

# Reformed Theology – Class 3

## THE SOVEREIGNTY OF GOD & GOD THE CREATOR

### CREATION

1. Truth

“Christianity is not a series of truths in the plural, but rather truth spelled with a capital “T”. It is Truth about total reality, not just about religious things. Biblical Christianity is Truth concerning total reality – and the intellectual holding of that total Truth and then living in the light of that Truth.” Francis Schaeffer

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2. Human Value and Dignity—Created in the Image of God

The Bible does not begin with the Fall instead of Creation: Our value and dignity are rooted in the fact that we are created in the image of God, with the high calling of being His representatives on earth. In fact, it is only because humans have such high value that sin is so tragic. If we were worthless to begin with, then the Fall would be a trivial event. When a cheap trinket is broken, we toss it aside with a shrug. But when a priceless masterpiece is defaced, we are horrified. It is because humans are the masterpiece of God’s creation that the destructiveness of sin produces such horror and sorrow. Far from expressing a low view of human nature, the Bible actually gives a far higher view than the dominant secular view today, which regards humans as simply complex computers made of meat—products of blind, naturalistic forces, without transcendent purpose or meaning.” *Total Truth*, Nancy Pearcey

3. Workmanship

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### EVOLUTION

“If you came into the kitchen and saw Alphabet cereal spilled on the table, and it spelled out your name and address, would you think the cat knocked the cereal box over?” Norman Geisler

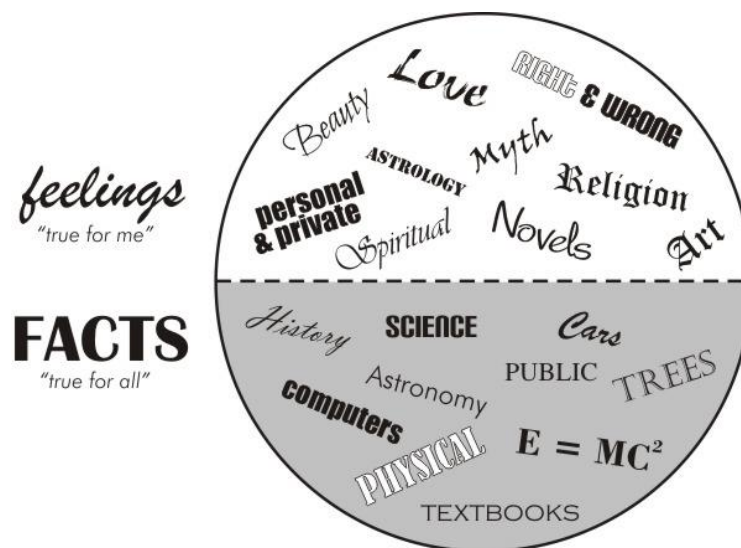
Secularists only answer to the existence of our complex world is the irrational idea of self-creation. This, however, is logically absurd. For something to create itself, it must exist before it

is. "Some have called this spontaneous generation, which is a sophisticated synonym for the word 'poof.'" R.C. SPROUL

## 1. Impact of Evolution Theory

...the major impact of Darwinian evolution does not lie in the details of mutation and natural selection, but in something far more significant—a new criterion of what qualifies as objective truth. As one historian explains, Darwinism led to a naturalistic view of knowledge in which religious and philosophical absolutes were false or at best merely symbolic of human aspirations. If Darwinism is true, then both religion and philosophical absolutes (like Goodness, Truth, Beauty or Human dignity) are strictly speaking false. We can still hold on to them if we really want to, but only if we're willing to place them in a separate category of concepts that are not genuinely true but "merely symbolic" of human hopes and ideals.  
*Total Truth*, Nancy Pearcey

## 2. Faith and Truth



## GOD THE RULER

The Bible teaches that God has supreme authority over heaven and earth. God created the universe, owns the universe, and governs the universe. There is nothing which takes place in this world that He does not ordain to come to pass. There is no one who can frustrate, change, limit or defeat any purpose of God. This is the doctrine of predestination.

- Ephesians 1:11 – God works all things after the counsel of His will.

- Proverbs 21:1 reminds us that men who fashion themselves as sovereign are totally under God's control.
- Matthew 10:29 teaches us that God is not too busy to even attend to the most minute details of governing His creation.
- I Kings 22:28-34 proves that seemingly accidental events are controlled by God. The concepts of luck or chance are fallacious and should only be in the lexicon of the unbeliever. (See also I Samuel 14:42.)
- Job 36:32 tells us that "natural disasters" are not from the hand of "mother nature", but are acts of God.
- Genesis 50:20; Acts 2:23; Acts 4:27, 28 show that even evil acts are ordained by God, in that they are permitted and used to advance His purposes.

"Just as a father forbids his child to touch a sharp knife though he himself uses it without injury or damage, so God forbids us to sin though he himself is able to use and does use sin as a means of self-glorification." Herman Bavinck

#### Q. GOD ORDAINS SUFFERING?

My argument against God was that the universe seemed so cruel and unjust. But how had I got this idea of "just" and "unjust"? . . . What was I comparing this universe with when I called it unjust? . . . Of course, I could have given up my idea of justice by saying it was nothing but a private idea of my own. But if I did that, then my argument against God collapsed too—for the argument depended on saying that the world was really unjust, not simply that it did not happen to please my private fancies . . . . Consequently, atheism turns out to be too simple." C. S. Lewis

- Job 2; Luke 22:31; I Corinthians 5:5 make it clear that even the evil one is a creature and subject to God's authority. Christianity is not dualistic; we do not believe there are two equal powers locked in a struggle for supremacy. Satan is an evil creature and is powerless to act without God's permission.
- Job 38-41 is one of the most powerful statements in all scripture of God's authority. He asks Job "where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth?" Job's conclusion in 42:2 - "I know that thou can do all things and that no purpose of Thine can be thwarted," should be our bedrock conviction as well.

This doctrine of God's authority or sovereignty is not unique to the Reformed school, or even to Christianity but is simply a tenet of theism. For if something can take place apart from God's permission then God is not in utter control, and if God is not utterly sovereign He is not God. To reject sovereignty then is to embrace nothing short of atheism.

"I believe the reason why Satan could be perfect, and yet fall, is that while he was perfect, he was still a creature, not a creator. He was not a deity – he was lower than God. Only God is immutable. Thus, Satan could "naturally" degrade without God forcing him to sin or inject him with unbelief. God allowed it to happen for His greater glory, but He did not force it upon Satan

or mankind.” Rob Barnes

## PRAYER

### MAN THE SINNER

#### 1. Covenant of Works

#### 2. Imputation of Guilt

Romans 5:

- “Through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin.” (v. 12)
- “By the one man’s offense many died.” (v. 15)
- “Through one man’s offense judgment came to all men, resulting in Condemnation.” (v. 18)
- “By one man’s disobedience many were made sinners.” (v. 19)

Not only was Adam’s guilt imputed to all mankind, but the radical corruption of our nature, we call total depravity was passed down also. The fact that all men are conceived in a depraved condition we call original sin. This corruption is so pervasive that it affects all of our being: our wills, hearts, minds, and our bodies. TOTAL depravity doesn’t mean that we are as bad as we could be - - for no matter how much each of us has sinned, we could have sinned even more, or more heinously. The TOTAL refers to the pervasiveness of the corruption.

3. None who do good. In Romans 3:10-12 Paul describes the effects of the fall on our nature. Paul says there are “none who do good” yet we know that man does acts that are ‘good’ according to man’s standards.
4. None righteous. Romans 3:23 says ... for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.
5. None who understand. The Bible says the eyes of natural man are darkened and his ears closed (John 8:43, 44a; Matthew 13:14; Corinthians 1:18a, 2:14).
6. None who seek after God. Man has a total lack of moral ability. He does not seek after God because he has no desire to do so. He does not choose Christ because he cannot. The effect of the fall has left him spiritually dead. (Romans 8:5, 8) “For the mind set on the flesh is death because the mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God; for it does not subject itself to the law of God, for it is not even able to do so; and those who are in the flesh cannot please God.” (Ephesians 2:1) “And you were dead in your trespasses and sins.”
7. What is the practical importance of recognizing man’s innate wickedness?  
It should influence our views on a multitude of issues like the following and it will cause us to

see that the problems of society have spiritual roots and demand spiritual solutions.

- child rearing and discipline
- crime and punishment
- the purpose and structure of Government
- the justness of war
- education

Our spiritual helplessness ought to humble us.

It ought to give us great confidence and comfort in the security of our salvation (Romans 5:6-10).

“What matters supremely, therefore, is not, in the last analysis, the fact that I know God, but the larger fact, which underlies it—the fact that he knows me. I am graven on the palms of his hands. I am never out of his mind. All my knowledge of him depends on his sustained initiative in knowing me. I know him because he first knew me, and continues to know me. He knows me as a friend, one who loves me; and there is no moment when his eye is off me, or his attention distracted from me, and no moment, therefore, when his care falters. This is momentous knowledge. There is unspeakable comfort—the sort of comfort that energizes, be it said, not enervates—in knowing that God is constantly taking knowledge of me in love and watching over me for my good. There is tremendous relief in knowing that his love to me is utterly realistic, based at every point on prior knowledge of the worst about me, so that no discovery now can disillusion him about me, in the way I am so often disillusioned about myself, and quench his determination to bless me.” J.I. Packer – *Knowing God*.

## READING ASSIGNMENT

1. Read Essential Truths of the Christian Faith (Sproul), sections 19-20, 44-45
2. Read the Westminster Confession of Faith, Chapters 3-6

## YOUNG EARTH VS. OLD EARTH

### Question

Could you give a quick comparison of the "young earth" view of creation and the "old earth" creation view? Please list a few pros and cons for each.

### Answer

Appropriately, the "young earth" view holds that the world is only thousands of years old, whereas the "old earth" view holds that it is probably millions of years old. The difference between the two essentially stems from their different interpretations of the early chapters of Genesis.

The young earth position tends to affirm that Genesis 1 speaks of six consecutive days of approximately 24-hours each, and that its account is scientifically accurate. Many who believe in a young earth also believe that the genealogies in the Bible allow us to reconstruct a reasonable timeline of history, such that the earth is only about 6,000 years old. Others believe that the generations in the genealogies are gapped, such that their chronologies and names are selective and representative only, so that we cannot construct an accurate timeline based on them. In this view, the earth may be many tens of thousands of years old.

### Some strengths of the young earth position are:

1. Genesis 1 explicitly describes normal days of approximately 24-hours each when the narrative continually says, "There was evening, and there was morning" (vv. 5,8,13,19,23,31).
2. Genesis 1 appears to describe consecutive days of creation, as indicated by the refrain "the [ordinal] day" (i.e., "the first day," "the second day," etc.).
3. The Sabbath commandment seems to assume consecutive 24-hour days of creation when it sets forth the pattern of six consecutive 24-hour days of labor (Exod. 20:9-11).
4. The potential for gaps in genealogies allows for the dating human ancestry postulated by modern science.

### Some weaknesses of the young earth position are:

1. Genesis 1 is highly stylized literature, unlike the historical narratives we find in Scripture. It is quite similar in many respects to poetry, though it is also unlike the poetry in Scripture in some ways. That we cannot clearly identify its genre implies that we cannot clearly identify its communicative style or intentions. In other words, we cannot be certain that it intends to communicate the timing and order of creation.
2. Modern science says that the earth is far more than thousands of years old, and some of its arguments are fairly compelling. The young earth position has postulated many speculative rebuttals to modern science, such as erroneous data and/or analysis,

potential changes in the laws of physics, and demonic tampering with the earth itself (e.g., the fabrication of dinosaur bones). Most of these rebuttals are less than compelling.

3. Genesis 1 and Genesis 2 present different (though not incompatible) accounts of creation, and only Genesis 2 claims to be an actual account of creation (Gen. 2:4). This may imply that Genesis 2 is to be taken as literal history, whereas Genesis 1 may be an introductory poem or hymn.

The old earth position denies the young earth interpretation of Genesis 1, but is not unified in its own interpretation. Some believe that the days of creation were literal but not consecutive. Others believe the days were literally ages. Still others believe that the days were a poetic figure that was not intended to communicate the actual length of time it took to create, and perhaps not even the order of creation. Some old earth proponents agree that there are gaps in the genealogies.

Some strengths of the old earth position are:

1. It corresponds well with the assertions of modern science.
2. It does not require strong correspondence between the interpretation of the stories of Genesis 1 and Genesis 2.
3. It does not require a certain decision regarding the genre and intentions of Genesis 1.

Some weaknesses of the old earth position are:

1. It presents a less compelling basis for the Sabbath commandment of Exodus 20:9-11.
2. Those versions that insist that a day is an age do not consistently interpret the text. By insisting on order, they concede that the text intends to communicate literally with regard to order. But at the same time, they deny that it intends to communicate literally with regard to timing ("there was evening, and there was morning," etc.). The interpretive judgments appear to be determined by the desire to make interpretation correspond to science, rather than by the text itself, or else appear arbitrary.
3. Those versions that speak of a punctuated creation of non-consecutive days have a similar inconsistency to that mentioned immediately above. Specifically, they accept the text at face value with respect to order but not with respect to timing. Again, this seems to be either an accommodation to science or arbitrariness.

Personally, I'm undecided on the age of the earth. I tend to think that the best options are the young earth position with gapped genealogies and the old earth position that takes Genesis 1 as a literary construct. The weakness of the former is its tension with science on the creation of things other than man, and the weakness of the latter is its tension with Exodus 20:9-11. The strength of both is that they interpret the text of Genesis 1 consistently. The biggest problem in deciding between the two is that the genre of Genesis 1 is uncertain.

Ra McLaughlin



# Praying with Your Eyes Open. by Richard Pratt

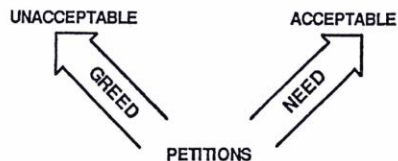


Fig. 9.1. Motives and Petitions

1

Do we try to change God through prayer? Are our requests intended to compel Him to act in ways He did not already intend? If God is unchanging, why do we bother to pray at all?

To answer these questions, we must look at prayer from two vantage points. In one sense petitions certainly do not change God. In another sense, however, prayers are ordained by God Himself as a means of moving Him to action. Unfortunately, many Christian groups tend to emphasize one of these viewpoints to the near exclusion of the other.

On the one hand, Scripture clearly teaches that God has a comprehensive and unchangeable plan for His creation. His designs for history have been set and cannot be altered. In Ephesians 1:11 we read that God has a purpose that extends to all creation:

In him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will.

2

... Thankfully, nothing can thwart God's sovereignty over His world. In this sense, therefore, it is impossible for prayer to change God.

On the other hand, however, Scripture teaches that prayer has been ordained as a way by which God may be moved to action. We must be careful to understand this dimension of prayer correctly. In the first place, God's plan is so comprehensive that it not only includes the final destinies of things but also includes the secondary, creaturely processes that work together to accomplish these ends. For instance, God does not simply ordain light to shine on the earth each day; He also employs the sun, the moon, the stars, and countless other things to accomplish that end. God does not merely determine that someone will recover from a disease; He uses doctors and medicine to accomplish the healing. As the playwright of his-

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Fig. 9.2. Prayer as a Cause of Change

tory, God did not simply write an ending for the book of time. He wrote every word on every page so that all events lead to the grand finale.

Furthermore, on those pages of history, God wrote a part for Himself. God is dramatically involved in the course of the world. He delights in personally directing and guiding events. He does not sit back and watch the world go its own way; He involves Himself with creatures one way at this moment and another way at that moment. He allows certain patterns to develop for a time and then reverses those patterns to accomplish another end. From a divine perspective, God's plan is clear and sure, even though His plan unfolds in ways that cannot be fully understood from a limited human perspective.

But still the inevitable question arises. Why pray when God already knows and controls everything? The same question may be asked of other areas of life. Why go to the doctor? Why work a job? Why spread the gospel? The reason we do all these things is that God has established these actions as vital creaturely means for accomplishing His purposes. The same is also true of prayer. Prayer is one of the many secondary causes through which God fulfills His plan.

Unfortunately, however, many Christians treat prayer as an impotent human activity. "If you want something done," we tend to think, "stop praying and go do it." To be sure, prayer and action



must be kept in balance, but we must stop viewing prayer as so much wishful thinking. Communication with God is our way of tapping into the power of the Lord of the universe. It is something we can use to move history toward its end more effectively and dramatically than any other human effort. In His sovereignty, God has made prayer a wonderfully powerful means by which we may interact with Him and effectively shape the course of history. When we petition God, we approach Him on the plane of His involvement with secondary causes. We seek to change the world by calling on the One who actively orders the world day by day (see fig. 9.2).

In the exodus from Egypt, Moses once faced a desperate situation. The people had rebelled against God and stirred His anger to such an extent that He was going to destroy the nation of Israel:

"I have seen these people," the LORD said to Moses, "and they are a stiff-necked people. Now leave me alone so that my anger may burn against them and that I may destroy them. Then I will make you into a great nation" (Exod. 32:9-10).

Had any one of us been in Moses' shoes, we would probably have stepped aside. "After all," we would have thought, "how can prayer change this situation?" But Moses had great faith and courage. He lifted his heart in prayer and attempted to dissuade God from His destructive intentions:

But Moses sought the favor of the LORD his God. "O LORD," he said, "why should your anger burn against your people, whom you brought out of Egypt with great power and a mighty hand? Why should the Egyptians say, 'It was with evil intent that he brought them out, to kill them in the mountains and to wipe them off the face of the earth'? Turn from your fierce anger; relent and do not bring disaster on your people. Remember your servants Abraham, Isaac and Israel, to whom you swore by your own self: 'I will make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and I will give your descendants all this land I promised them, and it will be their inheritance forever'" (Exod. 32:11-13).

In response to the prayer of His servant, God turned back and had mercy on the people:

Then the LORD relented and did not bring on his people the disaster he had threatened (Exod. 32:14).

We must remember that Moses did not alter the eternal decrees of God; his prayer did not take God by surprise, nor did it force God into doing something He had not planned. Yet, this text illustrates that God uses prayer as an effective means of fulfilling His purposes. He has chosen to use the petitions of His people as instruments of change. Prayer is a powerful human effort that can significantly affect not only the lives of individuals but the very course of world history.

Excerpted from *Pray With Your Eyes Open: Looking at God, Ourselves, and Our Prayers* by Richard L. Pratt, Jr.

# PROBLEM OF EVIL

## Question

How did Lucifer get the evil idea to be like God, and how did the angels that fell with him choose to do evil also? And if Adam was created in the image of God (perfectly, with no sin to obscure it), why was he disobedient to God?

## Answer

Religious folks try to fix that problem in a variety of ways.

First, there is the free-will answer: Man/Satan chose by his own free will to be evil. Evil exists, but God had nothing to do with it. Satan is the author of evil, not God. The problem with that is there is no sufficient cause for the effect. If Satan was perfect, then a suitable cause for the effect of evil could not come from him. Having a free will doesn't create motivations or causes where there are none.

Second, you have the honorable St. Augustine who said that evil is not a thing, but the absence of a thing. It is the absence of good we see when we sense evil. So, God didn't create evil — neither did man. It does not exist. Problem: Evil sure does seem real. It may not exist like I do, like beings do, it's not on the same level as the number 12 or the color "white". Its effects are far too obvious to not exist in some form. Plus, Augustine said in other places that moral good is absent from all sorts of soulless objects like chairs or neckties, but that absence of good does not instantly make them evil. God pronounced creation good, but Augustine's solution seems to leave anything that is absent of moral good as evil. Though I really don't like neckties and have a sneaky suspicion they are evil. So Augustine was only mostly wrong.

Modern Charismatics have a solution: God is good all the time! God only gives, the devil takes, suffering and evil do not come from God, but from the devil. Problem: I don't mean to be uncharitable towards our charismatic friends, but that's not in the Bible. The Scriptures say the opposite, that those who live godly lives will necessarily find suffering and persecution as part of their daily bread. God gives a painful promise to his people when Paul says to Timothy, "In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted." (2Ti 3:12) So that solution is just not possible.

The "normal" Reformed answer is that we don't have a problem of evil, but a problem of good. The mystery isn't that God could allow evil to begin and continue to exist in the world — the mystery is that God would allow any good to happen to bad people like us. True enough, but that's no help. It's an answer to a question, but not the question of why do we have evil in this world. But it is true — it's just not the answer to "Why is there evil in the world?"

I believe the reason why Satan could be created perfect, and yet fall, is that while he was perfect, he was still a creature, not a creator. He was not a deity — he was lower than God. Only God is immutable (1 Samuel 15:29; Malachi 3:6; James 1:17). Thus, Satan could "naturally" degrade

without God forcing him to sin or inject him with unbelief. God allowed it to happen for his greater glory, but he did not force it upon Satan or mankind.

This is how "perfect" beings could sin — they were created perfect, but were vulnerable to the impact of time upon those who are not God.

Rev. Robert Barnes