

Dr. Robert A. Peterson, Theology Proper, Session 19, The Works of God, Creation and Providence

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This is Dr. Robert Peterson in his teaching on Theology Proper, or God. This is session 19, The Works of God, Creation, and Providence.

We continue our lectures on Theology Proper, the doctrine of God himself, and we move to God's works.

We've studied how God is the Holy Trinity, one God in three persons. We've studied God's attributes, both incommunicable and communicable. Now we study his works of creation, providence.

We do not include in this course his work, his works of redemption, and the consummation. But we do study angels, Satan, and demons, because although God did not create them as fallen creatures, indeed, some of the angels rebelled, as we will see.

Let's pray together. Gracious Father, thank you for your word, for your truth, for your Son, for your Spirit. Bless us, we pray. Lead us in the everlasting way, we ask, through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

God's works. The glorious God is known by his works, which both accomplish his purposes and display his glory.

His works are many, but four stand out as primary. Creation, Providence, Redemption, or Salvation, and Consummation. Other series of lectures address Redemption and Consummation.

Here, we focus on God's works of creation and providence. God creates everything, the Christian doctrine of creation. The Bible begins with God creating the heavens and the earth.

The Bible ends with God bringing about a new heaven and a new earth. In Genesis 1:1, God created the heavens and the earth. Revelation 21 and 22, 21 early on says, "And I looked, and I beheld a new heaven and a new earth."

As such, the doctrine of God as creator frames the biblical story and plays a key role in Christian theology. At its core, the doctrine of creation is that God, without the use of any pre-existing material, that is *ex nihilo*, Latin for out of nothing, brings into being all that is. Creation is a completely free act of God to communicate his excellence.

He alone has no beginning, as we saw previously when we studied God's eternity, Psalm 92 and verse 2. Psalm 90 verse 2, from everlasting to everlasting, you are God. God creates all that is, including light, the earth, sky, water, vegetation, marine life, animals, angels, and everything else. Genesis 1:1-25, Psalm 148:1-5, Colossians 1:16, Revelation 4:11.

Let me just read one of those, Psalm 148:1-5. One of the Hallel Psalms of praise that conclude the Psalter, 148. Psalm 148:1, Praise the Lord, praise the Lord from the heavens, praise him in the heights, praise him all his angels, praise him all his hosts, praise him sun and moon, praise him all you shining stars, praise him you highest heavens and you waters above the heavens.

Let them praise the name of the Lord, for he commanded and they were created, and he established them forever and ever. He gave a decree, and it shall not pass away. Praise the Lord from the earth, you great sea creatures and all deeps, fire and hail, snow and mist, stormy wind, fulfilling his word, mountains and all hills, fruit trees and all cedars, beasts and all livestock, creeping things, and flying birds, kings of the earth and all peoples, princes and all rulers of the earth, young men and maidens together, old men and children.

Let them praise the name of the Lord, for his name alone is exalted; his majesty is above earth and heaven; he has raised up a horn for his people, praise for all his saints, for the people of Israel who are near to him, praise the Lord. I went ahead and read all 14 verses because it does expand on that topic of creation. God is also directly involved in the creation of men and women, whom he specially creates in his image.

Genesis 1:27, in the image of God he created them, male and female he created them. Genesis 1:27 and 27, Mark 10:6, Romans 5:12 to 21, James 3:9 through 12. One more time, God creates men and women, especially in his image.

Genesis 1:27, 27, Mark 10:6, Romans 5:12 to 21, James 3:9 to 12. All of creation reflects the design and order of God's eternal plan and comes into being by the wisdom of God. Jeremiah 10:12, the will of God, Revelation 4:11 and the word of God, Psalm 33:6 through 9. Wisdom of God, Jeremiah 10:12, God's will, Revelation 4 11, God's word, Psalm 33:6 through 9. Creation reveals God as it bears witness of his power and handiwork to all peoples at all times and in all places.

Psalm 19:1 to 6, Romans 1:18 through 32. I should read a little bit of that one. For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who, by their unrighteousness, suppress the truth.

For what can be known about God is plain to them because God has shown it to them. For his invisible attributes, namely his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived ever since the creation of the world in the things that have been made. This leaves them without excuse, and in the reverse of the works of the flesh in Galatians 5, here we have first of all idolatry and then sexual sins, this time heterosexual sins, and that shows God's people, God's creatures, rebelling against him in both worship and sex lives.

Creation also brings glory to God as it displays his kingship, power, goodness, wisdom, love, and beauty. Genesis 1:1 to 28, Isaiah 43:7, Romans 11:33 through 36. Revelation 4:11 links God's role as creator to his reception of worship and glory.

Worthy are you, I'm quoting, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power for you created all things, and by your will they existed and were created. Revelation 4:11. Indeed, the eternal God exists before creation.

Psalms 90 verse 2 and he alone brings all things into being. He creates without the use of previously existing materials. Hebrews 11:3 for quote, the universe was created by the word of God so that what is seen was made from things that are not visible.

Hebrews 11:3. God creates by speaking his word. "Then he said, then God said, let there be light and there was light." Genesis 1:3 and seven more times in Genesis 1. See also 2 Peter 3:5. God makes human beings capable of understanding his words and responding to him.

Moreover, God makes the whole of reality, which is what the heavens and earth mean in Genesis 1:1. He creates all things. Ephesians 3:9, Revelation 4:11, including everything "visible and invisible." Colossians 1:16, a verse that describes creation to the son of God.

John stresses this point by affirming the positive and denying the negative. Once again, of the Lord Jesus, John 1:3 more properly said, of course, Jesus is his human name at his incarnation. The law, the word, the light, the eternal son before he became incarnate, all things were created through him.

And apart from him, not one thing was created that has been created. John 1:3. The Trinity inseparably performs the work of creation as they inseparably perform any where all works. Namely, creation is the work of the father.

1 Corinthians 8:6, Revelation 4:11. The son, John 1:3, 1 Corinthians 8:6, Colossians 1:16, Hebrews 1:2 and 10. And the creation is the work of the Holy Spirit.

Genesis 1:2, Job 33:4. God does not create out of a sense of loneliness or a need for fellowship because the three Trinitarian persons love one another from all eternity.

John 17:24. God, the Father, is the source of creation and the Son is the agent of creation.

“There is one God, the father. All things are from him, and we exist for him. And there is one Lord, Jesus Christ. All things are through him, and we exist through him.” 1 Corinthians 8:9, 8:6, 1 Corinthians 8:6. The spirit of God is also active in creation. Genesis 1:2, Psalm 104.

In creation, as in everything else, God is both transcendent and imminent. He alone exists before creation and thus stands outside of it and above it. He's also imminent in his creation because he cares for it, draws near, and enters into a covenant relationship with his people.

The Christian doctrine of creation rejects the errors of dualism, emanationism, pantheism, and deism. The Christian doctrine of creation rejects these errors among others: dualism, emanationism, pantheism and deism.

Dualism holds that there are two eternal principles of good and evil. It not only holds that there is good and evil, but they are both eternal principles. On the contrary, the all-powerful creator is the ultimate reality. Evil is not a competing eternal principle with God, but is a distortion, an aberration of God's good creation.

Emanationism holds that the world is an emanation or extension of God himself. An extension, an emanation of his substance. Contrary to this, the creator, according to scripture, is distinct from his creation. It is not part of himself emanated. Creation is not an overflow of his being. Rather, he who alone exists from eternity brings his world into being by his word. It remains as distinct from him as the creation does, as the creature is distinct from its creator.

Pantheism confuses God and his world. It says God is everything, and everything is God.

While pantheism erroneously equates God with his world, deism removes God from the world. It teaches that the creator builds into his world the ability to run on its own, according to human insight, without his involvement.

The doctrines of creation and providence refute both pantheism and deism. God not only makes the world but continues to uphold it and direct it. Perhaps I should do a little more with these four errors: dualism, emanationism, pantheism, and deism.

Dualism says not only that they're good and evil exist, they do in scripture ever since the fall in Genesis 3. And evil will not exist in the new heavens and new earth when all the enemies of God are destroyed, including human elements, human enemies, who are destroyed, so to speak, by undergoing eternal punishment in hell, which is

outside of the new creation, which has nothing unclean or sinful in it. Rather, dualism says that not only what is correct but also that from the fall until the consummation, good and evil exist.

It says good and evil are both eternal. God is not. Holy God is not alone. I hesitate because we just said he's never alone. He's a holy trinity.

The holy trinity is not alone. There, according to dualism, there's another eternal principle of evil. And thus, in that way, good and evil are necessary.

None of that is biblical teaching. Evil is not eternal. Evil is an aberration, a frustration, a rebellion against God, and did not exist before Genesis 3, and will not exist eternally in the new heavens and new earth.

No, the one eternal holy trinity of father, son, and holy spirit has existed from all eternity. Evil is not his challenger eternally. God alone is God and is eternal.

Emanationism holds that the creation is an overflow of the being of God. It's an ontological overflow, a metaphysical overflow of the very stuff of which God is made. That didn't come out too well.

It is an overflow of God's being of himself that is wrong. Surely, creation stands in relation to the creator, but it is not the creator extended, emanating from the universe. No, no, there is a distinction between the creator and his creation.

It is not an emanation of his being. It is rather separate from him who made it and who remains outside of it, transcend it, and within it, but not a part of it, imminent. Pantheism confuses God and his world, and therefore it is erroneous.

God is not his world. Everything is not God. God alone has existed eternally, and he brings his creation into existence.

It is not God. It is not he. He is rather distinct from it.

He made it, and he runs it. He preserves it and runs it, but he is not the creation. Pantheism confuses God and his world.

If it does that, and it does, dualism separates God and his world. It teaches the Christian doctrine of creation, but then it says God built into that creation principles for it to run on its own. That is erroneous because the Bible's presentation is that creation is followed by providence.

God maintains and directs the world he had made. If pantheism identifies God with his world illegitimately, dualism, I mean, deism separates God and his world illegitimately. The truth is creation and providence.

The chief purpose of God's work of creation is his own glory. Paul affirms this when he contemplates God's works of creation, providence, and consummation in Romans 11:36. For from him, creation, and through him, providence, and to him, consummation, are all things. From him, through him, to him are all things.

To him be the glory forever. Amen. Romans 11:36. Paul also writes of Christ in Colossians 1:16. All things have created through him, he's the father's agent in creation, and for him, that is everything exists for the son's glory.

When Paul says for him, he means for Christ's purposes and glory. The fact that scripture declares God's work of creation very good, Genesis 1:31, has great ramifications. Everything God makes is intrinsically good, not evil, including physical things.

Indeed, the human body and sexuality are not sinful, but are gifts from God to be used according to his will. Furthermore, asceticism, the idea that holiness is achieved by rough treatment of the human body, is misguided. As Paul teaches, Colossians 2:20-23, it does not promote godliness, he says, in that place.

Asceticism says holiness is to be achieved by denying bodily appetites. That is incorrect. God made the world, he gave us our appetites, we're to use them for his glory in the ways that he has revealed.

Because human beings are creatures of the eternal creator, we have both great gifts and many limitations. He crowned us with glory and honor, Psalm 8:5. And he gives us dominion, quote, over the work of his hands, Psalm 8:6. God crowned us with glory and honor. In the context of Psalm 8, it's Adam and Eve as the first human beings.

He crowned them with glory and honor and gave them dominion over the works of his hands. The same thing is true of us, their descendants, their progeny. Our creatureliness brings great responsibility to fulfill the purposes for which God made us.

These include, as stewards, taking an ontological interest in the world God gives us as our home. He gives us wonderful minds and bodies, enabling us to enjoy him and his beautiful world. But only God is self-sufficient and eternal.

And we are his creatures who depend on him because, quote, in him we live and move and have our being, Acts 17:28. We also praise the creator for his majestic and

lovely world, Psalm 19:1, Psalm 38:1-9. That world has meaning, unity and intelligibility and points to God's wisdom, power, goodness, glory and beauty. We praise the creator for his majestic and lovely world, Psalm 19:1, Psalm 38:1-9. And that world has meaning, unity, and intelligibility and points to God's wisdom, power, goodness, glory, and beauty. With that brief treatment of creation, we move on to providence.

Our God guides history, the Christian doctrine of providence. Creation is God's original act of bringing all things into existence, while providence is his ongoing work of maintaining and directing his creation. The Westminster Shorter Catechism defines providence well and answers the question, what is God's providence? The catechism says providence is God's most holy, wise, and powerful, preserving and governing all his creatures and all their actions.

It's the answer to question 11 of the Westminster Shorter Catechism. It's providence is God's most holy, wise and powerful, preserving and governing all his creatures and all their actions. The two aspects of providence, as we will see, are God's preserving, preservation and governing, government.

Furthermore, the Shorter Catechism chooses three of the most important qualities of God, attributes of God that inform his work of providence. Providence is God's most holy, preserving and governing all things, his most wise, preservation and government, and his most powerful, preserving and governing all things and all their actions. Providence includes both preservation and government.

Preservation is God's work of maintaining his creation, to which both the Old and New Testaments bear witness. Psalm 104, Psalm 104, starting at verse 10. You make springs gush forth in the valleys.

They flow between the hills. They give drink to every beast of the field. The wild donkeys quench their thirst.

Beside them the birds of the heavens dwell. They sing among the branches. From your lofty abode, you water the mountains.

The earth is satisfied with the fruit of your work. You cause the grass to grow for the livestock and plants for man to cultivate. Psalm 104, verse 14.

That he may bring forth food from the earth and wine to gladden the heart of man, oil to make his face shine, and bread to strengthen man's heart. The trees of the Lord are watered abundantly, as are the cedars of Lebanon that he planted. In him the birds build their nests.

The stork has her home in the fir trees. The high mountains are for the wild goats. The rocks are a refuge for the rock badgers.

He made the moon to mark the seasons. The sun knows it's time for setting. You make darkness, and it is night when all the beasts of the forest creep about.

The young lions roar for their prey, seeking their food from God. When the sun rises, they steal away and lie down in their dens. Man goes out to his work and to his labor until evening.

O Lord, how manifold are your works. In wisdom, you've made them all. The earth is full of your creatures.

Here is the sea, great and wide, which teems with creatures innumerable, living things both small and great. There go the ships and Leviathan, which you form to play in it. These all look to you to give them their food in due season.

When you give it to them, they gather it up. When you open your hand, they're filled with good things. When you hide your face, they are dismayed.

When you take away their breath, they die and return to the dust. When you send forth your spirit, they are created, and you renew the face of the ground. An extensive Old Testament passage, Psalm 104, 10 through 30, affirming God's preservation of his creation.

We've already read Psalm 148:7 to 14. I won't do it again. Colossians 1:17, by Christ, by the sun, all things hold together.

Hebrews 1:3, he upholds all things by his powerful word. Those last two, both of Christ. God's preservation especially pertains to his people whom he loves, saves, and keeps according to his plan.

Psalm 23, I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever. Isaiah 40:11. Isaiah 40:27 through 31.

Romans 8:28 through 39. There's no condemnation for those in Christ Jesus. Nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus, our Lord.

1 John 5:18. Government is God's work if preservation is his work of maintaining and preserving his creation. Government is his work of directing his creation toward his goals, which scripture abundantly affirms.

Psalm 33:10 to 22. Isaiah 40:22 to 26. Daniel 4:34 and 35.

Acts 4:23 to 31. Acts 14:12 to 17. Psalm 33, starting with verse 10. I'm selectively reading some of these and repeating the references of the others.

Psalm 33:10. The Lord brings the counsel of the nations to nothing. He frustrates the plans of the peoples.

The counsel of the Lord stands forever. The plans of his heart to all generations. Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord.

The people whom he has chosen as his heritage. The Lord looks down from heaven. He sees all the children of man.

From where he sits enthroned, he looks out on all the inhabitants of the earth. He who fastens the hearts of them all, fashions the hearts of them all, and observes all their deeds. The king is not saved by his great army.

A warrior is not delivered by his great strength. The war horse is a false hope for salvation. And by its great might, it cannot rescue.

Behold, the eye of the Lord is on those who fear him. On those who hope in his steadfast love that he may deliver their soul from death and keep them alive in famine. Our soul waits for the Lord.

He is our help and our shield. For our heart is glad in him because we trust in his holy name. Let your steadfast love, O Lord, be upon us, even as we hope in you.

That was Psalm 33:10 to 22. I repeat, Isaiah 40:22 to 26. Daniel 4:34, 35.

Acts 4:23 to 31. Acts 14:12 through 17. Besides preservation and government, providence also involves concurrence, in which God acts, and his creatures act both unto his intended purposes.

God does not always guide history by his direct action but often uses the free actions of people and other secondary causes. Scripture reflects this idea, asserting that God uses human agents. Genesis 1, 26 to 30.

2 Samuel 12:1 to 15. John 6:1 to 13. Acts 1:5. God uses nations.

Isaiah 1:10. Isaiah 10:5 through 11. Ezra 1. God uses creatures.

Psalm 104. Angels. Genesis 16:6 to 14.

Luke 1:26 to 38 and more. God's providence extends to every area of his creation. The universe, nature, people's lives, Satan and angels, nations, animals, accidents, free actions, and sinful actions.

All this is from Lewis Birkhoff's Systematic Theology, page 168. I'm going to go through again and give scripture references. Genesis.

God's providence extends to every area of his creation. The universe. Psalm 103:19.

The Lord has established his throne in heaven, and his kingdom rules over all. Daniel 4:35. Ephesians 1:11.

God works all things after the counsel of his will. Nature or creation. Job 37:5 and 10.

Psalm 104:14. Psalm 135:6. Matthew 5:45. Matthew 6:25 to 30.

Job 37:5 and 10. Psalm 104:14. Psalm 135:6. Matthew 5:45.

Matthew 6:25 through 30. Satan and angels. God's providence is over them.

Job 1:12. Satan can only harm Job with God's permission. Psalm 103:20 and 21.

Luke 22:31. Satan and angels are under the providence of God. Job 1:12.

Psalm 103:20 and 21. Luke 22:31. Nations are subject to the providence of Almighty God.

Job 12:23. Proverbs 22:28. I'm sorry, Psalm 22:28, not Proverbs.

Psalm 66:7. Acts 17:26. Nations. Job 12:23.

Psalm 22:28. Psalm 66:7. Acts 17:26. God's providence extends over animals.

1 Kings 17:4 through 6. Psalm 104:21, 28. Matthew 6:26. Matthew 10:29.

Animals. 1 Kings 17:4 to 6. Psalm 104:21 and 28. Matthew 6:26.

Matthew 10:29. God's providence extends over accidents. Proverbs 16:33.

Jonah 1:7. Matthew 10:29. Accidents. Proverbs 16:33.

Jonah 1:7. Matthew 10:29. Over free actions of human beings. Genesis 45: 5. Exodus 10:1 and 20.

Isaiah 10:5 through 7. Acts 4:27 through 28. Free actions. Genesis 45:5. Exodus 10:1 and 20.

Isaiah 10:5 through 7. Acts 4:27 and 28. God's providence extends even over sinful actions of human beings. Genesis 50 in verse 20.

Exodus 14:17. Acts 2:22 to 24. 2 Thessalonians 2:11.

God's providence reflects his greatness, wisdom, power, truth, justice, and grace. And his providence inspires our praise, delight, confidence, trust, awe, fear, and wisdom. Psalm 111.

One more time. Sinful actions. Genesis 50 in verse 20.

Exodus 14:17. Acts 2:22 to 24. 2 Thessalonians 2:11.

God's providence, I repeat, reflects his greatness, wisdom, power, truth, justice, and grace. And his providence inspires our praise, delight, confidence, trust, awe, fear, and wisdom. Psalm 111.

We will deal in our next lecture, our last one, we will deal with God's creatures, the angels, some of whom, of course, rebelled.

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