

Systematic Theology – “Thinking God’s Thoughts After Him”

Class 6 – God and His Creation

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I. Hello...and Catechism Quiz (Questions 11, 12, or 13)

Writing assignment: What are key things we need to understand about creation and providence?

In this class, we’ll think about the fact (1) God decreed all things (decree); (2) God created all things (creation); and (3) God governs all things (providence).

II. God Decreed All Things (The Doctrine of Decrees)

God has decreed in himself from all eternity all things, whatever comes to pass, by the most wise and holy counsel of his own will, freely and unchangeably. (TCOF 3.1)

For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen. (Rom 11:36)

“All things” includes the eternal states of people. “Election” is the word we use to describe God’s eternal choice of his people to receive his salvation in Jesus Christ:

3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, 4 even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love 5 he predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, 6 to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved. (Eph 1:3-6)

III. God Created All Things (The Doctrine of Creation)

Thinking rightly about Day One of creation:

1 In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. 2 The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters. 3 And God said, “Let there be light,” and there was

light. 4 And God saw that the light was good. And God separated the light from the darkness. 5 God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, the first day. (Gen 1:1-5)

The ordering of creation – *Not at all denying the history of it but this history occurs in a symbolic and meaningful way!*

| The 6 Days of Creation | |
|---|--|
| Kingdoms | Kings |
| Day 1 – Light/Dark “separated” | Day 4 – Sun/moon and stars “to govern” |
| Day 2 – Waters above/Waters below “separated” | Day 5 – Birds/Fish |
| Day 3 – Land/Water | Day 6 – Living creatures on land, man |

Length of the 6 days of creation: 24 hours long!

- Meaning of “day” throughout the Bible – arguments that “day” can mean unspecified spans of time fall short: e.g., “day of the LORD,” “day of prosperity,” etc.
- Genesis 1 written in a clearly historical manner, as all historical narrative in the Old Testament. It is presented as historical as Gen 12 and no less. See this in the verbs used (vav-consecutive-plus-imperfect, “And God did such-and-such”).
- How Moses refers to the creation in a later passage:

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. (Exod 20:11)

IV. God Governs All Things (The Doctrine of Providence)

Providence speaks to how God governs what he has made.

God, the good Creator of all things, in his infinite power and wisdom upholds, directs, disposes, and governs all creatures and things from the greatest even to the least by his most wise and holy providence to the end for which they were created according to his infallible foreknowledge and the free and immutable counsel of his own will. This is all to the praise of the glory of his wisdom, power, justice, infinite goodness, and mercy. (TCOF 6.1)

Providence includes 3 aspects:

- Preservation: He makes all things continue to exist.

- Cooperation: He works with all things in their God-created properties so that they accomplish his will. Though God created beans and corn from nothing in the days of creation, the more typical way we get beans and corn is by farmers planting and harvesting crops. God is cooperating with the farmers and their crops to bring about the food he has decreed.
- Government: In this context, “government” means “governing” all things to accomplish God’s glory. As Romans 11:36 says, “to him are all things.” “Government” here accents the *to him* of this verse.

A. MIRACLES

Miracles are sometimes called “extraordinary providences” (Louis Berkhof, *ST*, 176). They are still a part of his “providence.” But they are places where he does not use his typical cause-and-effect but interrupts it in an “extraordinary” way.

Gravity is typical. But sometimes God wants people to walk on water and suspends the usual way that gravity works!

B. The Problem of Evil

One of the great mysteries within God’s providence is often called “the problem of evil.”

The problem of evil: If God is all-good and all-powerful, why does evil exist?

1. The fact we live in a fallen world must be a central fact in our interpretation of the world and the lives we live. Adam’s sin affected everyone and everything (Gen 3:15–19; Rom 5:12–21; 8:19–25).
2. Acknowledging evil as a problem is really to accept the existence of God. There is no good and no evil if there is no God. All absolute standards of right and wrong or good and evil depend on the existence of a God who defines these. Alvin Plantinga makes this argument and says you can argue for the existence of God from the existence of evil.
3. God is not and cannot be the Author of sin. “Author of sin” language is often used in Reformed writings to speak of God’s connection to sin. Though he controls it, he is not the “Author” of it. The *Westminster Confession* says, “God...neither is nor can be the author or approver of sin” (*WCF* 5.4; cf. *TCOF* 6.4). John Frame says “Author” is “rarely defined” in theological writings, “but it

seems to mean both that God is the efficient cause of evil and that by causing evil he actually does something wrong.”²⁹

4. Sin and evil are never spinning out of control, but the beginning, progress, and end of them are always fully controlled by God.
5. The Bible speaks of a kind of “divine permission” where God permits a sinner to do something that violates God’s own preceptive will. Frame says that when the Reformed speak of “God’s permission,” this is not “mere permission,” for “God’s ‘permission’ is an efficacious permission.”³⁰ See Job 1–2 where Satan gets God’s permission to act. Also Romans 1:24–32 where we sin and turn away from God and then he “gives us over” to our sins even further.
6. Though God is the primary and ultimate cause of all things, evil always has a real and secondary cause. This speaks to how events have various causes, some very immediate and direct but some real but less direct. An illustration: Me breaking someone’s nose!
7. Though God is fully sovereign over all events, we sin by freely choosing to sin and not by being coerced. See this in Genesis 50:19–20:

“But Joseph said to them, ‘Do not fear, for am I in the place of God? 20 As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today.’” (Gen 50:19-20)

8. While we cannot fully remove the difficulty of the reality of sin and evil, we can provide some explanation(s) for why God would allow it to remain. 3 from John Frame³¹:
 - a) “Normative Defense: Human beings have no right to bring accusations against God.” Romans 9:19–20. He is the potter, we’re the clay.
 - b) “Situational Defense: God will always bring good out of evil.” This is what he calls “the greater-good-defense,” which means that there is a “greater good” God is pursuing than simply removing evil from our world and lives. See Romans 8:28.

²⁹ Frame, *Systematic Theology*, 294.

³⁰ Frame, *Systematic Theology*, 297.

³¹ Frame, *Systematic Theology*, 301.

- c) “Existential Defense: God will comfort us so that our hearts are fully assured of the justice and rightness of his actions.” One day we shall look back on all that God has done and say with the Redeemed:

“Great and amazing are your deeds, O Lord God the Almighty! Just and true are your ways, O King of the nations! 4 Who will not fear, O Lord, and glorify your name? For you alone are holy. All nations will come and worship you, for your righteous acts have been revealed.” (Rev 15:3-4)