

# THE223 Christian Narrative 1 Creation and Fall

## Unit 2b The Dependent Nature of Creation

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Hello and welcome to Session B of Unit 2. In this session, we will explore the dependent nature of creation. In our last unit, we started by investigating the unique way in which God created. We looked at the important Hebrew word *bara*. We discovered that God alone creates and that the vast majority of his creation was done with the use of divine speech. Today, we're going to look at what logically follows from the idea that God alone creates. So in front of you is our main teaching idea for this session. Creation exists because God sustains it. Therefore, creation is wholly dependent on God.

Now, let's begin our discussion today by considering two more important Hebrew words found in the creation account of Genesis 1 and Genesis 2. The first word is the Hebrew word *kalah*, and it's found at Genesis 2:2. "And on the seventh day God finished his work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all his work that he had done." *Kalah* is the word translated "complete" or "finished" in this verse. This word, like *bara*, is important in that it communicates something critical to us about creation. God's act of creation is *kalah*. It is finished. So this word communicates to us the completion of an activity. When we read that God finished his work that he had done, we should understand then that all God intended to do, all that God intended to create has in fact been created.

Now, in the same passage, we find the second Hebrew word on which we will focus today. It's the word *shabath*. *Shabath* is the Hebrew word "rested." We see this word also utilized in Genesis 2:2. A theologian, Kenneth Matthews, explains the meaning of this word well when he says the verb "rested" means the cessation of creative activity. It has this same sense in its only other occurrence in Genesis where God promises the postdiluvian world that the times and seasons will never cease. Elsewhere, we find that God rested, but here the passage speaks of the absence of work. Therefore, he abstained from work.

Now that we have looked at both the word "finished" or "complete" (*kalah*) and the word "rested" (*shabath*), let's consider how these two Hebrew words help explain the meaning of each other. In order to do this, let's take a slightly broader view of the beginning of Genesis 2 and read verses 1 through 3. "Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them. And on the seventh day God finished his work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all his work that he had done. So God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it God rested from all his work that he had done in creation."

So it's important for us to ask the simple question: Why did God stop the work of creation? Why did he rest? Was he tired? Was he uninspired? What is the nature of his decision to cease his creative activity? *Kalah* helps us understand that the reason God rested was because he had accomplished all that he had intended to do. In so doing, we see that God was not tired, bored, or uninspired. Rather, he finished all that he had set out to accomplish. So we can confidently state that the Bible reveals to us that God's act of creation is complete. The idea God had in his mind was perfectly brought to bear in creation order. Nothing was missed, mangled, misaligned, or misrepresented. And this should be a comforting thought to you and me.

Now that we've established that God fully completed his act of creation, we need to turn our attention to his continued involvement within creation. There are many passages that discuss God's continued relationship with creation, some of which are focused broadly on God's involvement, others of which are more focused. Let's take a look first at the fact that, broadly speaking, all creation is dependent on God. The passage in front of us comes from Colossians 1. There in verses 16 and 17, we read, "For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones

or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together.” [Colossians 1:16-17] Stop for just a moment and consider the massive gravity of this text.

Now, this text is directly addressing the role of Christ in creation, but it speaks also to the absolute dependency of creation upon its Creator. We’ve already looked at the role of the Trinitarian God in creation, so we do not need to repeat ourselves here. However, let’s understand a few things that are going on in this passage. First, there are three phrases used to describe the relationship between Christ and creation: by him, through him, and for him. Each one of these phrases helps us understand the relationship uniquely. The first phrase, literally translated “in him,” conveys the idea that creation was Christ’s idea. He detailed the plan given to him by the Father for creation. Creation rests fully in Christ’s sphere of influence. The second phrase, “through him” simply means that Jesus was the effective agent of creation. As we mentioned in our last lesson, without Jesus, creation would not exist. Finally, we have the phrase “for him” which helps us understand that all of creation exists to bring Jesus glory. It is the work of an artist which brings the artist, not the art, praise.

Also notice in this passage that heaven, earth, things visible, and finally, things invisible are noted as being created by Christ. This means that everything, whether physically tangible or created yet immaterial, has indeed been created by Christ. So nothing that has been created was created outside the creative and dependent sphere of Christ. He has done it all. Now consider the words of verse 17 [Colossians 1:17]. Of this passage, theologian Richard Mallick states, “The work of creation included the continual sustaining of what was created. Looking to the present ongoing routine of creation, therefore, Paul stated that Jesus keeps things in order. The Creator has not forgotten the creation. He daily maintains a balance in the universe.”

All creation, everything is dependent on God. Creation is not, in any way, independent of, a part of, or equal to God. From creation in general then, let us also focus in on the fact that the Bible speaks to the reality that specific parts of creation are also dependent on God. So in Hebrews 1:3, we read about the fact that it is God who upholds inanimate creation. There we read, “He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power. After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high.” Notice here that all nonliving creation is dependent on God in order to be sustained. We see that in the phrase, “He upholds the universe by the word of his power.”

In Job 12:10, we read that the animal kingdom is dependent on God as well. In Job 12:10, we read, “In his hand is the life of every living thing and the breath of all mankind.” Now, because we see a contrast between every living thing and mankind, we can assert that it is all living things save mankind that are referenced in the first phrase. All creatures are dependent on God for their continued existence.

Of course, humanity is also dependent on God. We see that in Job 12:10, but we also see this in Acts 17:25 and Acts 17:28. There we read, “Nor is [God] served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything... For ‘In him we live and move and have our being.’” Here’s a wonderful portion of the sermon Paul preaches at the Areopagus. Human beings exist expressly because of God’s sustaining power. So creation in general and inanimate creation, the animal kingdom, and humanity specifically are all dependent on God for existence. Without God, nothing would exist. According to the Bible, we are all dependent on God for our existence.

Now, let's let logic drive this next thought. If we are in fact dependent on God in order to exist and we do in fact now exist, then God must still be involved in his creation. Did you follow the logic? God could not have created us and then left us to our own devices, for if that were the case, we would cease to exist due to our dependency on God. No. God is involved in creation. What's more, God is not simply involved in creation. Rather, God's involvement in creation is both transcendent as well as imminent. So let's unpack each of these words in order to understand the full meaning of the statement "God's involvement in creation is transcendent and imminent."

The word "transcendent" means existing apart from and not subject to the limitations of the material universe. God is neither part of nor dependent upon creation for his own existence. He is completely independent of it and, in fact, rules over creation. The word "imminent" simply means close at hand or near. Although God is in fact transcendent, the Bible also teaches us that he is near to his creation. He is imminent because without his sustaining power, we would cease to exist. So God is involved in creation. He simultaneously is transcendent and imminent. Creation is in fact distinct from God yet it is always dependent on God.

So using Wayne Grudem as our guide, I would like to consider with you four false views that exist within our world today regarding the relationship of God to creation. First, we will consider the correct view which is here before us. Creation is distinct from yet always dependent on God. And this is because God is both transcendent and imminent. Here is the correct view. Now let's consider four incorrect views that are common in our world today. The first false view of the relationship between God and creation is called materialism. Materialism is quite popular in our society today, and it simply is the view that God does not exist. So if we were to visualize this view (and you see it on the right), it would exclude any understanding of God. By contrasting the right hand side of your screen to the left hand side of the screen, you can see the differences between the biblical understanding of how God relates to creation and materialism. Basically, what we see is that in this view, there is no God. Therefore, the chief goal of people who hold this view is to acquire more and more material goods. Materialism.

The second false view of the relationship between God and creation is called pantheism. Quite the opposite of materialism, pantheism is the false view that everything in the whole universe is God or a part of God. Pantheism is the position that God and nature are the same thing. Now, pantheism, the word comes from two separate Greek words: *pan* meaning "all" and *theos* meaning "god." So it would teach that all the stars, all the galaxies, all the planets, all the mountains, even the wind and the rain, all of these things are one and the same, part of what God is. Unfortunately, pantheism denies several essential aspects of God's character, like for instance, his distinct personality. And because God in pantheism has no distinct personality, this leads pantheists to ultimately devalue the personhood of human beings as well. So if we were to visualize this view, it's easy to see how it differs both from materialism and from the biblical view of how God relates to creation. Pantheism denies that anything but God exists. There is no, strictly speaking, specifically, material world.

The third false view of the relationship between God and creation is called dualism. Dualism is the belief that both God and the material universe have eternally existed side by side. First, let's look at how we would visualize this belief, and then we will talk about the ways that it can be articulated in our modern culture. So on the right hand side of your screen, you see dualism. God and creation, like the biblical view of the relationship between God and creation, do in fact exist. However, you'll see that their relationship is significantly different. In dualism on the right hand side, we see that God and creation

exist in parallel reality. They've always existed together and they are equal, whereas on the left hand side of your screen where we see the traditional biblical understanding of the relationship between God and creation, we see that God relates to creation in a unique and specific way. So dualism would show that God and the material universe exists side by side and are thus equal and contrasting realities.

So what is dualism really? Well, dualism is the belief that two things exist side by side. And dualism is popular among our modern generation because it contains the idea of eternal struggle. The struggle is between good and evil. It's between light and dark. It's between God and Satan. Any of these will really do. You see, dualism picks two realities into an eternal struggle for victory. The problem with this view is that it does not take into consideration the Lordship of God over creation. As we have read earlier, the whole created world, earth and heaven, visible and invisible, are dependent on God for their existence.

The fourth false view of the relationship between God and creation is called deism. Deism holds that God created the universe, but then, because he is ultimately so transcendent, left creation to its own devices. This view believes that God is, if you will, the divine clockmaker who created the world, that is, he wound the clock, and then left it to run on its own. He is not involved in creation at all. Some deists would hold that at the very end, God will judge creation but he is certainly not involved in any imminent way within creation. Deists have, in fact, offered their own definition which states this: "Deism is the recognition of a universal creative force greater than that demonstrated by mankind, supported by personal observation of laws and designs in nature in the universe, perpetuated and validated by the innate ability of human reason coupled with the rejection of claims made by individuals and organized religions of having received special divine revelation." So if we were to visualize this false relationship between God and creation, it would look like this: God and creation are completely separate. And so you see on the right hand of your screen, God and creation exist, like the biblical view which we see on the left. However, there is no relationship between the two, which is where the two clearly differ.

So in this line, we will review the four false views of the relationship between God and creation and why they ultimately fail to meet the standard set out within the Bible. First, we have materialism. The reason it ultimately fails is because God is subsumed within creation. The view ultimately rejects the transcendence of God, the distinction of creation from God, and the dependency of creation on God. Next, we have pantheism. This view fails because creation is ultimately subsumed into God. This view rejects the distinction of creation from God as well as God's transcendence. Next, we have dualism. This view fails because it, in essence, equates God and creation. This view rejects God's transcendence as well as the dependency of creation on God. Finally, we have deism. Deism fails because it completely separates God from creation. This view rejects the imminent nature of God as he relates to creation as well as the dependency of creation on God.

So to review, our main teaching point in this lesson was that creation exists because God sustains it. Therefore, creation is wholly dependent on God. As we close this lesson, consider this reality: We exist because God is involved in our lives. We live and move and have our being expressly because God desires for us to exist. God thinks about us so much more than we believe. I'm reminded of what the psalmist says in Psalm 139, and I think it would be appropriate to conclude our time in this unit by contemplating these words. As I read from the Scriptures, close your eyes and consider how involved God is in our existence.

"O Lord, you have searched me and known me! You know when I sit down and when I rise up; you discern my thoughts from afar. You search out my path and my lying down and are acquainted

with all of my ways. Even before a word is on my tongue, behold, O Lord, you know it altogether. You hem me in, behind and before, and lay your hand upon me. Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high; I cannot attain it. Where shall I go from your Spirit? Or where shall I flee from your presence? If I ascend to heaven, you are there! If I make my bed in Sheol, you are there! If I take the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there your hand shall lead me, and your right hand shall hold me. If I say, 'Surely the darkness shall cover me, and the light about me be night,' even the darkness is not dark to you; the night is as bright as the day, for darkness is as light with you. For you formed my inward parts; you knitted me together in my mother's womb. I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are your works; my soul knows it very well. My frame was not hidden from you, when I was being made in secret, intricately woven in the depths of the earth. Your eyes saw my unformed substance; in your book were written, every one of them, the days that were formed for me, when as yet there was none of them. How precious to me are your thoughts, O God! How vast is the sum of them! If I would count them, they are more than the sand. I awake, and I am still with you. Oh that you would slay the wicked, O God! O men of blood, depart from me! They speak against you with malicious intent; your enemies take your name in vain. Do I not hate those who hate you, O Lord? And do I not loathe those who rise up against you? I hate them with complete hatred; I count them my enemies. Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts! And see if there be any grievous way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting!"

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