

The purpose of these supplementary notes are first to provide an outline of key points from the PTC Course Notes, and second to provide some extra information that may fill out your understanding of the subject in question.

**Reflection:**

- Think about the immensity of the stars and solar systems that reach for light years in every direction.
- The Christian view is that God put the universe in place to show his power and glory and made humanity as the pinnacle of this creation.
- The Atheistic view is that the universe happened and that humanity is a product of matter plus time plus chance, the spontaneous result of random variation in organisms over millions of years.
- How should one feel about their place in the universe? About other people? About the future? About wrong, or right?

**Introduction**

- What can we know of God?
- So far in this course we have looked at the *Gospel of God* and the ways of *knowing God through his gospel*. We have considered the different sources which help us to know *generally* what God is like before focusing on the Bible as the best way to *specialy* know God.
- We have considered what we can know about his *character and identity* and then looked at the relationship that we know as the *Trinity*.
- For this remaining units of this course we will look at God's involvement in the universe from *creation to new creation* – from the beginning to the eternal age to come.

**Exercise:**

- Read Genesis 1 and Revelation 21.

a. What similarities and differences do you notice between the Creation and the New Creation?

	Gen 1	Rev 21
Similarities		
Differences		

- Read Genesis 2 and Revelation 22.

b. What do these chapters tell us about God and his activity?

	Gen 2	Rev 22
God		
Activity		

### **The Nature of Creation**

- What is God's relationship to his creation? - Non-existent? Originator (now removed)? Remote or distant? Involved? Integral?
- The answers offered for this question, if posed in our workplaces, would perhaps be a mixed bag and be driven by the variety of worldviews which exist around us today.
- The Bible suggests no such ambiguity.

For from him and through him and for him are all things.  
To him be the glory forever! Amen. (Romans 11:36)

a. \_\_\_\_\_ ('from him ...are all things').

- From the beginning, and only because of God, all that we know, see, feel, smell, hear and taste in creation is because God made it. Be it enormous or microscopic, be it temporary or eternal, be it majestic or awful, be it comprehensible or mystifying – all is created by God
- Technically this is called creation *ex nihilo* – that is creation 'out of nothing' (c.f. Gen 1:1; Neh 9:6; Ps 33:6-9; Is 40:28; 42:5; 45:18; Mark 13:19; Rom 4:17; Rev 10:6)

b. \_\_\_\_\_ ('through him...are all things').

- God didn't create and then retire or disappear. He continues to sustain all things and as such all things are dependent upon him.
- The Old Testament recognises his ongoing role (Ps 119:89-91) and Jesus in the New Testament proclaims it (Jn 5:17).
- It therefore would be an error to suggest that God is separate or absent from any part of creation – that includes that which appears to be bad or evil.

c. \_\_\_\_\_ ('for him are all things').

- Beyond God being involved, he also has his intentions for creation. All things are for him, and for his ultimate purpose.
- From our fallen position, that ultimate purpose may not seem clear and as such we as a world rebel – rejecting God, ignoring his will over our lives, glorifying ourselves before God (Ps 33:10-11)
- Since God as creator is the explanation for the existence of the world and humanity, it is the activity of creation that sets the starting point for humanities relationship with him – as Creator Lord.

d. \_\_\_\_\_

- Hebrews 11:3 suggests that it is '*by faith that we understand that the universe was formed at God's command, so that what is seen was not made out of what was visible*'.
- The doctrine of creation is based upon biblical revelation and is understood from the standpoint of faith. It is by his Word that God brought all things into existence, it will be by his word that he sustains all things, and it is by his word that he reveals his purposes. The appropriate response from those in his creation should be by faith.

- It should not be a surprise that the work of creation will appear to be a mystery to many which may include those who approach creation purely from a scientific position.

So, if created, sustained and purposed by God, then in line with his character and identity (unit 5) it should also be possible to say that creation is:

e. \_\_\_\_\_

**Reflection:**

Read Colossians 1:15-20.

- What role does Jesus play in creation?
- For what end?

- The work of creation is attributed to all three persons of the Godhead – Father (Gen 1:1; Is 44:24; 45:12), the Son (Jn 1:3, 10; Heb 1:2) and the Spirit (Gen 1:2).
- Notable however is that creation is Christ-centred. Not only was it *through him* that all things were made (Col 1:16), and that it was gloriously made *for him* (Col 1:16), but he sustains it by his word (Heb 1:3; Col 1:17) and ultimately all things will be reconciled to him because of his death on the cross (Col 1:20).
- It should be important to Christians, that the God who created all that we know, also came to us – we know him as a man, involved in history and involved in the lives of those came to be with.

f. \_\_\_\_\_

- The origin and the continuation of the universe are dependent on God's rule – it all depends upon him (Ps 104:27-29; Matt 10:29-30).
- To put the material world before God is to put the creation before the creator.

g. \_\_\_\_\_

- What does the good God think of his creation – it is good! (Gen 1:4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25). In fact with the creation of humanity, it is very good (Gen 1:31). That pronouncement is not only for a pre-fall creation – despite sin, creation maintains a good character (1 Tim 4:4).

h. \_\_\_\_\_

- By and large, what we see in creation is pattern and routine. The sun rises and the sun sets. Chaos is not the norm. The order of creation has a largely predictable form and variety. That comes from being created by a reliable creator.

- Yet, there are also events and actions which appear to be arbitrary and unexpected. Whilst these are collectively frequent, they are not the common experience or norm.
- Both the routine and the irregular fall under the essentially reliable nature of God such that his creation can trust that he controls its ultimate order (c.f. Gen 50:20-21; Acts 2:23-24; Rom 8:28).

### **The Abuse of Creation**

- So, God rules his creation. Yes, and no!
- Somewhat extraordinarily, God gave humanity permission to rule.

God blessed them and said to them, “Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground.” (Gen 1:28 see also Ps 8:3-5)

- At no point was that to be a rule outside of the authority and purpose of God. It was to be a rule which reflects the image of God in all its fullness (Gen 2:15).
- And God further gave humanity the resources in which to rule – to multiply, to work, to care, to governance over his creation.
- Rule and governance however does not include ownership.
- Genesis 3 recounts how those who should have displayed the image of God exchanged the truth they knew about God for a lie. They looked not to God the creator, but to his creation and as such fell far short of his ideal.
- We see the implications of this in every sphere of life. Serving created things, and incredibly serving those things that we have created (Rom 1:21-25).
- Whenever humanity treats the visible world as the ultimate source of life and value, then they substitute or ignore God’s rule for them and quite logically then rule the world corruptly and wickedly (Rom 1:28-32).

### **Issues in Creation**

- The Doctrine of Creation raises some questions. Here are two:

#### **1. What is the place of science in creation?**

- Scientific discovery over the ages has raised some questions about the origins of the universe. At points, these discoveries have been used as a tool to question the reasonableness of Christianity and the creation accounts.
- Some physicists suggest that the universe was created by a ‘big bang’ – something that Genesis 1 and 2 apparently cannot accommodate.
- Some biologists have suggested a theory of evolution to account for the existence of flora (plant life) and fauna (animal life).

- Five considerations:

- a. \_\_\_\_\_
  - Unless Christians know all and everything, it is an arrogant position to assume that we might know more or better than those engaged in the

sciences. There should be no harm in examining what we know and believe for want of a clear and more informed understanding.

- That does not make what we do know redundant. Nor does it nullify what Biblical scholars have suggested when examining the Bible and the potential conflicts it may have with science.
- The main elements of the doctrine of creation so far have been largely untouched and the challenges have served to stimulate and sharpen our understanding of creation.

b. \_\_\_\_\_

- Unless Scientists know all and everything, it is an arrogant position to assume that they might know more or better than those engaged in theology.
- Scientific findings may be inadequate or wrong and the conclusions drawn from them mistaken. From time to time science needs correction (and have been corrected).

c. \_\_\_\_\_

- Whether the 'big bang' or 'evolution' are right or wrong as a working hypotheses, it should be acknowledged that there is a great deal of scientific support and research sitting behind these views. There are good arguments both for and against.
- Care needs to be taken before adopting a hypothesis that may point favourably toward a Christian position and similarly reservation should be exercised before dismissing a hypothesis that points away from the Christian position.

d. \_\_\_\_\_

- Recognise that both theology and science have contributions to make in this discussion.
- It should not be a surprise that each discipline works in a different area of interest and aims to achieve different objectives. For example, science tends to answer the 'how' question, whilst theology tends to answer the 'who and why' questions. Genesis 1 & 2 were never intended as scientific accounts to answer the question of 'how'. Darwin's 'On the Origin of Species'<sup>1</sup> where he first suggested his theory of natural selection was never intended as a theological account to answer the questions of 'who' or 'why'.
- Note: creating a dichotomy like this is dangerous as there are parts of the Bible that are concerned with the 'how' as there are parts of many scientific writings that try to address the 'who' and 'why'.

e. \_\_\_\_\_

- This all said, bear in mind that modern scientific method has largely arisen from a culture shaped by the Bible.
- We see that in the pursuit of the one true answer, the reliance on a 'norm' or standard which can be relied upon as a 'control', and the desire to seek rational explanation to the betterment of humanity.

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<sup>1</sup> Published 24<sup>th</sup> November 1859 – the full catchy title is '*On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection, or the Preservation of Favoured Races in the Struggle for Life*'.

## **2. Are miracles possible in creation?**

- There is a comfort that comes with having order and routine in life. Generally, there is a normal pattern to how things 'work'. There are two dangers that comes with this comfort.
- First, that which is not normal becomes expected (e.g. the birth of a child, a sun that continues to burn, an orbit that the world operates in, the chemical make-up of the air that we breath etc.). What may by and large be a mystery or at best difficult to explain becomes the expected such that it is no longer viewed as being extraordinary.
- Second, that which seems extraordinary and unique (e.g. the weather event that unexpectedly hits once, the unexplained healing of a person etc) are often dismissed as an accident or a coincidence.
- Miracles are often overlooked and fall into these categories.
- The Bible suggests that God is continually holding the world together. That which appears normal is only normal because God ensures it happens. And that which is extraordinary is only extraordinary because God has made it happen.
- Often God is left out of the picture and his actions (normal or extraordinary) are explained away using scientific or secular categories.
- Then we read about the 'miracles' in the Bible (or in History) – unusual, remarkable events. Evil Spirits freed, lame men walking, illnesses healed, food divided impossibly to feed thousands. Each may viewed with some element of scepticism today as explanation is offered to how those miracles could have been naturally arranged.
- Yet, alongside those 'miracles' there are other events recorded in the Bible – also unusual and remarkable yet somehow almost unbelievable. Ten consecutive and selective plagues, the parting of the sea, a virgin birth, a star appearing in the sky from nowhere, choruses of angels appearing to multiple people, the sea being calmed at a word, the resurrection of people who have been confirmed dead. Each a (supernatural) event with no easy natural explanation.
- Regardless of whether these events may be 'natural' or 'supernatural', the Christian understanding that God created, sustains, and gives purpose to all things provides a way to view 'miracles' as possible.
- Some 'miracles' may indeed be surprising variations to the way God has chosen to do something, whilst other 'miracles' may indeed be God's intervention where he decided to act or offer a sign so that people can or will see that he is sovereign over all.

## **Conclusion**

- The doctrine of creation is vital for a Christian view of the world, because it teaches us that everything is from, through and for God, that we are utterly dependent upon him, and that we owe him the service of our whole lives.
- Yet as we have seen and still see, humanity will do much to ignore and reject the great truth that God is our creator – we reject his rule over our lives.
- Thankfully, God is not only our creator, he is also our redeemer – and to that we turn next study.

**Reflection:**

How should we interact with creation as God's people?  
Should we take our responsibility to manage and care for it seriously, in what ways do we abuse it?

**For next Week:**

- Read the *Moore Distance* Doctrine 1 - Unit 7 Notes

**References** (for possible further reading)

McKim, D. K., 'Doctrine of Creation' in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*. Edited by: W.A. Elwell. Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1984. 281-83.

Philip, J., 'Creation. 1. The Biblical Doctrine' in *New Bible Dictionary*. Leicester: IVP; 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. 1992. 245.