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The Theological Impact of the Doctrine of Creation

By Henry Middleton

The doctrine of creation is often de-emphasized among Christians today as holding secondary importance. After all, isn't Christianity about salvation through Jesus? While it is true that the Christian message centers on the atoning work of Jesus, that is not a reason to neglect creation.

Theology can be understood in two ways. On the one hand, "Theology is the topical and logical study of God's revealed nature and purposes."¹ It is the discipline which seeks to express a biblical understanding of God and what he reveals about the world, mankind, and mankind's relationship with God.² On the other hand, however, theology is not a purely academic discipline. Every person has a theology because every person has thoughts about God, who and what mankind is, and what happens after people die. One person's theology may be more fully thought out than another person's theology, but every person has a theology whether he realizes it or not.

The various facets of theology are intertwined. One doctrine will inevitably carry implications for other doctrines. Changes in one area will create a rippling effect in other doctrines, and error in one area of doctrine will generate errors elsewhere. This is definitely true with the doctrine of creation.

This article is not about the impact of either theistic (God-directed) evolution or a denial of a historical Adam and Eve or Fall on Christian theology.³ Instead, it will review the significance of the mere fact of God's creative activity on other Christian doctrines such as the sovereignty of God, mankind's place in the world, and the goodness of creation.

God's sovereignty over all things

To say that God is sovereign is to say that God is in complete control. It is to acknowledge His kingship over His creation, His ownership of creation, and His right to create and manage as He chooses simply because He is God and creator. The Bible sometimes uses the image of a potter and clay to illustrate God's sovereignty over mankind. In Jeremiah 18:1-6 God says he can do as he chooses with Israel as a potter does with clay. He does not need to answer to anyone (see also Romans 9:18-21).⁴ God has the same rights over creation that a potter has over his lump of clay.

It is important to remember that God did not need to create anything. As the omniscient, omnipotent, and triune God, he was sufficient in Himself. He created the universe to reveal Himself, and the creation serves to glorify Him. "The heavens declare the glory of God" (Psalm 19:1). Creation displays His attributes (Romans 1:19-20), including His power (Psalm 33:6-9), majesty (Psalm 8:1), transcendence (1 Kings 8:27; Is 29:15-16, 45:9, 64:8; Acts 17:24-25), and righteousness (Psalm 50:6).

Because God made everything, He is the Lord over everything (1 Samuel 2:6-8; Job 36:26-33; Psalm 104; Isaiah 44:24-28). As John Feinberg explains, "All things come from God and we exist for him; we are under his sovereign control."⁵ This also means that he is completely free in all of his actions and is not inherently bound by pre-existing conditions (such as natural laws) outside of His own nature, although He can choose to make a covenant commitment which He will then honor (for example: Genesis 9:8-17, 12:1-3; Exodus 19:1-8; Jeremiah 31:31-34; Hebrews 8).⁶

All created reality exists by Him *and* for Him (Romans 11:36; 1 Corinthians 8:6). Not only does created reality exist because God created it, but it exists for His purposes and for His glory. "All things have God as their goal

¹ Lewis GR and Demarest BA (1996) *Integrative Theology*, vol. 2, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, vol. 1, p. 23

² Erickson MJ (1998) *Christian Theology*, 2nd ed., Baker Books, Grand Rapids, MI, 17

³ A review of these questions can be found in H. Middleton, *Sola Scriptura: Our Standard for Theology*, <<http://tasc-creationscience.org/content/sola-scriptura-our-standard-theology>> Accessed 2014 June 3

⁴ Feinberg JS (2001) *No One Like Him: The Doctrine of God*, *Foundations of Evangelical Theology*, Gen. Ed. John S. Feinberg, Crossway Books, Wheaton, IL, 559-60

⁵ Feinberg, 564

⁶ Erickson, 928

and purpose, and he brought them into being in the first place.”⁷ John Morris explains:

Creation is the “worldview” concept which places God as the sovereign Controller over all. His role as Creator gives Him the authority to set the guidelines for life and the penalty for breaking His law. Just as the manufacturer has the right and responsibility to author the owner's handbook dictating how to properly operate and repair a manufactured device, so the Creator of mankind has authority over our lives and choices.⁸

Man is not ultimate

Because God is the creator, people are dependent on Him for their very existence.⁹ Because God is the sovereign creator, it follows that mankind is subject to His kingship. Man is not the measure of all things, and so this rules out any modern form of humanism.

God does not need to answer to mankind's standards. “The Almighty—we cannot find him; he is great in power; justice and abundant righteousness he will not violate. Therefore men fear him; he does not regard any who are wise in their own conceit.” (Job 37:23-24) When Job asks God why he has experienced great misfortune, God does not give him a complete answer. Instead He reminds Job of His position as God: “Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth? Tell me, if you have understanding.” (Job 38:4)

God is not a tyrant, however. The God who governs creation and judges sin is the same God who provides for our needs. He “gives to all mankind life and breath and everything” (Acts 17:25), and He makes the rain fall on the righteous and unrighteous alike (Matthew 5:45). He also sent Jesus as a substitutionary sacrifice for sin (Romans 3:21-25), thereby providing the means of redemption from sin.

We will not always understand God's decisions, but He will always act according to His holy, just, and sovereign nature. “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).

⁷ Feinberg, 559, 565

⁸ Morris JD, What other doctrines do you ignore? <<http://www.icr.org/article/2904/>> Accessed 2014 June 3.

⁹ Van Til C, For us God's being is ultimate, while created being is, in the nature of the case, derivative, (Van Til C (2008) *Defense of the Faith*, Oliphint KS, ed., P&R Publishing: Phillipsburg, NJ, 53). Van Til also says that reality is two-layered, consisting of the eternal, ultimate, unchangeable God and the temporal, contingent, changeable creation (Ibid., 52-53, 236-37).

Physical reality is good

God created the universe to display His glory, and it will fulfill the purpose He intended. The world was also originally created good. In Genesis 1, as God created the universe, he repeatedly declared it to be good (Genesis 1:1:4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25, 31). Today, however, we see a creation that is filled with sin and both moral and physical corruption. When Adam and Eve rebelled against God, they not only affected their own standing with God. They also affected the entire human race (Romans 5:12-21) and all of creation. As Paul says, “the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now” (Romans 8:22), but God will one day restore it to its former condition (Revelation 21:1-4).¹⁰ After God judges the world He inaugurates the *new* heaven and earth, which will last for eternity (Revelation 21:1-22:5). The physical creation is therefore not merely a temporary reality to be replaced by an allegedly superior nonphysical reality. Instead, it is part of God's eternal plan.

Because God declared His creation to be good, this rules out any form of dualism in which good and evil are equally ultimate realities. First of all, only God is eternal (Psalm 90:2; Exodus 3:14; 1 Timothy 1:17; Revelation 1:8), and He is good and holy. Second, nothing was inherently evil from the beginning. If all of creation owes its existence to God and was originally created good, then matter is not inherently and eternally evil although created beings can become morally evil.¹¹

Remembering this helps us to avoid devaluing the physical world. This world is God's handiwork and should be respected and enjoyed as such. Creation has value by virtue of the fact that it was created by God.¹² Physical reality is not morally inferior to spiritual reality. Millard Erickson explains it well:

Although sin may well have disturbed the universe God created, the world was good when it came from his hand. There is no particular virtue, then, in fleeing the physical creation or avoiding bodily pursuits in favor of more intellectual or spiritual activities. The fact that we are intellectual and spiritual creatures does not negate the fact that we are physical beings as well.¹³

Remembering the goodness of creation also helps us to avoid devaluing the incarnation of Christ in which he assumed a physical human form and lived as one of us. Even though Christ humbled Himself in the Incarnation

¹⁰ Grudem W (1994) *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, 272-73

¹¹ Erickson, 401-2

¹² Ibid., 410

¹³ Ibid., 411

(Philippians 2:5-11), He did not participate in our sinful nature (Hebrews 4:15).¹⁴

A biblical view of creation also rules out any form of monism, in which the world is an emanation of God.¹⁵ God created the world out of nothing and is distinct from it. Creation is not divine and not to be worshipped (Exodus 20:4-5; Jeremiah 10; Romans 1:18-23). Gordon Lewis and Bruce Demarest explain that “we ought to value creation highly as a great achievement of the most creative Being who is,” but we should not deify it.¹⁶

Francis Schaeffer also explains that in the Christian doctrine of creation, the universe is “an objective reality” and not an extension of God, and therefore it can be studied objectively. It is worth investigating creation because it is God’s creation.¹⁷ Wayne Grudem stated it well: “The doctrine of creation will also enable us to recognize more clearly that scientific and technological study in itself glorifies God, for it enables us to discover how incredibly wise, powerful, and skillful God was in his work of creation.”¹⁸

The Bible warns against both materialism, the overemphasis on material possessions (Luke 12:13-21; James 5:1-6; 1 Timothy 6:9-10), and hedonism, the over-emphasis of pleasure (Proverbs 23:19-21; Colossians 3:5-7; 1 Peter 4:1-6). Nevertheless, a person does not need to resort to asceticism which advocates avoiding physical possessions or other physical pleasures as inherently evil. Although he warns people of the vanity of over-emphasizing wealth and pleasure, in Ecclesiastes 5:19 Solomon encourages people to enjoy what God gives them. After rejecting teachings which forbid specific foods and marriage, Paul explains that “everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving” (1 Timothy 4:4).¹⁹

Grudem summarizes a biblical attitude toward use of physical creation:

Though the created order can be used in sinful or selfish ways and can turn our affections away from God, nonetheless we must not let the danger of the abuse of God’s creation keep us from a positive, thankful, joyful use of it for our own enjoyment and for the good of his kingdom....Yet in all of this we are to remember that material possessions are only

¹⁴ Ibid., 402

¹⁵ Ibid., 403-4

¹⁶ Lewis and Demarest, vol. 2, p. 58

¹⁷ Schaeffer FA (1982) *How Should We Then Live?* in *The Complete Works of Francis Schaeffer*, vol. 5, Crossway Books, Wheaton, 163.

¹⁸ Grudem, 309

¹⁹ This principle does not negate the Bible’s many moral rules which instruct us on the proper use of physical creation.

temporary, not eternal. We are to set our hopes on God...and on receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken.”²⁰

The appropriate response to creation is to worship God, both in attitude and in behavior. Feinberg explains, “In light of God’s great power, wisdom, and majesty so marvelously displayed in creating and preserving the universe, there is only one appropriate response from his creature: praise.”²¹

Conclusion

The doctrine of creation is not a secondary doctrine which can be discarded. It is not a doctrine which we can set aside because it is controversial. It is an essential component of Christian theology which has significant impact. It shows us that God is sovereign over mankind and the whole of creation, and it shows us mankind’s place in the world. It also shows us that the physical world can be appreciated despite its currently fallen nature. As John Morris explains:

Creation is the foundation for the worldview of Christianity. Without it we lose the logic of the doctrines of God, of sin, of man, of the penalty for sin, of salvation from sin based on the Creator’s death on our behalf, of His coming Kingdom, and others. If we can so easily abandon the doctrine of creation, the basis for the others, which of the others are we prepared to ignore?⁸ ❧

New Young Earth Indicator Discovered

By Mike Kinnaird, PhD

In the 9 June 2014 *The Conversation* appears an article by David Waltham, entitled “Why haven’t we encountered aliens yet? The answer could be climate change.”

<http://theconversation.com/why-havent-we-encountered-aliens-yet-the-answer-could-be-climate-change-27741> Accessed 6/10/14 9:58.

This article gives a fascinating discussion of global warming that brings up some huge points. First, the sun has gotten brighter over time, which by all rights should have resulted in a massive 100°C increase in the Earth’s surface temperature over the course of its supposed 4.5 billion year existence. That is enough heating to bring the surface to the boiling point of water if it had initially been ice at its freezing point. If that is true, then either the Earth is nowhere near 4.5 billion years old, or the

²⁰ Grudem, 272-73

²¹ Feinberg, 562. As examples Feinberg cites Ps. 97-99. He emphasizes Ps. 148 in which every part of creation praises God.

climate models are terribly wrong. It was proposed that the Earth's surface topography and the activity of the biosphere "just happened" to balance out the immense heating tendency to, if anything, cool the earth over geological time! What an amazing coincidence!

Another point is that if the climate models are so amazingly wrong about this important point, are they really to be trusted with our global economy? But that is another issue.

A final point of interest is the conclusion that planetary habitability over long time periods may be most unusual. Ya think? This is in stark contrast with the positively gushing headline recently that there may be 100 million inhabited planets in our galaxy alone, the implication being that life on Earth must not be so special after all. ☹

COMING EVENTS

Thursday, August 14, 7:00 pm, Providence Baptist Church, 6339 Glenwood Ave., Raleigh, Room 631
Mark Stephens, MCS, will acquaint our attendees with the exciting new 12 video series by Institute for Creation Research titled *Unlocking The Mysteries of Genesis*. He will show the video titled "Science and the Bible" and discuss and answer questions. This well done, new video series can be used in church and fellowship Bible studies by youth through adults to help get the creation and science of creation message out to stand for faith in today's secularist society. Please come out and get equipped. Bring your youth and college groups.