths where the god(s)' control is oppressive or punitive.

## 6. Evolution - What's the Problem?

1. So far, nothing has been said for or against evolution. That fact alone is important! The whole point of Gen. 1-2 as part of a treaty between God and humanity was to show forth just how great and sovereign is Yahweh!
2. American Christianity is unique in its hangup on evolution, and it really stems from the cultural and historical trends that grew out of the Scopes trial in 1925.
3. See excursus below on "Views Acceptable in the PCA" and Keller's article, "Creation, Evolution, and Christian Laypeople".
4. Remember also, from our study of the knowledge of God, that there are two "books" that tell us who God is - Scripture and Nature (or Reason, Logic, etc.) - and they should not conflict! So if we think there is a conflict, our interpretation of one or the other is mistaken, not the book itself.
5. **Non-negotiables** (probably not as many as we think!) according to many places of Scripture, not just Gen. 1-2:
  1. Historical work of the Triune God
  2. Ex Nihilo, or out of nothing - meaning nothing existed before God's act of creation. Nothing is co-eternal with God.
  3. Humanity as uniquely created in the Image of God
  4. Historical Adam as our Covenant Head
  5. Historicity of Adam and Eve
    1. Aside from these non-negotiables, especially if we are to read Gen. 1.1-2.3 as poetic with a different intent from that of a scientific textbook, there are many uncertainties on which Scripture is silent.
6. *Beyond the grasp of evolution* - "Does the scientific theory of evolution include, not merely the idea that the living world has been produced by a process in which natural selection is the chief mechanism, but the *vastly more ambitious* idea that this process has been unsupervised, unplanned, unintended by God or any other intelligent agent? That hardly seems to be an appropriate part of an empirical scientific theory. It looks instead like a metaphysical or theological add-on." - Alvin Plantinga

1. In other words, whatever we say about evolution, science itself cannot say - by its own standards! - that it is "random" or "unguided", but merely it seems that way to empirical science. What is more, Plantinga gave a talk at Yale a few years ago, where he takes it a step further and says that if evolution is totally random, we have no reason to trust the faculties with which we use to discover evolution - reason, science, etc. - since they are themselves products of a random process geared toward adaptability and survival, not truth. Thus it collapses under its own foundation. Evolution needs God to trust that its own tools can be trusted!
2. Conclusion - what we say about evolution either way does NOT impact our view of biblical creation, God's existence, or the trustworthiness of Scripture!

**\*\*\* Excursus: Acceptable Views on Creation in the PCA \*\*\***

*This is excerpted from a position paper put together by the PCA denomination as options, all of which are understood to be within the bounds of Scripture and the teaching of WCF.*

*“Acceptable” means in the sense that an ordinand could believe any of these options and still not be considered as taking an exception to WCF.*

**A. The Calendar-Day Interpretation**

- The Bible teaches that God created of nothing all things in six days, by which Moses meant six calendar days. This view is often called the literal view, the traditional view, or the twenty-four-hour view.

**B. The ‘Day-Age’ Interpretation**

- The ‘Day-Age’ interpretation of the creative days in Genesis 1 has taken various forms in its contemporary expressions, and those which have been held within conservative Reformed circles are outlined below and contain certain common features.
- The ‘six days’ are understood in the same sense as in that day of Isaiah 11:10-11 -that is, as periods of indefinite length and not necessarily of 24 hours duration. There are other similar uses of the Hebrew word for day (yôm) in Scripture to support this view of periods longer than 24 hours including that in the very context of Genesis 2:4. Another argument for this approach is that the seventh day in Genesis 1 is not concluded with the boundary phrase, and there was evening, and there was morning as with the other days, and therefore it continues, as indicated by Hebrews 4:1-11's quotation of Psalm 95:11.
- The six days are taken as sequential, but as overlapping and merging into one another, much as an expression like the day of the Protestant Reformation might have only a proximate meaning and might overlap with the day of the Renaissance. While exponents of this view might be willing to concede a rough parallel between day one and day four, day two and day five, day three and day six, they would tend to deny that this is an intended parallel by Moses as author, as is commonly claimed in the Framework interpretation.
- The Day-Age interpretation claims that the narrative of Genesis 1 is from the point of view of the earth as being prepared for the habitation of man. In this context, the explanation of day four is often that the sun only became visible on that day, as atmospheric conditions allowed the previous alternation of light and darkness to be perceived from the earth to have its source from the position of the previously created sun and other heavenly bodies. However day four is understood, the point is made that only on that day is the diurnal cycle of days governed by the sun begun, so that it is difficult to know the nature of the first three days.

### *C. The Framework Interpretation*

- There are a number of versions of the Framework interpretation. Here we discuss the position which has arguably influenced the PCA most, that of Meredith G. Kline and Mark D. Futato. In Genesis 1:1-2:3: Exegesis indicates that the scheme of the creation week itself is a poetic figure and that the several pictures of creation history are set within the six work-day frames not chronologically but topically. In distinguishing simple description and poetic figure from what is definitively conceptual the only ultimate guide, here as always, is comparison with the rest of Scripture.
- In other words, the distinctive feature of the Framework interpretation is its understanding of the week (not the days as such) as a metaphor. Moses used the metaphor of a week to narrate God's acts of creation. Thus God's supernatural creative words or fiats are real and historical, but the exact timing is left unspecified.
- Why the week then? Moses intended to show Israel God's call to Adam to imitate Him in work, with the promise of entering His Sabbath rest. God's week is a model, analogous to Israel's week. The events are grouped in two triads of days. Days 1-3 (creation's kingdoms) are paralleled by Days 4-6 (creation's kings). Adam is king of the earth and God is King of Creation.

### *D. The Analogical Days Interpretation*

- The days are God's work-days, which are analogous, and not necessarily identical, to our work days, structured for the purpose of setting a pattern for our own rhythm of rest and work.
- The six days represent periods of God's historical supernatural activity in preparing and populating the earth as a place for humans to live, love, work, and worship.
- These days are broadly consecutive: that is, they are taken as successive periods of unspecified length, but one allows for the possibility that parts of the days may overlap, or that there might be logical rather than chronological criteria for grouping some events in a particular day.
- Genesis 1:1-2 are background, representing an unknown length of time prior to the beginning of the first day: verse 1 is the creatio ex nihilo event, while verse 2 describes the conditions of the earth as the first day commenced.
- Length of time, either for the creation week, or before it or since it, is irrelevant to the communicative purpose of the account.