Chapter 4 – Of Creation

Intro:

In question 11 of the Baptist Catechism, we read:

Q: "How does God execute His decrees?"

A: "God executes His decrees in the works of creation and providence."

As Renihan notes,

> The presence of this chapter immediately after one on God's decree speaks of the fundamental importance of the doctrine of creation. It is the first means by which God brings His eternal plan to realization in time and space.[1]

Having a right understanding of the biblical doctrine is no small matter, as Earl Blackburn reminds us:

> Perhaps no time in human history has the doctrine of creation been so important and needed as now. The advancements of modern science, the rejection of the once prominent Christian worldview in western civilization, and the militant anti-Christian atheism, pluralism, relativism, and scepticism of twenty-first century culture combined to war against the biblical teaching of the origins of the earth and universe… Seeds have been so cleverly and insidiously sown into the modern mind via technology, attempting to overthrow what Almighty God has authoritative, lead, declared and clear the revealed. Many have been duped by these wily schemes, thinking these strategies are harmless and innocent.[2]

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[1] James M. Renihan, *To the Judicious and Impartial Reader. Baptist Symbolics, Volume 2: An Exposition of the 1689 London Baptist Confession of Faith* (Cape Coral, FL: Founders Press, 2022), 127.

[2] Earl M. Blackburn, "Chapter Four: Of Creation," in A New Exposition of the London Baptist 75 Confession of Faith of 1689, ed. Rob Ventura (Ross-shire: Mentor, 2022), 97-98. See also John MacArthur's practical book, "The Battle for the Beginning."

Now before we look at these three paragraphs of chapter four of the Confession, we must note – in the words of Waldron – that, "If anything should be obvious, it is that this chapter assumes a very literal understanding of Genesis 1 and 2."[3]

Paragraph 1: The Doctrine of Creation

1. In the beginning God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit[1] was pleased to create or make the world and all things in it, both visible and invisible, in a six-day period, and all very good.[2] He did this to manifest the glory of His eternal power, wisdom, and goodness.[3]

[1]John 1:2, 3; Hebrews 1:2; Job 26:13. [2]Colossians 1:16; Genesis 1:31. [3]Romans 1:20.

Waldron[4] provides a helpful outline of paragraph one, which we will follow:

1. The **time** of creation: 'In the beginning'
2. The **author** of creation: The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit'
3. The **purpose** of creation: for the manifestation of the glory of his eternal power, wisdom and goodness'
4. The **extent** (or Object or Scope) of creation: 'the world, and all things therein, whether visible or invisible.'
5. The **duration** of creation: 'in the space of six days'

Firstly, Renihan notes that the editors of the Confession moved "in the beginning"[5] to the beginning of the sentence[6] to "emphasize that the created order is temporal and not eternal in itself."[7]

- That is, God created not only space, but time as well.

[3] Samuel E. Waldron, A Modern Exposition of the 1689 Baptist Confession of Faith, 5th ed. (Welwyn Garden City, UK: EP Books, 2016), 89.
[4] Waldron, *A Modern Exposition of the 1689*, 89.
[5] For those who like Bible trivia, these are the very first words of the Bible. Whereas we call the first book of the Bible "Genesis," Jews call it *bereshith* ("in the beginning").
[6] The WCF and Savoy have "in the beginning" in the middle of the first sentence.
[7] Renihan, *Baptist Symbolics, Vol. 2*, 128.

- In the clever words of song-writer Michael Card, "In the beginning *was* the Beginning."

Blackburn writes,

> The Confession begins where the Bible begins, in Genesis 1:1, "*In the beginning….*" What beginning? It certainly was not the beginning of God because as you learned in the previous chapters, God is "infinite in being…immutable,[8] immense, eternal." God the Lord had no beginning, nor will He ever cease to be. So, the beginning spoken of here is the beginning of time, as we know it. God constructed time. He does not exist in time but outside of it, and yet He works in and through time. He is neither bound or controlled by time, nor restricted or hindered by any event within time. He is absolutely sovereign over all time and creation, not vice versa!

Second, we see that creation is ascribed to the Triune God, whose nature was unpacked in chapter 2 of the confession, and whose decree was explained in chapter 3.

- As we learned from chapter 2 in the Confession, the three persons of the Godhead work harmoniously as One, not only in redemption, but in creation as well.

    - In creation, the Spirit hovers the waters,[9] the Word/Son is the agent,[10] and the Father is the source.[11]

Third, because God needs nothing,[12] He is able to create all things according to the good pleasure of His will.

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[8] Blackburn, p. 99.
[9] Cf. **Genesis 1:2**
[10] Cf. **John 1:1-4; Psalm 33:6; Hebrews 11:3**
[11] Cf. **Romans 11:36**, where we see the beauty of the Triune God: "For *from* Him [God the Father] and *through* Him [God the Son], and *to* Him [God the Holy Spirit] are all things, to Him [the Triune God] be the glory forever, amen."
[12] Cf. **Acts 17:24-25** – "The God who made the world and everything in it, because He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in temples made by man, nor is He served by human hands, as though He needed anything, since He Himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything."

- For example, He was not lonely and in need of companionship,[13] nor did He need to create subjects and slaves to carry out His commands and will.[14] Nor was He in need of a "glory top-up" and therefore somehow under obligation to create.

In the words of Renihan,

> Why were all things created? Not out of any necessity in God. He lacked nothing. All things were created simply for the manifestation of the glory God's eternal power, wisdom, and goodness. Not that created things ad to God's glory – that can never be. Rather, creation is intended to demonstrate what God is – glorious. This is why the heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament shows His handiwork, and why the defilement of creation as explained in Romans 1 is so evil.[15]

Fourth, the extent of God's creation.

- "**All** things were made through Him, and without Him was not anything made that was made."[16]
- "For in Him **all** things were created, in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities – **all** things have been created through Him and for Him."[17]

Fifth, the Confession takes "day" literally, and not as metaphorical of an undisclosed period of time. Nor does it insert a "gap" between Days one and two. The creation week is literally a seven-day period when God created all things.

Some other theories that oppose a literal 6-day creation interpretation:

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[13] See especially Michael R. Reeves excellent book, *Delighting in the Trinity*, where he contrasts the true and Triune God with the false demon-god of Islam, who is tragically solitary and in need of companionship, as well as subjects to rule and reign.

[14] This is especially true of the false (megalomanic) gods of the Israel's neighbors. See especially Bruce K. Waltke's sublime commentary on Genesis, as he shows how Genesis 1-2 was also an apologetic against the false religions of the Ancient Near Eastern peoples of the time.

[15] Renihan, 128.

[16] **John 1:3**

[17] **Colossians 1:16** (LSB)

1. **Theistic Evolution**: The theory that God used the process of evolution to create all living things.[18]
2. **The Day-age theory**: This theory interprets the days of Genesis as extended periods of time, rather than literal 24-hour days.[19]
3. **The Gap theory**: Between days 1 and day 2 of the creation cycle, there was a gap of millions of years, which is why the earth seems so old, while other parts of the creation seem relatively young in comparison.
4. **Framework Hypothesis**: This theory views the creation account as a literary framework that emphasizes God's creation and ordering of the cosmos. The creation account is not to be interpreted as a chronological account.[20]

A word on omitting the phrase "Ex Nihilo"

Strangely, the Baptists drop the phrase *out of nothing* (as found in the WCF and Savoy).[21] The question is *why?*

- Did they believe that there was a kind of eternal material that God used in creation?

No. As Renihan notes, the doctrine of *creation ex-nihilo* was very important in 17th-centurty scholastic theology and removing it might imply that they were adopting an unorthodox position on creation.

Simply put, the Baptists were once again carefully making their Confession even *more* precise than their Presbyterian and Congregational brethren.

Renihan writes,

> Protestant scholastics argued that creation must be viewed from two perspectives: *creatio prima* and *creatio secunda*. The first refers to the initial act of creation in which God drew out of nothing the primary or unformed

[18] For example, the BioLogos institute holds to this. Some prominent evangelicals like Timothy Keller also held to this position. For a thorough response, see *Theistic Evolution: A Scientific, Philosophical, and Theological Critique*.
[19] See Waldron, *A Modern Exposition of the 1689*, pages 89-93 for a thorough and very convincing critique of the day-age theory.
[20] This view is held by many reformed evangelicals, such as Meredith Kline and Bruce Waltke. For a critique of this view, see https://answersingenesis.org/creationism/old-earth/whats-wrong-with-the-framework-hypothesis/?srsltid=AfmBOornRHAle7Yc9hKP-ABFobPThz5h1Z0Ewi0HLHNlTtLV7UFA5dEU.
[21] And clearly taught in Scripture: **Hebrews 11:3** – "By faith we understand that the universe was created by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things that are visible."

> matter. The second refers to God's creation of all other things from this already existing matter. Notice how the Confession speaks of the creative process in six days – the span of the entire course. While it is true, in one sense, that everything was made out of nothing, applying the term to the entire timespan and activities is somewhat less technically accurate.[22]

The most obvious example (among many) is the creation of Adam. He was created not out of nothing, but out of the dust which God created out of nothing.

Paragraph 2: The Creation of Man

2. After God had made all the other creatures, He created humanity. He made them male and female,[4] with rational and immortal souls,[5] thereby making them suited to that life lived unto God for which they were created. They were made in the image of God, being endowed with knowledge, righteousness, and true holiness.[6] They had the law of God written in their hearts[7] and the power to fulfill it. Even so, they could still transgress the law, because they were left to the liberty of their own will, which was subject to change.[8]

[4]Genesis 1:27. [5]Genesis 2:7. [6]Ecclesiastes 7:29; Genesis 1:26. [7]Romans 2:14, 15. [8]Genesis 3:6.

Again, Renihan is spot on when he writes,

> Why was man the crowning glory of creation? Because God intended, in a special way, to reflect His greatest glory in humanity. The very purpose for their *reasonable and immortal souls* was to make them suitable for a *life* of bringing glory *to God*.[23]

[22] Renihan, *Baptist Symbolics, vol. 2*, 132. He spends six (!!) pages (131-36) to explain and defend the Confession's decision to make this change.
[23] *Ibid*, 138. Renihan shows how much of the wording is drawn directly from the Puritan John Owen (especially from his *"Pneumatalogia*."

With regards to what "the image of God" means, the Confession draws heavily from Paul's words in Ephesians 4:24 and Colossians 3:10, where the apostle defines the image of God as "knowledge, righteousness and true holiness."[24]

Concerning this, Owen writes,

> We may consider the moral sate and condition of man, with the furniture of his mind and soul in reference unto his obedience to God and his enjoyment of Him. This was the principal part of that Image of God wherein he was created. Three things were required to render man idoneous or *fit unto that life to God for which he was made*. First, an ability to discern the mind and will of God, with respect unto all the duty and obedience that God required of him; as also so far to know the nature and properties of God, as to believe Him the only proper object of all acts and duties of religious obedience, and an all-sufficient satisfaction and reward in this world and to eternity. Secondly, a free uncontrolled unentangled disposition to every duty of the Law of his creation in order unto living unto God. Thirdly, an ability of mind and will, with a readiness of compliance in his affections, for a due regular performance of all duties and abstinence from all sin. These things belong unto the integrity of his nature, with the uprightness of the state and condition where he was made…[these faculties of the soul of man] were not superadded or infused into [man] when created, but were con-created with them; that is his soul was made meet and able to live to God as his sovereign Lord, chiefest good, and last end.[25]

Though it is true that bearing God's image has much to do with exercising dominion over creation,[26] Owen is quick to note that exercising dominion is the natural consequent of bearing God's image and nature as representing His righteousness and holiness.[27]

This is crucial, especially when we consider the incarnation of the eternal Son of God, as He would need to add to Himself a nature that was able to fully bear and

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[24] ESV. The Greek literally reads "holiness of the truth" (cf. LSB, NET)
[25] John Owen, *The Works of John Owen*, ed. William H. Goold, vol. 3 (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, n.d.), 101-102. Accessed from Logos.
[26] Most commentators would go so far as to say this is the *primary* definition of what it means to bear God's image, at least according to Genesis 1:26.
[27] Cf. John Owen, *The Works of John Owen*, ed. William H. Goold, vol. 1 (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, n.d.), 231-232. Accessed from Logos.

reflect God's image,[28] as well as have the true ability to love God with all His heart, mind, soul, and strength, and sincerely and *really* keep God's law and commandments.

Renihan writes,

> Adam and Eve received [God's] law with the *power to fulfill it*. Traditionally, this has been referred to as the ability not to sin (*posse non peccare*).[29] They were truly free. Knowledge, righteousness, and true holiness, with God's Law internalized, placed them in a perfect moral circumstance. This ability, however, was not confirmed in them, and they *were subject to change*.[30]

Again, this is crucial to understand if we are to appreciate the obedience of the Son of God incarnate. His obedience was real. It was also a "free" obedience, offered up gladly, lovingly, and worshipfully. But unlike the first Adam, the obedience of the true Son of God was confirmed in Him, who earned for Himself – and all those under His headship – the right to eternal life.

This is also important with regards to our hope for the new creation, when the image of God is truly restored in the sons of God. Until then, this restoration (or renovation) of the God's image in us, is a 'work in progress' as we put off the old man and put on the new Man.[31]

This is also crucial for us to understand that obedience unto God is not impossible. That is, God originally created humanity with the ability to love and obey Him.

- Oh, how great indeed was the Fall of man in the sin of Adam, which has marred this image, which now is morally unable to "fulfill all righteousness" apart from God's sovereign and initiatory grace!

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[28] See especially **Hebrews 1:2-3**; **Colossians 1:16.**

[29] This is traced back to Augustine. See the helpful chart provided in the following article: https://www.monergism.com/thethreshold/articles/onsite/four-fold.html

[30] Renihan, *Baptist Symbolics, Vol. 2*, 141.

[31] See **Ephesians 4:20-24**; cf. **Colossians 3:10**. See especially **Romans 8:29**. Regarding *fallen* man, Waldron writes, "He is a very distorted image of God, a very inaccurate replica. That image, therefore, needs to be renewed in the redemption of men." In his *Modern Exposition of the 1689* (5th ed.), 99.

Paragraph 3: Positive Law

3. In addition to the law written in their hearts, they received a command not to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.[9] As long as they obeyed this command, they were happy in their communion with God and had dominion over the creatures.[10]

[9]Genesis 2:17; [10]Genesis 1:26, 28.

In defining and explaining what "positive law" is, Renihan writes:

> It is an added commandment, given by revelation, differing from moral or natural law in that knowledge of it will only come externally by means of divine disclosure. For example, circumcision and baptism are both positive laws. They are appropriately part of worship, associated with specific covenants, and would be unknown apart from divine revelation. Any positive law is a command given by God for a particular purpose and/or time. It requires obedience beyond what is required in natural or moral law.[32]

A popular slogan in the reformation was "moral laws are good, and therefore are commanded; but positive laws are commanded, and therefore good."

Love for God is always demonstrated by obedience to God's commands[33] – whether in natural law or positive law – which is to be our true act of worship to Him.[34]

Obedience is always a good thing and was designed for our well-being and good. "While [Adam and Eve] kept the commandment, they enjoyed the greatest of blessings, *communion with God*. It is the essence of heaven."[35]

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[32] Renihan, *Baptist Symbolics,* vol. 2, 142. See how this is a wonderful apologetic against infant baptism in the new covenant (i.e., circumcision was a 'positive law' added for those under the old covenant, whereas believer's baptism is a 'positive law' added for those under the new covenant [i.e., believer's only] in the following message from Dr. Renihan: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v154imjdPzs&list=FLS1mwfr4vpX704_K3eJLSRw&index=8

[33] For example, as Jesus says, "If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love, just as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love." (**John 15:10**). Again, "If you love Me, you will keep My commandments." (**John 14:15**; cf. **14:21, 23; 1 John 5:3; 2 John 6**).

[34] Cf. **Romans 12:1**.

[35] Renihan, *Baptist Symbolics*, vol. 2, 144.

Application:

1. As Blackburn notes, the true doctrine of creation destroys *atheism* (i.e., there is no God), *materialism* (i.e., matter has always existed), and *pantheism* (i.e., God *is* all things and, *in* all things, everything is God).[36] To this, I would add that it destroys *dualism* and *polytheism*.

2. Understanding the purpose and goal of our redemption helps us make sense of our sanctification as being made more into the true image of God in Christ.

    - As he is the image of God, man's whole duty is to be the image of, to reflect, or to represent God on earth. Our moral duty is to be like God, to follow His example). As man is the image of God, his sin is always the misrepresentation of God. The sinner perversely represents God. Our representation of God is either accurate or slanderous, but never morally neutral. This being so, God can never be indifferent to wicked behavior.[37]

3. Evangelism

    - Creation is the foundation of human society, and when properly understood and believed, imparts harmony ad comfort to the human heart. It gives reason to and for our existence and trains us to look beyond ourselves to Him, the Creator of all things.[38]

        - Cf. Paul's gospel presentations in **Acts 14:15-17** and **17:23-31**

4. Seeing and 'using' the world rightly

    - The "ditches" of worshipping the world as if it was god and abusing the world as though it was not good. God has commissioned us to be "good stewards" not only of the gospel, but also the created order.

        - **Psalm 24:1-2** – "The earth is the LORD's and the fullness thereof, the world and those who dwell therein, for He has founded it upon the seas and established it upon the rivers."

        - The "doctrine of demons" in **1 Timothy 4** is those who see enjoying things like food and marriage as bad and to be avoided.

        - **1 Corinthians 10:31** – "So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God."

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[36] Blackburn, 100.
[37] Waldron, *A Modern Exposition of the 1689*, 5th ed., 99.
[38] Blackburn, 108.

5. We are to worship God not only as our Savior and Redeemer, but also as our Creator and Lord.

    - **Psalm 19:1** (LSB) – They heavens are telling of the glory of God; and the expanse is declaring the works of His hands."
    - **Revelation 4:11** – "Worthy are You, 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."

Soli Deo Gloria!

Addendum: Should we interpret Genesis literally, then?

Waldron[39] suggests there are good reasons why we should interpret Genesis 1-3 (indeed 1-11) literally:

1. Genesis itself does not permit a figurative interpretation. If Genesis 12 is historical narrative, then it cannot be doubted that Gen. 1-11 is intended as such. The genealogies of Gen. 10 and 11 conclude with the family background of Abraham. The genealogy of Gen. 11:10-32 is, furthermore, identical in structure to that found in Gen. 5, but Gen. 5 begins with Adam and Seth. A seamless literary structure and genre, thus, ties Abraham to Adam. If Gen. 1-11 is not intended to be taken literally, the constant impression of historicity is baffling.

2. The rest of Scripture does not permit a figurative interpretation. The continued reference to the creation week does not permit it.[40] Other literal interpretations do not permit it.[41]

[39] See his *Modern Exposition of the 1689*, 5th ed.

[40] Exodus 20:8-11; Exodus 31:15-17; Mark 2:27-28

[41] See Matt. 19:4-6; 24:37-39; Mark 2:27, 28; 10:6; Luke 3:23-38; 17:26ff.; John 8:44; Rom. 5:12-19; 1 Cor. 11:7-12; 15:21, 22, 44-49; Eph. 2:3; 5:31; 1 Tim. 2:13, 14; Heb. 11:3-7; James 3:9; 1 Pet. 3:20; 2 Pet. 2:5; 3:5, 6; 1 John 3:8, 12; Jude 14, 15.