

TEACHING THROUGH THE WESTMINSTER CONFESSION OF FAITH

Chapter 4: Of Creation

LESSON 007

TEACHER NOTES

REVIEW FROM PREVIOUS LESSON

God has decreed from eternity past the salvation of His people and the means to bring that about. He has also ordained the passing by of the non-elect and the means by which they would, through their own free choice, bring His judgement down upon their own heads. When this doctrine is handled with proper care it should spur us to evangelism and humble us in our trust of God's mercy and grace.

God Made All Things

TEACHING NOTE

It is of fundamental importance to remember that God is God and we are not. God's creation of all things is like our creation of things in this world but also fundamentally different. In contrast to us, he started with absolutely nothing. He is not just a painter using a canvas, but the one who made the paint and canvas. God existed before time and space and matter, completely independent of all things. He freely chose, without any necessity or compulsion of doing so, to create all things, whether visible or invisible. He created exactly as it is revealed to us in Genesis in the space of six days and all very good.

For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day... Exodus 20:11

- 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.

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God Freely Created: We so often speak about God as if He is trapped by circumstances and forced into corners by His creation. But God is totally, completely, and utterly free of all dependence on anything outside of Himself. God does not need us because the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost are internally sufficient. The Triune God chose to create because to do so was glorious and showed forth His power, wisdom, and goodness. By creating He is showing who He is. (Psalm 115:3, Acts 17:24-25, Romans 11:34-36, Revelation 4:11)

God Made All Things: One of the key differences that has separated the Christian religion from everything else is the universality of its claims about God. God is not the god of a single river or mountain or people or concept, like the pagan gods of old. God's power is not limited by anything. So when we say that God made all things, we're not merely making a statement about creation, but about source and authority. "All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made," (John 1:3). If you make something, you have complete authority over it, and God made all things, visible and invisible. (Psalm 24:1-2, Colossians 1:16-17)

In the Space of Six Days: The Westminster Divines felt this phrase was important to include in the confession because it is scriptural, and because in the history of the church there have been several attempts to undermine this truth. Augustine famously struggled with this passage and taught that God's creation was instantaneous. The modern world either rejects entirely God's work in creation or accepts His work only according to schemes and theories they can imagine. Yet, we affirm what the scriptures teach, that God made all things, of nothing, in the space of six days. There is some debate among faithful Reformed men about the nature of those days, but six days remains the biblical account. (Genesis 1:1-31, Exodus 20:11, Hebrews 11:3)

All Very Good: What we find in Genesis 1 is that everything that God made was good. In Genesis 3 man chose sin, which is bad, and so God submitted creation to the curse and the futility of death making our experience of many things become bad, but the flaw is not in creation itself but in Adam's sin. God made all things very good. Man's sin brought along the bad things. This is incredibly important for us to remember lest we adopt the pagan philosophy that the flesh is evil and only the spirit good. God made the flesh and spirit good, and what we ultimately long for is a full restoration of both in the New Heavens and New Earth in which righteousness dwells. (Genesis 1:31, Romans 8:20-22, 1 Timothy 4:4-5, 2 Peter 3:13)

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- **Because God made all things out of nothing, He possesses absolute authority over everything. In what ways does God's total ownership challenge the way our culture views personal freedom and autonomy?**

We are not free to live however we please, but bound to live in a way that pleases God. He has given specific and explicit instructions for how we ought to live, He has written those down in the Word for us and written them on our hearts and we are bound to obey. Our culture says that you are god, that you have complete freedom to live however pleases you, but that is a lie of the devil. No one ever has the moral freedom to sin.

- **God didn't have to create anything. How does knowing God didn't *need* creation change the way you understand your purpose and relationship with Him?**

We don't deserve anything we have. It was all graciously given, even our very life. He doesn't need us, we need Him. Remembering who God is and who we are should make us abound with praise due to the extreme glory of His grace and mercy.

- **Since God created the physical world and declared it "all very good," how should that truth shape the way we view the world?**

The physical world is not evil, but neither is it everything. God made us body and soul to glorify Him and to enjoy Him forever. When we focus too much on the physical pleasures of this life we lose sight of the Spiritual blessings of Christ, but when we focus too much on the Spiritual we forget the good blessings God has given us to enjoy. We need balance as God intended.

- **Why do you think our culture pushes back so strongly against the biblical account of creation?**

Because it acknowledges that God is God. Because accepting a Creator means acknowledging an ultimate authority outside of ourselves which the world hates because it means that they aren't God.

God Made Man

TEACHING NOTE

Modern science and philosophy have done everything they can to obscure this truth, but man is the capstone of God's creation. While we share a physical reality formed from the dust alongside the rest of the creatures, we are fundamentally different because God created us with reasonable, immortal souls in His own image. As a result, we bear unique responsibilities toward our Creator and His world. Moreover, contrary to modern ideas, we are not fully independent beings who exist in a vacuum; we live under God's authority, and as such, we rightly stand under the covenantal consequences of Adam's headship in the garden.

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. Genesis 1:26–27

- After God had made all other creatures, he created man, male and female, with reasonable and immortal souls, endued with knowledge, righteousness, and true holiness, after his own image; having the law of God written in their hearts, and power to fulfill it: and yet under a possibility of transgressing, being left to the liberty of their own will, which was subject unto change. Beside this law written in their hearts, they received a command, not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil; which while they kept, they were happy in their communion with God, and had dominion over the creatures.

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The Image of God in Man: All creation reflects God in some way and glorifies Him, but man is directly made in the image of God in a unique way. The shorter catechism gives us helpful insight into what it means to be in the image of God, saying "God created man male and female, after his own image, in knowledge, righteousness and holiness, with dominion over the creatures." The fall marred and defaced the image of God in man, but did not destroy it entirely. It remains, though corrupted, until it is restored by Christ for the elect. This image of God in man is one of the key foundations for why we are to treat our neighbors with love and kindness. It is also why God gives us animals to kill and eat, while forbidding us to take the life of a man, who bears His image. (Genesis 1:26-27, Genesis 9:3-6, Colossians 3:10, James 3:9)

Adam's Freedom in the Garden: Reformed theology rightly speaks of the different states of man's freedom: In the garden Adam was able not to sin, after the fall man was not able not to sin, in Christ believers are able not to sin (though not perfectly in this life), and in glory to come believers will not be able to sin. What this gets at fundamentally is our freedom in regards to rebellion against God. And as such, Adam was free in a way that we are not, because there was nothing in his nature, as created by God, that compelled him to sin. He was free to choose between good and evil and freely chose evil. Thus Adam's nature changed, fundamentally, from able not to sin, to not able not to sin; this is the consequence of the fall. (Genesis 2:16-17, Genesis 3:6-7, Ecclesiastes 7:29)

Adam's Duty in the Garden: While Adam was free to choose between good and evil, he was obligated to obey God. He was created under the law of God written on his heart, and God then entered into a covenant of works with him, which required personal, perfect, and perpetual obedience, promising life upon obedience and threatening death upon transgression. This included the general rules of the moral law written upon Adam's heart and the specific command not to eat of one tree. We cannot conceive of how light this duty to obey God was. Adam was in sinless perfection in the garden, for us obedience always brings with it the challenges of living in a broken and cursed world, but for Adam this was not so. As our first father and federal head, Adam made his choice not just for himself but for all of his children and so we have received the guilt of his sin and inherited the corruption... (Hosea 6:7, Romans 2:14-15, Romans 5:12-19)

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- **What makes mankind different from the rest of creation?**

We are the only things made in the image of God. We have reasonable and immortal souls, meaning that we were meant to think and reason and live forever. At creation we were given knowledge, righteousness, and true holiness and though that gift is marred by the fall, it is restored by Christ in the new creation. A rock or a tree or a bear or a dog doesn't have any of those things. They glorify God, but they are not like God.

- **Why is it really important for us to confess that God created man male and female?**

Because man and woman are equally made in the image of God. God has ordered authority in the home, the church, and the commonwealth so that men are called to lead, but men are not above women in glory. Men and women together bear the image of God. To forget this is to abandon the truths of the scripture for a tyranny based on human will.

- **In your own words, how did Adam's original freedom in the garden differ from our condition today, and why is that distinction crucial for understanding the brokenness of our world?**

Adam was under no obligation to sin. He was free to choose between sinning and not sinning. After the fall man was corrupted in his whole being and thus made unable to do anything but sin apart from the divine work of the Savior in their hearts. In Christ, believers in this life are able not to sin and have the promise of that great future when we will be not able to sin anymore. We long for the future where sin is impossible.

- **How should the reality that every person bears God's image directly shape the way we speak to, think about, and treat difficult people in our everyday lives?**

Though they are sinners, they were not made for sin. It is profoundly sad to see fallen man wallow in the pigsties of this world when they were meant for the throne room of heaven. We should feel the same pity and sadness that Christ felt for this world and treat them with patience and love, pointing them to our glorious savior!

- **Modern culture often swings between viewing humans as animals or as gods. How does the biblical truth that we are image bearers under God's authority provide a healthier, more secure sense of identity and purpose?**

To view us as no different than creation denies the image of God and leads to all sorts of wicked evils. But to view us as gods standing in moral authority over all creation also leads to all sorts of wicked evils. We have to remember that we are regents from the king, given authority over this world in submission to Him. We are neither slaves to animal impulse nor free to live however we please.

References — Chapter 4

– Monergism, *WCF Study Guide 4.1 - Creation*
www.monergism.com/creation-wcf-41

– Monergism, *WCF Study Guide 4.2 - Imago Dei*
www.monergism.com/imago-dei-wcf-42

Glossary — Chapter 4

Confession —The public declaration or formal written summary of biblical doctrines and convictions held by believers and the church.

Covenant of Works —The original agreement between God and Adam requiring perfect obedience for life, broken by the Fall.

Holy Spirit —The third person of the Trinity, eternally proceeding from the Father and the Son, who applies redemption through regeneration, indwells believers, and sanctifies them progressively.

New Heavens and New Earth —The eternal, renewed creation where believers will dwell bodily with God in perfect righteousness, with sin and death completely removed.

Reformed —The theological tradition emerging from the Protestant Reformation, characterized by a commitment to God’s absolute sovereignty in salvation, covenant theology, and confessional standards.

Revelation —God’s direct act of making His character, will, and redemptive purpose known to mankind, culminated in the written Scriptures. See also Natural Revelation and Special Revelation.

Spirit —A being without body or material parts, immaterial and invisible. To confess God as “a most pure spirit” affirms that He has no physical form and is not composed of parts, but is simple, whole, and undivided in His being. As spirit, He is present everywhere and is perceived not by the senses but known through His revelation.

The Father —The first person of the Trinity, unbegotten, who planned redemption from eternity, sent the Son, and adopts believers as His children.

Westminster Divines —The theologians and pastors who composed the Westminster Assembly (1643–1649).

Westminster Shorter Catechism —A concise catechism produced by the Westminster Assembly, designed for instructing children and beginners in the Christian faith.



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MONERGISM STUDY GUIDE