
VIDEO LECTURE MODULE: BIBLICAL THEOLOGY

LECTURE 2: CREATION

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The John Knox Institute
of Higher Education

Entrusting our Reformed Inheritance to the Church Worldwide

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Module

BIBLICAL THEOLOGY

30 LECTURES

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21 CHAPTERS OLD TESTAMENT · 9 CHAPTERS NEW TESTAMENT

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Lecture 2

CREATION

Lecture Theme:

In the work of creation, God lays the foundation for the revelation of himself and prepares us for the greater glory of the new creation in Christ.

Text:

“For by him [Christ] were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him: And he is before all things, and by him all things consist” (Colossians 1:16–17).

TRANSCRIPT LECTURE 2

If you want to erect a building, you have to first lay a solid foundation. And the taller the building, the more substantial the foundation must be. The opening of the Bible provides the groundwork for everything else that follows. Therefore, you must understand clearly the theology of the first few chapters of Genesis in order to make sense of the remainder of the Bible. Think with me about a few questions. Where is Christ in the opening chapters of Genesis? How does the world before the entrance of sin prepare the way for the salvation from sin? Who is man? And what is the basis for his relationship with God? How is the first book of the Bible, Genesis, related to the last book of the Bible, Revelation? And how is the theology of Genesis woven throughout the rest of Scripture? In this lecture, we will explore what God reveals to us about the world before sin, in Genesis 1 and 2. We'll learn about God, about man, then about man's relationship to God, and finally, and perhaps most importantly, about the ultimate destination of redeemed man, with God.

So first of all, what does God reveal about Himself? Well, if you open your Bible to Genesis 1:1, you'll see that the Bible opens with God Himself, in the beginning, God. Well, this comes as no surprise because as we saw in the first lecture, the Bible is God's book about Himself, the revelation of His own glory. And we see, from the first verse, that God existed before the beginning. That is to say, God is eternal. Now, when you think of eternal, don't think merely in terms of God existed for a long time, maybe an infinitely long period of time in the past, and into an infinitely long time in the future. No, it's more than that. God is eternal. That means He's actually outside of time, outside of time and space. He created and brought into existence time and space. Before the universe was created, all that existed was God and the perfect fellowship of the Three Persons of the Godhead. And you can think about any attribute of God. Think, for example, about His love. God did not begin becoming loving when He created the world.

He's eternally love. That's who He is, not just what He does. And that love was exhibited eternally between the Persons of the Trinity. We also see that God sovereignly decreed the work of creation. Now, what do we mean by decreed the work of creation? Well, the shorter catechism in Question 7 helps us here. It says, "the decrees of God are His eternal purpose, according to the counsel of His will, whereby for His own glory, He hath foreordained whatsoever comes to pass." We see from the first verse of the Bible that God has a plan, and He brings to pass everything that happens in history from the beginning to the end. We also learn about what God is like: His attributes. We've already mentioned the fact that He's eternal, and we've mentioned the fact that He's sovereign. He decrees all things. What else do we see? Well, let me give you some more examples. We see His power in bringing the universe into existence out of nothing. Paul notes this in Romans 1 verse 20, "For the invisible things of Him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead."

We also learn that God is good. You'll see the repeated words in chapter one: "And God saw that it was good." What He created was good because He is good. We see as well His wisdom: all of the intricacies of creation are set on display. If you read Isaiah 40, this is underlined. But what about the Trinity? I mean, after all, the Trinity is a fundamental doctrine, and it's a doctrine with practical consequences. What is more practical for the Christian than prayer? And yet, we rely on the doctrine of the Trinity, on the Trinity Itself in prayer. We pray to the Father through the Son by the help of the Holy Spirit. Contrary to what some think, the doctrine of the Trinity does not begin in the New Testament. We find it throughout the Old Testament, including the opening of Genesis, though of course we have a fuller and a clearer revelation of it in the New Testament. And so, it's no surprise to see, for example, the pronouns that are used in Genesis 1 verse 26: "And God said, let us make men in our image, after our likeness." There's the plural. We already see this in the first three verses of the first chapter.

There's a reference to God the Father in verse one; there's a reference to the Holy Spirit in verse two. It says, "And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters." And we see a reference to the Son in verse three: "God said, Let there be light." Christ is, of course, the Eternal Word. Now you may be wondering to yourself, is it right to include Christ here? Well, the New Testament casts further light on these opening verses in Genesis one. Notice how the opening words of the gospel of John are nearly identical to Genesis 1:1, but in John, it substitutes "Christ" for "the Word." It says, "In the beginning was the Word." This places Christ in the opening verses of Genesis. And it goes on, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by Him; and without Him was not anything made that was made." Christ, the Eternal Son, spoke the universe into existence. If you go to the gospels, you'll see how on one occasion He actually stills the wind and the waves by His command, by speaking, "Peace be still" (Mark 4:39).

Well, who can do this? Who can do this? Their Creator, the Creator of the winds and the waves, Who commanded them into existence. He's the One who can do that. Paul reinforces this when he writes, "For by Him were all things created." That is by Christ, "were all things created, that are in Heaven, and that are in Earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by Him, and for Him: And He is before all things, and by Him all things consist" (Colossians 1:16-17). Notice that the text does not say most things. Christ created all things. He was before all things, and it is by Him that all things consist; and for Him, not for anything or anyone else, but for Christ, all these things exist. So we can conclude that Christ first appears in Genesis one, not in Matthew one. This is Christ's world. He created the universe that He would later enter through His incarnation, in order to redeem it and raise it above and beyond how it began, as we'll see toward the end of this lecture. You should also consider God's works, because in Genesis one and two, we also learn that God acts.

And He reveals things about Himself through His works, through what He does. Now, this sets our expectation for the rest of our study of Scripture. God reveals Himself in His works. Genesis one teaches us to look for God to reveal Himself in the acts of history, biblical history. This will be very important in our future lectures on the rest of the Bible. God reveals Himself both in His words and His works, but His words and His deeds always go together. You see here that God spoke the universe into existence, again verse three, "And God said." In Psalm 33 verse 6 and verse 9, we read, "By the word of the Lord were the heavens made;... For He spake, and it was done; He commanded, and it stood fast." Consider a few of the characteristics of Christ's work of creation. Well, we

learn that matter, the physical stuff of this world, is not eternal. It began to exist at creation. We also see that it is created out of nothing. By the word “nothing,” we mean “not anything.” And He created the world with His long term plan in mind. Well, what do I mean by that?

Well, we read that He created the birds, and He created the lilies and flowers of the field. He created the sheep and so on. And He did this from the beginning, because He intended to utilize all of these things, to teach us spiritual lessons. Later on the Lord Jesus Christ will say, “Consider the birds, how the Lord feeds them. Consider the lilies of the field, how they clothe the fields.” He’ll speak of His people as His sheep. It’s not as if the Lord Jesus was subsequently finding a lesson in these particular things in creation. No, from the beginning, He created them to convey, to teach us these spiritual lessons. We also see that Christ chose to create the universe in six normal days. Indeed, we sing about this as well, in Psalm 104. He chose to create the whole universe in six normal days. And we know that’s the case for a few reasons. The word “day” in Genesis one is qualified by the words evening and morning, thereby limiting the timeframe. We also see that “day” is used on the fourth day, to determine the period governed by the sun, which is to say a regular day. We also note that every time “day,” the word “day,” is used in the Bible in conjunction with a numerical adjective, that is, with a word like “first,” “second,” and a “third” day, and so on, it is always a literal day.

And the plural word “days,” the days of creation, always means literal days throughout the entire Old Testament. Perhaps most significantly though, in Exodus 20 verse 11, where we find the 4th commandment in the 10 Commandments, man’s work week is patterned after God’s work week. Another characteristic that we should highlight is that the world was created good. The view that physical matter is inherently evil is not biblical. So under this first point, we’ve been answering the question, what does God reveal about Himself? Secondly, what does God reveal about man? What does God reveal about man? Well, we see that man is the pinnacle of God’s creation. Though God made a great variety among people, they share everything that is essential and held in common. Paul preaching in Acts 17 says, and God “hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the Earth” (verse 26). The reason this is the case, chiefly, is because man is made in the image of God, unlike all the other creatures. Again, in Genesis 1 verse 26, “And God said, Let us make men in our image, and after our likeness.”

So the question is, “What does it mean to be made in God’s image, for man to be made in God’s image?” This is a pressing question for many reasons, but one reason is the impact of the entrance of sin. Does man continue to be the image of God after the fall? Well, to answer that question, we must see that there are two aspects to the image of God, a broader and a narrower aspect. The broad aspect of man being made in the image of God, refers to the fact that man is a rational, moral creature, refers to man’s rational and moral nature, which is something that is maintained after the fall. So if you go to Genesis 9:6, you’ll see the Lord speaking of murder as an attack on the image of God. Man is still the image of God in that context. If you go to the New Testament, James 3 verse 9, you’ll see that cursing man is sinful, among other reasons, because it’s an attack on the similitude of God. We’ll see the same thing in First Corinthians 11, in verse 7. So there’s this broader aspect of man being the image of God, as a moral, rational creature, but there’s also a narrower aspect.

And the narrower aspect is spiritual knowledge, righteousness, and holiness. And this is lost after the fall, but it is regained in Christ at conversion. Paul speaks about this in places like Colossians 3, and Ephesians 4, and Romans 8, and so on. The image of God is defaced, if you will, in this sense. That spiritual knowledge, righteousness, and holiness is lost, but God makes a way for all of that to be recovered. This becomes very important for our understanding of the significance of the Christian being renewed and conformed into the likeness and image of Christ, which we will explore in a later lecture. We also learn that man has two parts to his nature: a body and a soul. The soul is also sometimes called a spirit. “And the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul,” Genesis 2 verse 7. Well, this is yet another building block for our study of the rest of the Bible. When we turn to consider man’s salvation, for example, after the fall, we’ll learn that Christ came to save the whole person, body and soul.

That, at death, the believer’s body is laid in the grave, still in union with Christ, and his soul immediately goes into the presence of God. And we learn about the resurrection, that, at the end of time, the Lord will resurrect the bodies, the physical bodies of His people. Why? Because Christ came to save the whole person, our bodies and our souls. Another thing that we learn about man, is that he is created male and female. And so,

gender distinctions and role relationships were established before the fall. Man was created before the woman, and man was given headship over the woman before sin ever entered into the picture. It's not as if male headship is a result of sin; it was prior to the fall. And you'll notice, then, as you go on in your study of the Bible, that the New Testament appeals all the way back to creation to establish the roles of men and women in the church. You see this in First Corinthians 11 verses 8 and 9, and First Timothy 2 verse 13, for example. On a similar note, God created the marriage relationship, man being created male and female.

He also established the covenant of marriage for the purpose of illustrating the relationship between Christ and His Bride, the Church. You'll sing about this in the Psalms; you'll hear the prophets talk about this in many places. You come to the New Testament, for example, in Ephesians 5, all the way to the end of the Bible. In Revelation 21, the new Jerusalem descends from heaven as a bride adorned for her husband; and so, this marriage relationship between one man and one woman brought into a covenant engagement illustrates the relationship between Christ and His Bride from the beginning. We also see that man was given dominion over the creatures. Man was God's vice region. Well, this too becomes important, and for example, it is connected to salvation in Christ. So, if you fast forward to the book of Psalms, in Psalm 8 verse 6, we're taught to sing, "Thou madest him," that is man, "to have dominion over the works of thy hands; Thou has put all things under his feet." Well, this may puzzle you. Why? Because it doesn't seem to be the case. It doesn't seem as if man actually does have dominion over everything and all things have been put under his feet.

Well, if that puzzles you, and if it raises a question, turn even further forward to Hebrews chapter 2 verses 8 and 9, because this very question comes up. We read, "Thou hast put all things in subjection under his feet", that is man's feet, "For in that he put all in subjection under him. He left nothing that is not put under him. But now we see not yet all things put under him." You see, that same question is arising, "But now we see not yet all things put under him. But we see Jesus," the text goes on. It is in Christ that this dominion is secured, and it is through Christ that the dominion that God gave to man, is brought forward. What else do we see about man? What else does God reveal to us? Well, we see that man was given permanent creation ordinances, so from the beginning of the world, there are certain ordinances at creation that are set in place, and there are four of them. I'll mention them briefly. The first is marriage; we've already referred to that in Genesis 2 verses 23 and 24. This is something that is to continue throughout the ages. In connection with that, we have procreation: the conceiving and birth of children.

In Genesis 1 verse 28, the Lord calls Adam and Eve to be fruitful and to multiply. The third creation ordinance is labor, or work. We see this in Genesis 2, for example, verses 15, 19, and 20. Work did not come as a result of the fall. It did not come as a result of sin. God created man to labor from the beginning, and that will continue through the end of time. The difference, of course, is that now, after the fall, he labors under the sweat of his brow, and many other difficulties and inconveniences. The fourth creation ordinance is Sabbath observance, and we see this in Genesis 2 verses 2 and 3. Notice again that the Sabbath is established before sin and before the fall. You'll learn later that it's also included as the fourth commandment in the 10 Commandments, that permanent standard of right and wrong for all men in all ages. But if you go into the New Testament, the moral obligation to observe and keep the Sabbath, one day in seven, continues to the end of time.

In Hebrews chapter 4 verse 9, we read, for example, "There remaineth therefore a rest." And the word "rest" there is different in the Greek from the other words that are translated, "rest," around it. It actually means Sabbath-keeping. There remaineth therefore a Sabbath-keeping to the people of God. What are we seeing in Hebrews 4? The weekly Sabbath, even in the New Testament, continues as a signpost, if you will, pointing to the eternal Sabbath that is found in heaven. So, this creation ordinance of a weekly Sabbath, begins in Genesis chapter 2. It continues through the Old Testament and the New Testament, even in the heaven itself. What does that mean? It means there is only one place where there is no Sabbath, and that is in hell. All of these are building blocks for the rest of the Bible. They're answering for us the basic questions about what God reveals to us about man. Thirdly, what does God reveal concerning man's relationship to God? We learn that God and His glory is dwelling in the midst of His people, that man was made for fellowship with God. We see that in Eden, where God is walking with Adam in the cool of the day.

We see it later on, throughout the Bible, God establishing the tabernacle where He dwells in the midst of His people, later on the temple, both of which show the glory of God. You'll read about it all the way through

the prophets, for example, in Zechariah 2, in verse 10, “Io, I come, and I will dwell in the midst of thee, saith the LORD.” We see it most importantly in the incarnation of the Lord Jesus Christ. He is Emmanuel, God with us, Christ coming and dwelling in the midst of His people and showing His glory. We see it throughout the New Testament church, and again, all the way into Revelation; at the end, in Revelation 21 verse 3, we read, “And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them.” That brings us to consideration of the Covenant of Works. You see, there is a great distance between God and man. So, God chose to voluntarily condescend to relate to man by way of a covenant.

Now, the word “covenant” and the idea of covenant is a very weighty biblical doctrine, and we’re going to be considering it at great length later, but a covenant includes a solemn engagement between two or more parties, with stipulations and conditions, and accompanying blessings and curses. It also often brings with it signs and seals, to confirm that covenant. This concept of covenant becomes a dominant theme through the rest of the Bible, and we’ll be considering it in detail in the future. But the first covenant is what theologians call the Covenant of Works, or the Covenant of Life. It was a unique covenant made with Adam, between God and Adam, with Adam as the representative of the human race before the fall. You’ll notice that God required of man perfect and personal obedience. He commanded Adam not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil in chapter 2 verse 17, threatening him with the curse, not only him, but also his posterity, the curse of death, if he did eat of it. He also held out the promise of eternal life to Adam and his posterity upon condition of obedience. Now, you may ask yourself, well where do we see the promise of this covenant?

We see the curse; where do we see the promise? Notice the reference to the Tree of Life. It was a sign, a sacrament, a visible representation of the promise. In other words, the presence of the Tree of Life held out the prospect or promise of permanent eternal life. We can verify this by where we see the tree again in Scripture. Let me direct your attention to the last place that we see it, the last chapter of the Bible. We read, “In the midst of the street of it,” this is describing Heaven, “and on either side of the river, was there the Tree of Life, which bear 12 manner of fruits, and yielded her fruit every month: and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations” (Revelation 22:2). Earlier in that same book, Revelation 2 verse 7, we read, “To him that overcometh,” that is to the Christian, “to him that overcometh will I give to eat of the Tree of Life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God.” In the next lecture, we will explore the important relationship between Adam, as the representative of his posterity, and Christ, as the representative of His people, places like First Corinthians 15 and Roman 5.

In order to understand the work of the last Adam, Christ, you have to comprehend the work of the first Adam. God’s salvation does not bring about a return to Eden. It provides something far, far superior, and that brings us to our last point in this lecture. What God reveals about the preparation for the superiority of the new creation. We’ve been pointing out some of the building blocks provided in Genesis for the remainder of our studies of Scripture. In this last point, we will show the exciting ways in which God builds on this foundation in the remainder of the Bible. Notice, first of all, God’s provision for a redeemer, and for redemption, was present at the beginning. We read that Christ was “foreordained before the foundation of the world,” First Peter 1 verse 20. He is described as “the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world,” Revelation 13 verse 8. Along these lines, the theologian Jonathan Edwards said, that the world was “doubtless created to be a stage upon which this great and wonderful work of redemption should be transacted.”

Notice that God created Heaven, the abode of God and angels, from the beginning. In other words, He made a place, from the beginning, to bring His redeemed people. In the words of Jesus, “the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world,” Matthew 25 verse 34. Do you see that? Who was the first person to enter Heaven? Well, the first martyr, Abel, who Hebrews 11 verse 4 tells us was saved by faith. We also see that when God later describes the salvation obtained through faith in Christ; and in the gospel, He employs the language of creation. Paul says, “Therefore, if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature,” literally in the Greek, “He is new creation.” We find this theme everywhere in the New Testament. We read, “For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness,” that’s pointing us back to Genesis, “hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ,” Second Corinthians 4 verse 6.

God is the Author of Salvation. The Spirit of God, Who breathed into man and made him a living soul, gives new life by regenerating the believer. Now, we could go on and on and on, but we’ll return to this later. Lastly, and to this point, consider the new heavens and the new Earth. The first world will not remain as it was first created.

And the fact is, God never intended, from the beginning, that it would. In fact, the whole cosmos is waiting for the grand finale at the end of time, where God will bring to consummation His work of redeeming His people. We read, for the earnest expectation of the creature, or creation, waiteth for the manifestation of the sons of God. The world suffers, the whole world suffers under the curse. Paul goes on, "Because the creature itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now" (Romans 8:21). Genesis 1 and 2 provide the foundation for what is to come. The new heavens and new Earth, and my friends, this will far excel what Adam ever knew in Eden.

Now, we must wait to unpack this later, but you should know that God has saved the best for last. As we saw in the first lecture, all of creation exists for God's glory. In the next lecture, we will take up the tragedy of man's fall into sin, and God's plan of salvation to recover him.