

LESSON 7

Belgic Confession Articles 12-14 Creation and Providence The Fall of Man

General:

In this lesson we examine the confession concerning God's perfect creation and almighty providence, and note the fall of man and the ensuing total depravity.

1. Creation

Creation is exclusively a Divine Work. Man can "make" but not "create." Creating is calling something into being "out of nothing," Hebrews 11:3.

The *manner* of creating is simply by the powerful Word of God,

Psalm 33:6, "By the word of the Lord the heavens were made, and all their host by the breath of His mouth."

This also indicates that God the Father created "through His Son," for the Word became flesh (John 1:3). The *time* of God's creating is determined by His own sovereign pleasure, "when it seemed good to Him." Before creation, there was no time; creation constitutes the "beginning" of time.

Creation is not simply the calling into existence of matter, but also giving "to every creature its being, shape, and form, and to each its specific task and function." God gave all creatures their place, purpose, and position, so that there would be order (harmony) in His creation and all things would glorify Him.

We can distinguish between:

a) the creation of *heaven* and the *angels*:

The Scriptures do not elaborate on this. We get the impression that the creation of heaven and its inhabitants was completed before the creation of the earth (see e.g. Job 38:7). We do know of an erupting battle in heaven (Revelation 12) and the fall of the wicked angels (Jude, verse 6).

The *function* of the angels is:

1. to glorify God in His heavenly temple (Isaiah 6:2, 3)
2. to be God's messengers (Luke 1:19)
3. to serve the elect (Hebrews 1:14).

The Scriptures speak of a great number of angels: cherubs, serafs, principalities, and powers.

b) the creation of *earth* and *man*:

The creation of earth receives ample attention in the Scriptures; in six days. In these six days we notice a clear progression with as climax and conclusion: the creation of *man*.

Man, created in God's own image, was given the calling to have *dominion* over all things, i.e. to rule in God's creation and develop all things ("cultural mandate"). Man was given the necessary characteristics to do this, e.g. "righteousness and holiness," the perfect *ability* and the full *will* to do what agrees with God's holy law. God immediately set man into a "covenant relationship," promising abundance and demanding obedience.

2. Providence

God did not, after creation, leave all things to themselves (Epicurus), nor did He create the world to run as an independent entity (Deism), but He "rules and governs" all things according to "His holy Will," so that nothing happens "without His direction."

We call this: *providence*, "the almighty and everywhere present power of God," Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day 10.

We distinguish between:

- a) preservation: keeping all things in their proper state, Colossians 1:17, "holding together"
- b) government: guiding all things to their established goal. The *goal* is: God's self-glorification, Isaiah 43:7.

God's providence and our responsibility:

God's providence does not *undo* human responsibility. Men are not "senseless stocks and blocks," Canons of Dort, chapter III-IV, paragraph 16. Although sin is not "beyond" God's Will (and did not come into the world without His sovereign "permission"), yet God is not the Author of sin, nor responsible for it. Man commits sin of his *own* accord (James 1:13,14), yet all his actions are determined by God's purpose (Proverbs 16:4). God's greatness can be seen in the fact that He even uses the powers of darkness and the sins of men to serve His goal (see e.g. Acts 2:23). This "surpasses" our human understanding, but we are called to adore "the just judgments of God."

3. The Fall

The Scriptures do not give us an explanation or reason for the fall of mankind: it is inexcusable. The fall does take place "at the instigation of the devil," but also "in deliberate disobedience," Lord's Day 4, Heidelberg Catechism. The Scriptures characterize the fall as *rebellion* against God's divine command and thus a breaking of the Covenant (see also: Hosea 6:7, "unfaithfulness"). In the fall it becomes apparent that man himself wishes to determine what is "good and evil" and not to find such knowledge exclusively in God's Law. "Sin is *lawlessness*," 1 John 3:4.

The *result* of the fall is: *total depravity*, slavery to sin. The will of man is now totally corrupt, and he can do only that which is evil; "inclined to hate God and the neighbour. "He has lost all "his excellent gifts" and "has nothing left but some small traces." These traces of original perfection do not excuse man, but emphasize the *extent* of his depravity. There is need for a totally new beginning, a "being born again," John 3, Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day 3.

The *result* of the fall is further that man is "dead" in his trespasses and sins, follows the prince of the power of the air and the desires of body and mind, and therefore is by nature "a child of wrath" (Ephesians 2:1-3), liable to corporal and spiritual death. The *harmony* (peace) in creation has been destroyed; creation is in "bondage to decay" (Romans 8:22), under God's curse (Genesis 3:14-19).

Many do confess man's depravity, but immediately restrict its significance by stating that man is able basically to choose to do what is good = has a "*free will*" (Neo-Pelagianism, Arminianism). Depravity is to them not *total*, and salvation becomes, at least partly, a *human* effort. The Scriptures clearly refute such ideas, "No one can come to Me, unless the Father Who sent Me, draws him," John 6:44. See also: Romans 3:9-26.

QUESTIONS (Lesson 7):

1. What is the difference between "creating" and "making"?
2. Explain the *manner* of God's creation.
3. What do we know of the creation of heaven and the fall of the angels?
4. What does it mean that man is created "after God's image"?
5. What is "providence"?
6. What is the *goal* of God's preservation and government of all things?
7. What is the relationship between God's providence and our responsibility?
8. How do the Scriptures characterize the "fall into sin"?
9. What are the results of the fall?
10. Does man have a free will after the fall into sin?

ASSIGNMENT:

Heidelberg Catechism, Questions and Answers 7, 8, 26, and 27.

ARTICLE 15

ORIGINAL SIN

We believe that by the disobedience of Adam original sin has spread throughout the whole human race. It is a corruption of the entire nature of man and a hereditary evil which infects even infants in their mother's womb. As a root it produces in man all sorts of sin. It is, therefore, so vile and abominable in the sight of God that it is sufficient to condemn the human race. It is not abolished nor eradicated even by baptism, for sin continually streams forth like water welling up from this woeful source. Yet, in spite of all this, original sin is not imputed to the children of God to their condemnation but by His grace and mercy is forgiven them. This does not mean that the believers may sleep peacefully in their sin, but that the awareness of this corruption may make them often groan as they eagerly wait to be delivered from this body of death.

In this regard we reject the error of the Pelagians, who say that this sin is only a matter of imitation.