

CHAPTER 7.

OUR FATHER AND HIS CREATION

“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth” (Gen 1:1). It is with this well-known sentence that the Bible begins. On the one hand, it is both short and simple. The words and phrases are not complicated or confusing. The time of the action is indicated: “in the beginning.” The one who did the action is identified: “God.” And finally, what he did is described: he “created the heavens and the earth.” On the other hand, this sentence is deeply profound. It also raises questions. Who precisely is this God who creates? What is he like? And what motivated him to create something entirely new?

In addition, many more questions have been raised, particularly concerning the relationship between faith and science. Many, but not all, scientists believe that all living beings, from small fish to human beings, evolved over long periods of time. To be more precise, these scientists teach that through the processes of adaption and natural selection simpler life forms (such as jellyfish and crayfish) eventually evolved into more complex life forms (such as blue whales and human beings). These processes require a long time span of millions upon millions of years. Genesis 1 and 2 provide an undeniably different explanation of how our present world came into existence. This revelation from God says that creation occurred over the course of six days. Furthermore, it did not happen through constant adaption but rather through divine command. God spoke, and it came to be (Ps 33:9). So, which is correct? Creation by God’s Word? Or evolution through adaptation? Or is some combination

of the two possible? Just to be clear on terminology, this attempt to find a hybrid solution is often called theistic evolution.

Many sincere Christians struggle with these questions. As children they grow up learning from the Bible that God simply created everything in six days. Yet later on, in high school and university or through personal reading, they receive a different impression from scientific research. For some it becomes a crisis of faith. So, also for their sake, we must not avoid these important questions, and we will not do so. We will deal with them a little later on in this chapter.

However, first we must pay attention to something else. When the early church confessed God's work of creation, they emphasized that God *the Father* is the Creator. This is clear from the Apostles' Creed, which begins, "I believe in God the Father almighty, Creator of heaven and earth." Please note that the confession of God as the Father is prior to the confession of God as the Creator. That order is not accidental, and it is confirmed by the Nicene Creed, the Heidelberg Catechism (LD 9), and the Belgic Confession (Art 12). Each creed or confession emphasizes, right from the start, that the God who creates is the Father. We will heed the wisdom of our forefathers in the faith and follow the same direction. There are many people in this world who acknowledge that there is a God or a higher being, but they do not know, trust, and love him as Abba (Gal 4:6). Also for their sake, we need to speak clearly about God as Father.

GOD THE FATHER IS THE CREATOR

The consistency with which the creeds confess God the Father as Creator is all the more noteworthy when we consider that each age has had its own scientific theories concerning how things are and how they came to be. The Apostles' and Nicene Creeds were written in a time that was still heavily influenced by Greek philosophy. Philosophers such as Aristotle (384–322 B.C.) and Ptolemy (ca. A.D. 90–168) held different scientific views, both with respect to the arrangement of the heavens and the constitution of the earth. However, the Apostles' and Nicene Creeds do not

touch on such matters; rather, they point to the Creator who is almighty Father.

Likewise, some twenty years before the Belgic Confession and Heidelberg Catechism were written, Nicolaus Copernicus was causing waves in the scientific and theological communities of his day. He proposed that the sun, rather than the earth, was at the centre of the celestial spheres. The theologians at that time were certainly aware of Copernicus' new ideas. In fact, a Lutheran theologian named Andreas Osiander wrote the preface to Copernicus' famous book, *On the Revolution of the Celestial Spheres* (1543). Yet again, the authors of the Belgic Confession and the Heidelberg Catechism do not spend time addressing these views. Instead, they are keen to confess that God *the Father* is the Creator. Why is this confession so important?

In the first place, it is crucial because it is biblical. The prophet Malachi says, "Have we not all one Father? Has not one God created us?" (Mal 2:10). The same truth is revealed in the New Testament when the apostle Paul writes, "Yet for us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist" (1 Cor 8:6). This last verse also makes it clear that all three persons of our triune God are involved in creation. The Father creates; he is the source. However, as the apostle Paul points out in 1 Corinthians 8:6, the Father creates through the Son. Indeed, the apostle John writes, "All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made" (John 1:3). Also, no sooner was the first act of creation completed than the Holy Spirit was immediately active, taking care of the waters that had been made (Gen 1:2; also see Ps 104:30). Clearly, each person of our triune God participates in the creation and maintenance of the heavens and the earth. It remains true, however, that God the Father is the one who is central in this doctrine.

Secondly, we need to ensure that we understand correctly *why* God is called Father. Let us begin by clarifying that he is not called Father because he is the Creator. If that were the case, then God would have

only *become* a Father on the first day of creation. Now, of course, when we speak about earthly fathers, this is what we are used to. A boy grows up to be a man. If a man is married, then he becomes a husband. If the Lord blesses that marriage in such a way that the couple receives a baby, then, and only then, the husband *becomes* a father. However, it is also entirely possible to be a man and not be a father. In other words, being a father is something that is added to, but not essential to, being a man. The same cannot be said of God the heavenly Father. He did not become a Father. He always was, is, and forever shall remain Father because he is the eternal Father of his eternal Son, Jesus Christ (2 Cor 1:3; LD 9). This truth brings with it a most remarkable stability and security. God's Fatherhood is simply part of who he is. It is not something that was added into his existence, and it cannot be taken away either. Another way of saying this is that God can never stop being Father nor stop being fatherly. If he were to do so, he would be denying himself, and that is something God will never do (2 Tim 2:13).

Thirdly, confessing God as Father brings the purpose of his creative work into sharper focus. To be sure, the final and highest purpose of God's creative work is to bring glory to his name. The apostle Paul makes this explicit when he exclaims, "For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen" (Rom 11:36). However, it is also true that as Father, God keeps in mind the needs of his children, whom he loves so much (Matt 6:26, 32). God the Father always had his eternal Son, whom we now know as Jesus Christ. Yet on the sixth day of creation he made two earthly children for himself, namely Adam and Eve. (We will look more closely at that aspect of creation in chapter 9.) Therefore all the other things that he created on the first six days had a clear purpose: they all had to serve, help, and assist his children. To say it in another way, God the Father not only *cares for* his children, he also *created for* his children.

In the fourth place, since he is Father, God has a particular view of everything that he created. He does not merely look at the mountains, rivers, stars, animals, and human beings as things that he made, as if they were nothing more than an inventory of products in a universe-sized ware-

house. No, creation has a much more elevated status than that. In his paternal eyes they are all part of the inheritance that is set aside for his eternal Son. Psalm 2 speaks of this truth, especially in verses 7–8. There the psalmist writes, “I will tell of the decree: The Lord said to me, ‘You are my Son; today I have begotten you. Ask of me, and I will make the nations your heritage, and the ends of the earth your possession.’” This is also confirmed in Hebrews 1:2, where the Holy Spirit speaks of the Son whom God the Father appointed heir of all things, that is, of the sum total of all created things.

Closely connected to this is the astounding truth that God the Son also graciously shares his inheritance with all those who are regenerated by the Spirit of God. This is revealed in Romans 8:16–17: “The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him.” And on the final day, when the Lord brings all his children into the new creation, they will enjoy their inheritance forever, in unspeakable and uninterrupted glory: “And he who was seated on the throne said, ‘Behold, I am making all things new’ The one who conquers will have this heritage, and I will be his God and he will be my son” (Rev 21:5, 7). Notice again how cosmically sweeping this promise is. Our inheritance includes the entire renewed creation. So, the next time you look at a blossoming flower, a gurgling brook, or a twinkling star, remember: it is not only a beautiful part of creation, but it is also part of your promised inheritance, through Christ, the eternal Heir of the heavenly Father.

Considering all the points above, it is obvious that our ancestors in the faith were on the right track when they emphasized that God the Creator is the eternal, loving, wise, and almighty Father. This truth sheds a profound and comforting light upon the whole doctrine of creation.

OUT OF NOTHING

God the Father is the Creator, not the Sculptor, of the heavens and the earth. In other words, God did not take pre-existing, eternal matter and re-shape it into the heavens and the earth. On the contrary, there was

nothing—except God. Then God spoke and one by one, day by day, he brought the various parts of creation into existence. It is true that as God’s creation work progressed he did use some things that he had created earlier in the week in order to create something else. The heavenly Father used dirt and dust to create both animals (Gen 1:24) and Adam (Gen 2:7). He also used a rib from Adam’s side to create Eve (Gen 2:21–22). Still, when God the Father began his work of creation, there was nothing for him to begin with.

This truth is taught in Scripture in various ways. To begin with, Genesis 1:1 does not speak of God using any pre-existent matter when he created the heavens and the earth. Rather, as Psalm 33:9 confirms, “He spoke, and it came to be; he commanded, and it stood firm.” Moreover, the apostle Paul explains that God is the one who simply “calls into existence the things that do not exist” (Rom 4:17). In the book of Hebrews we are exhorted to believe that our heavenly Father does have the power to create something out of nothing: “By faith we understand that the universe was created by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things that are visible” (Heb 11:3). The confessions also make a point of mentioning this significant truth (BC 12; LD 9).

The full significance of this truth becomes apparent if we set it next to the doctrine of God’s eternity. Since God created the heavens and the earth, in the beginning and out of nothing, all matter is finite and time-bound; it all has a definite beginning point. By contrast, God has no beginning; he, and he alone, is eternal. In Psalm 90:2 Moses sings, “Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever you had formed the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting you are God.” Since God is eternal and all creatures are not, there is a sharp line of demarcation between the two—a line that we do well to maintain.

A number of false teachings blur the boundary line between Creator and creature. The most extreme of these teachings is *pantheism*. Pantheism teaches that ultimately everything is God. This means that the mountains, the moon, the animals, and all human beings are divine, although their divinity is manifested in different ways. Religions such as Hin-

duism and Buddhism, as well as many mystical religions, have elements of pantheism in them. For instance, in Hinduism Brahman is divine, and “everything is Brahman.”¹ Obviously, the sharp demarcation line between Creator and creature is erased entirely.

A closely related teaching is *panentheism*. Followers of panentheism do not assert that God is everything, but rather that God is *in* everything, or conversely, that everything is *in* God. However, this only raises the question: to what extent is everything in God? And if something is completely in God, does this not make everything divine again? In the final analysis, is panentheism so much different from pantheism? Whatever the correct answer may be to that question, the fact remains that panentheism makes the boundary between Creator and creature very blurry.

Finally, there is *materialism*. Although there are different forms of this teaching, some variations teach that matter as such, including atoms, is eternal. As a result, materialism affirms two eternals: God and matter. Naturally, atheistic materialism denies the existence of God altogether and maintains that only matter is eternal. Yet either way matter takes on an eternal status, which should be the exclusive claim of God alone.

In each of the three teachings outlined above, the line of demarcation between Creator and creature is compromised. The inevitable result is that God becomes more creaturely, or the creature becomes more divine, or both. However, Scripture clearly maintains that the Creator is not in the same category as his creation. As the LORD himself says, “To whom then will you compare me, that I should be like him?” (Isa 40:25–31). This truth has at least one very crucial consequence: it protects the uniqueness of the incarnation of Jesus Christ. Both pantheism and panentheism teach that it is a rather normal thing for divinity and humanity to be combined or conjoined. According to these teachings, such a combination is simply part of the way things naturally exist. The holy gospel has a radically different and infinitely better message. When the Word, who is God, became flesh (John 1:1, 14), a most unique and miracu-

1. Vedas, *Chandogya Upanishad* 3.14.1.

lous event took place. Our very salvation depends upon that miracle (LD 5–6)! In this way we are also reminded that the doctrines of the Christian faith are intricately interconnected. Making a mistake in the doctrine of creation also has big repercussions elsewhere, including the doctrine of salvation.

ALL THINGS VISIBLE AND INVISIBLE

The Apostles' Creed simply states that God created the heavens and the earth. The Nicene Creed expands on this by adding a phrase: "all things visible and invisible." Why should we be interested in things that we cannot even see? And what exactly is this invisible realm anyway? To be specific, the invisible realm includes the angels who serve the Lord as well as those angels who have rebelled against the Lord, otherwise known as evil spirits or demons (2 Pet 2:4; BC 12). Angels and demons are spiritual. They do not have physical bodies, although at times they do appear in a visible form that is similar to a human being (compare Gen 18:2, 22 and 19:1).

Since angels are spirits who normally dwell in the heavens (Luke 2:13–15), it easily happens that people tend to put them in the same category as God himself, or at least they think of them as demi-gods. But they are wrong in doing so. Angels, like human beings, are creatures. Angels are not eternal. Angels are not almighty. Angels had a definite beginning and, like all other creatures, they must ultimately submit to the Creator. This truth is comforting for God's children, especially when they consider that Satan is a fallen angel (Job 1:6; Jude 6). Satan is opposed to God, but he is definitely not equal to God. Satan's counterpart is not God but the loyal archangel Michael (Rev 12:7–9). Consequently, even though Satan is a roaring lion who attacks us with many enticing temptations and deceiving schemes, as God's children we can be confident that, in the end, God our Father will be victorious. If the contest is between the Creator and a creature, between the infinite One and a finite being, the eternal Creator will win every time. Satan will, most assuredly, go down to total defeat (Rev 20:7–10). Since our Father is God, and Satan is not, there is no doubt about it!

IN SIX DAYS

The first week of world history was undoubtedly a most special and unique week. At the beginning of the first day there was nothing. By the end of the sixth day God the Father had created the heavens and the earth, complete with water, light, weather systems, continents, trees, flowers, sun, moon, stars, birds, fish, mammals and, last but not least, human beings. So much accomplished in so little time! It was truly miraculous. Let us be honest, it is impossible for anyone of us to wrap our minds fully around that miracle. In fact, the enormous scope of what the Lord did in that special week has led some to question whether it all really happened in just one week. Some have suggested that the mention of days in Genesis 1 may, in fact, be a poetic way of referring to much longer periods of time, perhaps even millions of years.

It is true that the word *day* can be used in a more metaphorical sense, referring to a period of time. For example, Proverbs 25:13 speaks about snow in the time of harvest. Literally, the word *time* is *day*, but harvest takes longer than one day. Yet, even if *day* can refer to a longer period of time, there are three key reasons for maintaining that this is not the case in Genesis 1. First, in Scripture whenever the word *day* is used with any kind of number (e.g., first, second, or forty days), it always refers to a literal, historical day.

Second, Genesis 1 contains a well-known refrain: there was evening and there was morning, the first day . . . the second day . . . the third day, etc. However, that is not the only time the word *day* is used in this chapter. It is also found in verse 14, where we learn that God created the sun, moon, and stars to be “for signs and for seasons, and for days and years,” and again in verse 18, where the celestial lights are “to rule over the day and over the night.” It is clear, and no one really disputes this, that in those two verses the word *day* is not used in a metaphorical or poetic sense but refers, rather, to ordinary days as we know them today. Therefore, if *day* is used in its normal sense in verses 14 and 18, we should fully expect that it is used in the same way in verse 19, which mentions “the fourth day,” as well as in the other five occurrences of that well-known refrain.

Thirdly, in the fourth commandment the LORD himself draws a clear and close parallel between the six days that we work each week and the six days that he worked to create all things in the beginning. In Exodus 20:9–10, he commands, “Six days you shall labour and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God.” Then, in verse 11 he bases this command on the creation week: “For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.” Put together, these two facts give sufficient reason for maintaining that our heavenly Father created the heavens and the earth, including all things visible and invisible, in six literal and historical days. It may be impossible for us to comprehend how he did it all, but what is impossible for man is possible for God (Matt 19:26).

Since he is the God of order (1 Cor 14:33), it is not surprising that his creative work is also organized. On the first day God created light. On the fourth day he made light-bearers: the sun, moon, and stars. On the second day God created an expanse to separate the waters above and the waters below. On the fifth day he filled the waters below with fish and the expanse above with birds. On the third day God created the dry land with many different plants and trees. On the sixth day God filled that land with all kinds of animals and human beings. Thus, there is a clear pattern of forming (days 1–3) and filling (days 4–6). This pattern does not indicate that Genesis 1 is a poetic or metaphorical chapter of the Bible. It simply confirms that our Father, the Creator, is an organized Master Designer.

CREATION, EVOLUTION, THEISTIC EVOLUTION

The theory of evolution is based on various scientific discoveries and data. In this section we can highlight only a few. Geologists have discovered patterns in the layers of rock. As they found certain kinds of fossils in certain layers of rock, geologists slowly worked on piecing together a history of the development of life by analyzing the patterns they found in these rock formations. Then there are also the striking similarities between certain creatures. Monkeys, apes, and gorillas all share many of

the same physical features. This has led scientists to ask if one species evolved from the other. Indeed, this question has been extended to the similarities between apes and human beings. Developments within molecular biology, especially DNA research, have confirmed that ninety-six percent of the genomes are the same in humans and chimpanzees.

Of course, it is one thing to collect data. It is another thing to interpret those data. How should we interpret the fact that humans and chimpanzees share ninety-six percent of their genomes? Those who believe in evolution cite it as proof that evolution occurred. Those who believe in creation will say that God the Creator obviously had a well thought out, effective design for living creatures. Rather than making each living creature genetically unique, God re-used elements of his design work in various creatures. Even human architects will borrow elements from previous blueprints when they design a new building.

However, there is a more fundamental issue at stake here. We already touched on it in back in chapter 2. Whenever we study parts of creation, whether rock layers or DNA patterns, we are receiving some general revelation. As the apostle Paul explains, general revelation teaches something about who God is: how powerful he is, how wise he is, and how divine he is (Rom 1:20). But general revelation is limited in what it can reveal (CoD 3/4.4). Therefore, in order to learn clearly and correctly how God created the heavens and the earth, we need to rely on special revelation, that is, Holy Scripture. Moreover, Scripture does not speak about evolution by constant adaption, but creation by divine command.

This also highlights another key weakness with the theory of evolution. Whatever insights the theory may offer, it does not provide a satisfactory explanation as to how life actually began. Proponents of evolution all acknowledge that there must have been an epoch-altering event in which inorganic, lifeless material suddenly began to live. Still, it is one thing to suggest *that* lifeless material began to live, but it is quite another to explain *how* this happened. So long as the theory of evolution leaves that question unanswered, it has failed to truly address the issue of origins, despite claims to the contrary.

As mentioned earlier, the attempt to combine creation and evolution is called theistic evolution. This theory maintains that evolution is the means by which all living beings eventually came into existence. However, theistic evolution adds that God is the one who initiated the whole process as well as the one who directed it. The idea of theistic evolution must be rejected for two main reasons. First, in his Word, the LORD does not speak anywhere of using a process of evolution. True faith is accepting what God reveals (LD 7), and our Father has revealed that “he spoke, and it came to be” (Ps 33:9). Secondly, all proponents of evolution, whether theistic or atheistic, teach that death is simply part of the way that things naturally are. For them, death is a necessary part of the process of natural selection, otherwise known as survival of the fittest. The Lord clearly reveals, however, that death entered the world because of sin (Gen 2:17; Rom 5:12, 17; Rom 6:23). Therefore Christ also had to die on the cross as the only satisfaction sufficient to pay for sins (Matt 16:21). Once again, we notice that it is crucially important to have the correct doctrine of creation; otherwise many other areas of doctrine, including the very heart of the gospel, that is, Christ’s death on the cross, may well become diluted or corrupted.

In short, since evolution is such a common teaching today, it can be challenging for us as Christians to take a different stance. We may even be mocked as being scientifically backwards or ignorant. In answer to that, there is also excellent science being done that questions evolution and supports creation. Yet more than that, it comes down to trusting our Father the Creator and what he says to us in his Word. Who can better tell us how he performed the miracle of creation than the Master Designer and Maker himself?

Suggested Readings: Genesis 1; Hebrews 11:1–3

QUESTIONS FOR UNDERSTANDING

1. Explain the significance of confessing that God has always been Father, even before the creation of the world. Can you think of

concrete situations in which this truth would be comforting to God's people? How so?

2. Define pantheism, panentheism, and materialism. Can you think of world religions, popular movements, or contemporary authors who promote these ideas? Also, try to think of examples that are not mentioned in this chapter. What are at least two fundamental errors that these teachings promote?
3. We often speak of ourselves as children of God, but we do not often take the next step and think of ourselves as heirs of God. What exactly does this mean? What is all included in our inheritance? Is it spiritual, physical, or both? To find your answers consider the following passages: Romans 4:13; Galatians 4:1–7; Ephesians 1:11, 14, 18; Titus 3:7; Hebrews 11:7; James 2:5; Revelation 21:5–7. Being an heir includes not only privileges but also responsibilities. What are they, and how must we fulfil them? Consider Romans 8:17.
4. Compare the first heavens and earth as they were before the fall into sin (Gen 1–2) and the new heavens and earth (Rev 21–22). What is similar? What is different? How do these similarities and differences comfort us and challenge us?

QUESTIONS FOR FURTHER DISCUSSION

1. What tasks do angels have? (Gen 32:1, 2; Matt 4:11; Luke 16:22; Heb 1:14). Are certain angels assigned to particular people in order to protect them from physical harm? What about spiritual harm? (Matt 18:10).
2. Are we overly concerned about the spiritual forces of evil, that is, Satan and his demons? Or insufficiently aware and concerned? How do we take our stand against the devil's schemes without seeing a demon behind every difficulty in life? Ephesians 6:10–18 may help in your discussion.
3. Sometimes people are perplexed by the fact that God created light on the first day (Gen 1:3), whereas he created the sun on the fourth day (Gen 1:14–16). Logically, one might expect that God would create the sun, as a source of light, before the light itself. Yet God

took a different approach. What theological significance might this have? Looking at texts such as Joshua 10:12–14, Matthew 27:45, and especially Revelation 21:22–25 may help you.

4. Concerning the origin of this world and human life, Christians sometimes say that the Bible tells us one thing and scientific discoveries tell us another thing. They feel caught between the two. They do not want to contradict the Bible, but neither do they want to dismiss scientific data casually. How can Christians work through this? What advice would you give?

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