

The Old Testament is also clear that God created all things for his own glory, especially humans, who were created in his image and whom he specially blessed. (Gen. 1:27-28a; Ps. 19:1; Isa. 43:6-7)

The Old Testament understanding of creation is also affirmed in the New Testament. (Acts 17:24a; 1 Pet. 4:19; Rev. 4:11)

The New Testament also adds a new twist to the doctrine of creation—the Son also played a role in the creation of the cosmos. (John 1:1-3; Col. 1:15-16; Heb. 1:1-2)

What Has the Church Said?

Before 1700, Christians almost universally affirmed the doctrine of creation. In the Patristic Era, many heretical "Christian **Gnostics**" (from the Greek word "gnosis" meaning knowledge) believed that a lesser semi-divine being created the world. They viewed this act of creation as a bad thing because they exalted the spiritual over the material. In the Medieval Era, a few scholastic theologians contemplated the idea of an eternal universe. But the overwhelming majority of professing Christians in the pre-modern era agreed with the biblical view. This agreement was reflected in the Apostles' Creed and Nicene Creed, both of which affirm unequivocally that God is the maker of heaven and earth.

The only real debate concerned whether the "days" of Genesis were literal 24-hour periods or represented longer spans of time, and Christians could be found in both camps prior to the Reformation. In the Modern Era, skeptical scientists and philosophers tried to find naturalistic or materialistic explanations for the world's creation (such as Darwin's **evolutionary theory** and **process theology**).

While evolution became a hotly contested issue among Christians, most evangelical theologians rejected Darwinism itself as unacceptable because the Bible affirms that Yahweh created the world through his spoken word for his glory. These ideas seem incompatible with natural selection. Though the **old-earth** and **young-earth** debate has grown in popularity amongst evangelicals, some are not definitively in either camp, claiming the Bible is silent concerning the age of the earth. Rather, they opt for a literary interpretation of Genesis 1-2.

What Should We Believe?

The triune God, Yahweh, created all things through the means of his spoken word for his own glory. Regardless of when creation occurred, God was involved in all the intimate details of creation. The Bible doesn't unambiguously answer every question about creation, but it seems difficult to reconcile **theistic evolution** with Scripture.

Some biblical principles:

- 1. Everything we know about creation comes by revelation from God, both in the creation around us and in the Scriptures.
- 2. Everything in creation belongs to Jesus.
- 3. Though the earth is not the center of the physical universe, it is still the center of God's plan for the universe.

The Trinity in Creation:

The Role of the Father

- 1. He is the constitutive grounds for all that exists in creation.
- 2. The Father is directly active in creation with reference to his divine will being the grounds for creation.
- 3. The Father is the author of creation with reference to its goal to glorify himself.
- 4. The Father generates the Son whom he loves and thereby eternally shares his deity with the Son; so also the Father freely makes the world and shares his existence with it.

The Role of the Son

- 1. Whereas the Father is the grounds of creation, the Son is the principle of creation.
- 2. The role of the Son is analogous to that of Wisdom in Proverbs 8, i.e., "the artisan at his side" (NIV text note).
- 3. As the Logos, the Son is the organizing and unifying principle of the created order.
- 4. According to Colossians 1:16, the Son is the unitive principle and goal of the created world.

- The incarnate Son exemplifies the proper relationship of humanity to God by obeying his Father.

The Role of the Holy Spirit

- Whereas the Father is the grounds of creation and the Son is the principle of creation, the Spirit is the divine power active in creation.
- The Spirit is the creative power of God to will, act, and effect creation.
- The Spirit is the power that binds together Father and Son, God and creation together.

How Should We Then Live?

The doctrine of creation is foundational to a Christian worldview, and it informs every aspect of our lives.

A healthy understanding of creation informs how we worship make disciples.

Defending the doctrine of creation is especially important in our present age.

As Christians, one of the ways we engage our culture is by caring for God's creation.

Recommended Resources

Andrew M. Davis, "Creation," in *The Gospel as Center: Renewing Our Faith and Reforming Our Ministry Practices*, eds. D.A. Carson and Timothy Keller (Crossway, 2012), pp. 55–76.

David Wilkinson, *The Message of Creation: Encountering the Lord of the Universe* (IVP Academic, 2002).

Albert M. Wolters, *Creation Regained: Biblical Basics of a Reformational Worldview*, 2nd ed. (Eerdmans, 2005).

Wayne Grudem, *A Biblical Case against Theistic Evolution* (Crossway, 2022).

Kenneth D. Keathley and Mark F. Rooker, *40 Questions about Creation and Evolution* (Kregel Academic, 2014).

THE EQUIP INSTITUTE

Theme: Christian Belief

Topic: Providence

Spring 2024

Introduction

The Equip Institute exists to equip members of Taylors First Baptist Church to think rightly about God and His Word for the sake of living rightly before God in His world. This session will focus on the doctrine of God's work in creation.

What is the Big Idea?

Providence is a theological term that describes God's relationship with his creation. In his providence, God is both able to know what is coming, and he is able to carry out his purposes. The doctrine of creation describes the act of God creating; the doctrine of providence describes what God does in and with his creation.

What do the Scriptures Say?

Scripture is clear that God not only created everything, but that he also actively works in creation, sustaining and preserving its existence and properties (Heb. 1:3; Job 34:14-15; Neh. 9:8; Acts 17:28).

Further, Scripture says that God directs his creation to act in accordance with his purposes. As his creatures are working, so it can also be said that God himself is working through them (Eph. 1:11; Ps. 104:14; Prov. 16:33; Matt. 5:45). God is providential over the most minute details of the lives of his creatures (Ps. 139:16; Prov. 21:1; Phil. 2:13). However, Scripture never speaks in a way that makes God responsible for sin or wrongdoing (Gen. 50:20; Jas. 1:13).

Lastly, God governs over his creation, seeing to it that his good plan for his creatures is brought about. Scripture is clear concerning the end result of this plan: God will be worshipped around his throne for the rest of eternity (Ps. 103:19; Rom. 8:28; Phil. 2:10-11; Rev. 7:9-10).

What Has the Church Said?

The early church distinguished between primary and secondary causes, where God is the ultimate Cause of all things, and creatures cause real change in the world.



During the Reformation, the Reformers, particularly John Calvin, upheld that God’s providence was personal, good, and wise. They affirmed that God is not ultimately the author of evil, because man is responsible. Sin was a secondary cause, not a primary one. Jacob Arminius would later go on to separate God’s knowledge from his will, arguing that God responds to human choices and that his purposes are a result of simple foreknowledge. In this view, what God ordains is much more general, but his providence does not touch many of the details of human history. This began the Calvinism and Arminianism debate popular in Protestantism even to this day.

What Should We Believe?

The triune God, Yahweh, created all things through the means of his spoken word for his own glory. Scripture leaves no room for a false understanding of God’s rule and reign that allows for a **pantheistic** (that there is no distinction between God and his creation) or **deistic** (that God set creation in motion and is now unable or unwilling to act in human history) worldview. He alone has ultimate say over what happens with his creation. Human decisions really matter, and human being have the ability to make real choices, but never do any of these decisions thwart the purposes of God. Concerning how exactly he accomplishes those purposes involves much mystery. The following are two valid interpretations of Scripture that the Church has wrestled over throughout history:

1. **General providence:** God gives humanity the power of contrary choice, but he is still able to accomplish his ultimate purposes for creation because of his divine foreknowledge.
2. **Specific providence:** God is absolutely sovereign over every single iota of all events, working through them to accomplish his purposes for creation.

How Should We Then Live?

We should pray for understanding concerning this doctrine.

We should not make the debate concerning how exactly God is providential in our world a primary issue.

We should remember that God is in control and that he is accomplishing his good purposes in our world, even in the midst of suffering.

We should submit our plans to his plans for our lives.

We should be committed to working together for God's ultimate plan: all tribes, tongues, and nations worshipping around the throne.

Recommended Resources

J. I. Packer, *Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God* (InterVarsity Press, 2006).

A. W. Pink, *The Sovereignty of God* (Banner of Truth, 1928).

John Piper, *Providence* (Crossway, 2020).

John S. Feinberg, *No One Like Him: The Doctrine of God*, Foundations of Evangelical Theology (Crossway, 2001).
