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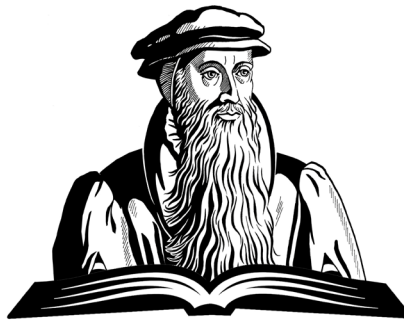
VIDEO LECTURE SERIES

by Rev. Jonathan Mattull

Lecture #6

God's Work of Creation

Catechism Question 9



The John Knox Institute
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Lecture #6

God's Work of Creation

Question 9: *What is the work of creation?*

Answer: *The work of creation is, God's making all things of nothing, by the word of his power, in the space of six days, and all very good.*

Last lesson, we looked at God's all-inclusive and perfect plan. He has decreed all, whatsoever comes to pass. He carries out the plan by his works of creation and providence. In today's lesson, we look at the first of these works—his work of creation. He has, as we'll see, created all things. This is a great truth. In the next lesson, we'll zoom in to look more closely at his creation of mankind. For this lesson though, we'll survey the glorious truth that God has created all things.

Before we get to our Question itself, it's worth noting the reality that faces us today. Our culture openly opposes the truth that God created all things. Many today think that the world and everything in it developed over billions of years in a random way. While we cannot answer all of the objections that the world, in its unbelief, presents, we can present the truth of God's Word on this topic.

Question #9 of the Shorter Catechism asks, "What is the work of creation?"—"The work of creation is, God's making all things of nothing, by the word of his power, in the space of six days, and all very good." There are four ideas we will focus on in our lesson. First, we will look at *what material God used to create all things*. Second, we will look at *what tool God used to create all things*. Third, we'll look at *how long God took to create all things*. And last, we'll look at *the condition of all that God created*.

So first, let's look at *the material God used to create all things*. Sometimes we say that we create something. A chef creates a meal. An artist creates a sculpture. By this, of course, we mean that the person is forming something into something else. The artist may take a large chunk of marble and chisel away certain parts to make a beautiful representation of a living creature. However, he's using something that already exists. Similarly, a chef may take raw ingredients—vegetables, and meat, and spices—and combine them and cook them in such a way that they turn into an excellent meal.

Now, notice what the Catechism says: "The work of creation is, God's making all things of nothing." Notice that. Everything God made was brought forth out of *nothing*. This is an amazing claim. It's an amazing truth. Most importantly, as we see this claim, it is a truth that is taught by the Bible. Notice Hebrews 11, and verse 3, "Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear." In

other words, God did not use preexistent material in order to make the things we see. This tells us several things.

First, it tells us how great and powerful God is. God did not just form the world. He brought it forth out of nothing. All that now is, once had no existence. God powerfully formed everything that is. This surpasses our ability fully to understand. However, it does direct us to see that God truly is Almighty, and is greater than all else, and is worthy of our worship.

Well, second, it tells us that there was nothing but God before he created the universe. This is a big thought for us. However, we should remember that God is eternal. Nothing else existed before he brought it into existence—no angels, no men, no preexistent material. This shouldn't make us think that God was lonely. Remember, he is the Triune God. Within himself, the three persons ever enjoy perfect fellowship—the one true God is perfectly satisfied. But he has created all things to display his wisdom and power, and to publish his glory.

Well third, it tells us that everything owes its existence to God. This is true of trees and stars, as well as angels and men. It's not only true of believers, it's true of the most wicked and atheistic men and women there are in this world. All are made by him and for him, and are accountable to him.

Well, second, in our lesson, let's look at *what tool God used to create*. What is this tool that God used to bring all things into existence? If you stop to consider even some of what God made, you would know it must have been something strong, something powerful. Having brought it all things into existence, and then shaping it, demanded infinite power, wisdom, and skill. How else could he have made the earth, the other planets, and the great stars? It must have been something very strong, and indeed, you're right in thinking so. However, it may not be what you think it was. The *Catechism* tells us that he made all things "by the word of his power"—by his Word. Perhaps that doesn't impress you. If that's the case, it may be because you're thinking about the power of your word or my word. If you or I tried to make something appear out of nothing by our word, we would fail, because our words are quite weak. However, God's Word is so powerful, that he simply says, and that thing he says, happens.

Notice how each day in creation begins with the phrase, "And God said." For instance, in the first day (Genesis 1:3) we read, "And God said, Let there be light: and there was light." Notice, he gave a commandment, "Let there be light." This is what he said. But what is amazing, of course, is what follows: "and there was light." His Word is so powerful that once he speaks, it happens. When we begin to understand this, we will see that God is so powerful, he must be praised. No one else is like he is.

In fact, the Psalms help us with this. In Psalm 33, there's an opening with a call to worship God with joy: "Rejoice in the LORD, O ye righteous: for praise is comely for the upright" (Psalm 33, verse 1). And the Psalm then gives several reasons for praising him. One reason is his creating of all things by his Word. Notice verse 6: "By the word of the LORD were the heavens made; and all the host of them by the breath of his mouth." The same idea is in verses 8 and 9: "Let all the earth fear the LORD: let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of him. For he spake, and it was done; he commanded, and it stood fast."

When we stop and consider that the whole universe was brought forth by the Word of God, we should stop and wonder at his power, and praise him for his work. It should cause us to see how great his is, and how little we are. This truth is taught, in Hebrews 11:3, as well: "Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear." The worlds, that is, everything in the universe, was framed,

made, formed by the Word of God.

Well, third, for our lesson, notice *how long God took to create*. We learned earlier that God is infinite in his power. He is Almighty. This means he could have created everything in a moment. However, as our *Catechism* states, God chose to make all things “in the space of six days.” We see this in the first chapter of Genesis. These were days of normal length. Though they were extraordinary days, since God was making all things, they were of normal duration. First and foremost, we see this in the Biblical record itself. Notice the repetition for each of the six days, in Genesis 1: “And the evening and the morning were the first day” (verse 5). It goes on, then “the second day” (verse 8). It goes on, then “the third day” (verse 13), and so on. Just as each of our days changes to the next by the transition of evening to morning, so did these first six days.

The Bible is very clear that all creation was completed in the space of six normal days. Notice, in Genesis 1, verse 31, we read, “And God saw every thing that he had made, and, behold, it was very good. And the evening and the morning were the sixth day.” The next verse, Genesis 2:1, tells us, “Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them.” This point is confirmed elsewhere in the Bible, and, Lord willing, we’ll eventually get to the Ten Commandments in our study. But for now, it’s important to notice how the fourth commandment appeals back to this creation week. The fourth commandment, as we’ll see, tells us that God wants us to set apart a whole day—twenty-four hours—to worship him. We’ll talk more about that later.

But notice that God, in that commandment, points us back to the creation week. He’s explaining the commandment, and he directs us back to creation. In one sense, he’s answering the question, “Why should we set apart a whole twenty-four hours—a whole day?” Notice Exodus 20, verse 11. There, God says, “For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day: wherefore the LORD blessed the sabbath day, and hallowed it.” In other words, our week is patterned after the first week. In the first week, God used six days to work. He completed his work in those six days, and after those six days, he spent a whole day glorying over his work. This is a pattern for us. We are to work and play for six days. Yet we’re to spend one whole day glorying in God and worshipping him, in our private devotions, in our family worship, and in our public praise as well.

It’s important to notice this. It’s God’s Word that teaches us how long God took to make all things. He tells us that he made everything in the space of six days. We shouldn’t, however, think that he needed six days, because he was tired, or needed to rest. He was actually presenting a beautiful order for us to consider. In fact, you can see this, if you read Genesis 1, and take notice that God is progressing in an orderly fashion as he brings things into existence. He establishes the places where things will dwell, and then he establishes the things that will dwell in those places. There’s much wisdom displayed in a diligent meditation of the order of that first week.

Well let’s move on now, fourth, to consider *the condition of what God created*. The *Catechism* tells us that what God made was “all very good.” This is actually taken from Genesis 1, verse 31: “And God saw every thing that he had made, and, behold, it was very good.” This is not just a nice and sentimental thought. It is full of instruction for us. God never made something bad, wrong, or off in some way. There was nothing evil in itself. Everything was as it should be. This is far different than things are today. There’s sickness, there’s disease, and there’s death. There are broken families. There’s wickedness in our world. We see that there is evil.

Well, what has happened to upset and disturb this beauty that marked creation, especially at the first? Well, it isn’t long into the Bible before we come to the answer. The answer is that sin was committed. We’ll spend more time on this in a future lesson, but it is worth noting that God’s

beautiful creation was marred by sin.

This doesn't mean that God was not in control of all things. It does, however, remind us that there would be no death, no illness, no problems in this world, no sadness, no grief, no misery, were it not for sin. It's worth pausing to think of that. Sin often appears to us as something little and insignificant. And yet, the first sin is what unleashed unto the world all of its misery. We have to think seriously about that first sin, but likewise, our own sin, and see how great a need there is for a Savior of sinners.

Well, we don't wish to end in discouragement. We should remember something else that the Bible teaches us. It's true that evil has entered and disrupted this good creation. However, that's not the final story. As we've noted, we need a Savior. The Scriptures tell us that Jesus Christ has come to conquer evil. In fact, we read of this most gracious and excellent work, in Revelation 21, and verses 4 and 5: "And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away. And he that sat upon the throne said, Behold, I make all things new. And he said unto me, Write: for these words are true and faithful."

There are many questions that we may have about God's work of creation. Unfortunately, we live in an age where there are many attacks upon this most glorious truth. We don't have the ability to answer every question. But one thing we can see is that though creation has been marked and marred by our sin, in the passage we just read, God has a way to restore it, and it's all through Jesus Christ.

Well, it's also true that there are some who deny that the world was created by God, some deny God himself. Many who do this consider themselves wise, educated, scientific, and thoughtful. And indeed, they may have the credentials and the degrees to show that they've done much to study. They look upon believers as darkened in their understanding, and even as fools—outdated, out of touch. And this, of course, is very sad. However, it's not new. This has been the case for a long time.

But why is it that some deny God, and deny his work of creation? Paul answers this question, in Romans 1. In verse 18, he says there are men "who hold the truth in unrighteousness." The word "hold" means "to suppress," "to hold back." Paul's noting that there are those who suppress the truth by their unrighteousness. He goes on to say, "Because that which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God hath shewed it unto them. 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; so that they are without excuse: because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened" (verses 19 to 21). Well, the world may parade its scientists, its specialists, and say, "Rejecting God as the creator is the intelligent thing to do," however, this is not because of science or learning. It's because they reject the truth that is displayed by all creation. All creation testifies clearly that there is a God who made all things.

The fundamental problem is not that they don't know it. It's that they despise the God who made it. Paul says, "They glorified him not as God." You see, this is the essence of sin. Sin does not give God the glory that is due unto his name. And instead, sin has corrupted, and is corrupting, and it makes us take the glory to ourselves. Moreover, if we can remove God, well, then we feel we have the liberty to live as we want. Well, how much better is it that we acknowledge the creator instead of suppressing what is so clearly seen? Let us look upon his work of creation, and give him the glory that is due unto his name. He is God Almighty! His wisdom and power are on full display.

So let us see that there is none like unto our great God who made all things out of nothing, “by the word of his power, in the space of six days, and all very good.”

And this can be an encouragement to you. It’s natural for us to look upon mountains, and trees, and animals, the stars above us, and to wonder. And we should do so, and yet, do so with the full acknowledging that these things, which are truly wonderful for us, are things that God has made. So as you study creation, as you take up the study of science, you would do so in a way that submits yourself unto God. As you discover the various systems of the world, the planets above us, the solar system, and the various stars and galaxies of the universe, and you wonder at the magnitude of creation, let it be to the end that your mind reflects on God who made all of these. As you look for instance, and you see models of how large the earth is compared to other planets, and how large the planets are to the sun, and how large the sun is compared to other stars that are greater than it, you should think for a moment that all of this is nothing, compared to the God who made it.

And so, as we study these things, we can be brought to a fuller understanding of the greatness of God. And it should lead us then to worship him, and to praise him. Perhaps you like to look at animals, and you go to the zoo, or you walk in nature, and you see these various creatures that are all around us, remember this—every single one of them was wisely and powerfully made by God himself. And so, as you study them, you can study the works of God. But be sure then, as you come to delight in those works, to give glory to God who made them. You see, we shouldn’t be afraid of studying creation. We should indeed be afraid of our sinful ways in our mishandling of the things which God has made. But we should enter upon such study with great delight to think we are following after the works of God, and we’re seeing his wisdom that is displayed in creation. You see, we need not fear the study of science. If science is rightly done, it is the gaining of an understanding of the things which God has made. And when science is rightly done, it helps us to see more clearly the wonder, and power, and wisdom that is displayed throughout creation.

But we also need to be mindful that we study the things that God has made rightly. We study them to discern the things that God has made, and the way that God has made them, and to delight in those things, but always then to return thanks unto God. So as you walk in the woods or you go to a park and you see the birds flying in the air; or you go to the river and you can see fish swimming; if you go to the zoo or the aquarium and you see the great things; there are a few things that you should remember. Remember this, there was a time when nothing existed but God. And remember this, that all things that now exist, exist because God brought forth all that is, out of nothing, by the Word of his power. And so as you see great creatures, whether living creatures as perhaps a blue whale, or the inanimate creatures like the stars above us, remember, there is one greater than all, and that is God. So let your study of creation lead you to the worship of God.

And yet, the last thing to remember is this. Creation itself shows forth that there is brokenness. And that brokenness, as the Bible records, is because of our sin. And so, reflect upon that as well. The creation is no longer as it once was, that there have been great upheavals. Indeed, most notably, the flood, because of man’s sin. And yet, all sin has brought about brokenness. And so, as you see certain things that are wrong, as it were, in creation, let it be a remembrance to you that there is much that is wrong, and it’s all because of sin. And yet, as you think on that, may be to the end that you would reflect upon Jesus Christ, who is the Maker of all things, as well as the Redeemer of sinners. And may you look to him in faith.