

Creation and Idolatry

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[0 : 00] Let's turn again this evening to Genesis chapter 1 and let's read at verse 6, Genesis 1 at verse 6 and we're going to look at verses 6 to 25 but not at all the details of it, just the main parts that are going to be emphasised this evening.

So at verse 6 and God said let there be an expanse in the midst of the waters and let it separate the waters from the waters. And God made the expanse and separated the waters that were under the expanse from the waters that were above the expanse.

And it was so and God called the expanse heaven. And then verse 14 God said let there be lights in the expanse of the heavens to separate the light the day from the night and let them be for signs and for seasons and for days and years.

Let them be lights in the expanse of the heaven to give light upon the earth. And it was so and God made the two great lights the greater light to rule the day and the lesser light to rule the night and the stars.

It means that he made the stars also. And so on. We've looked at the creation and the formation that God set about taking to completion as you come to verse 3.

[1 : 26] And then we looked at that creation in relation to separation. How there's a separation mentioned in the creation of light. Separating the light from the darkness. And we looked at the connection between that and the whole issue of separation.

In terms of God separating what is evil from what is good. What is separation in terms of redemption as well. How there's a separation involved in that. The separation of ourselves from sin to righteousness and so on.

And that separation now continues. Still looking at the issue of separation. And tonight also we're going to look at creation and multiplication. The multiplication that took place from vegetation and fish and animals right up to the time at which God was then ready to create man.

So the separation is continuing as he mentions here in verse 6. God said let there be an expanse or a firmament in the midst of the waters and let it separate the waters from the waters.

In other words God is still speaking creatively as you go through the chapters. And it's not just that he brought things into being from nothing. But the things that he brought into being as he then said about forming and fashioning them.

[2 : 38] And putting them into an order. That is also a creative activity of God. It's something in which he acts as a, if you like, as a master craftsman. Taking what he himself has already created.

And then fashioning that into and designing that into what he has as his final plan and purpose for the creation to prepare for the coming of man.

And as we'll see also the coming of redemption. And here is what leads really to the appearance of dry land. There was no dry land as we know it up to this point.

We've read in the early part of the chapter when he created the heavens and the earth in the beginning. The earth was without form and void and darkness was over the face of the deep. So it appears that most of the earth at that time was liquid or water.

Certainly not the dry land as we know it now. Or as it came to be when God here separated the waters that are above the expanse from the waters that were below the expanse.

[3 : 41] In other words, what you know of nowadays as the waters that you find in the heavens. The rain, the water that's contained in the upper atmosphere. The water that comes to water the earth from that.

God separated that from the water that exists in the rivers and in the seas. Especially in the deep, in the waters of the seas. And he made a separation in that.

And that separation to God was important within the creation. That he separated it off waters from waters in order to let the dry land appear.

Now we don't know anything about the detail of how that happened. It simply was God's. It just simply described as God saying something as he did before.

And it happened. Then you come to verse 14. Where there is let there be lights in the expanse of the heavens to separate the day from the night.

[4 : 36] And as we mentioned at the beginning, this chapter really is giving us how in the whole of the vastness of creation, God's special interest is in the earth.

And God's special interest is in the earth because it's in that earth, in that planet, that things are going to take place which will be immensely important to God and to the human beings that he's going to create.

There are no human beings elsewhere. He placed them in this planet of earth. And that's why the focus comes to be so much on earth.

The heavens and the earth were created. The stars, all of these things were created. But the focus is especially on this planet, on earth. And what we're told here is that God said let there be lights in the expanse of the heavens, in the firmament, and that's to separate the day from the night.

Now we read earlier that God created light. And that the light came to be separate from the darkness. The light he called day and the darkness he called night.

[5 : 48] We mentioned at the time that some commentators think that the sun and the moon were created then, but we don't have a reference to it until you reach 14. But I think there's a need for us to, as we said then, to take note of the fact that light is not confined to what you find in reference to the sun and the moon.

The light of the sun, our sun, does not reach into the furthest parts of the universe. There are other objects there that emit and transmit light.

So light is something in itself that God created. And in order to bring light to the earth, both in day and night time, he created the sun and the moon to be specially set in the heavens so as to give light on the earth.

That is exactly what it's saying. Let there be lights in the expanse of the heaven to separate the day from the night. And let them be for signs and for seasons.

Let them be for lights in the expanse of heaven to give light on the earth. So light is now specific to the earth and to the life that's going to be found on earth.

[7 : 04] And as you know yourselves, it's not just human life that needs light. Plants, vegetation, animals need light. Plants don't grow properly without light.

They need light in order to photosynthesize, in order to perform the functions that leaves and other parts of plants have for the plant's development.

Light is crucial. The light of the sun is crucial to that. Without that light, they become spindly and would eventually just die. Of course, you translate that into spiritual language as well.

But we'll leave that for a moment. But here he is saying that the light was created, the sun and the moon, to give light upon the earth. And it was so. And God made the two great lights, the greater light to rule the night, the day and the lesser light to rule the night.

And he made the stars also. So the word created there, God made, applies to the stars as well. He made the two great lights and he made the stars also.

[8 : 12] And the sun and the moon established a pattern on earth of what you and I now call time.

Time is a very difficult thing to understand. I find it really fascinating and impossible to just take a grasp of everything that you find when you think about time.

I mean, tonight we're here at, what is it, just after 8 o'clock. If you go to America, it's whatever, 6, 7, 8, 9, depending which part of it is, hours before the time we are now living in.

If you go to the other side, to New Zealand, there on the other side of the spectrum, there 10, 12 hours ahead of us. There just now have ended the day and are into the early hours of the morning or even coming almost to the daylight again.

Time is a fascinating thing. But yet, wherever you are and whatever time it is on the earth, a day has 24 hours. Why does a day have 24 hours?

[9 : 17] Who actually invented the span of a day? Well, God did. God created it. God created it when he created the sun and the moon and the earth in relation to them and the turning of the earth on its axis in relation to the light of the sun and of the moon.

And it's in relation to that created order, the formation of that. It's creation and formation for the benefit of earth. God has calculated exactly what life on earth requires, both in terms of darkness as well as of light.

In terms of day and of night, God set the lights so that life on earth in all its forms would have the light specific and adequate and appropriate for it.

So when you look at your watch, you don't often think that God created the time that your watch is part of or your clock is part of.

But that is what it was. God creating and setting this order on the earth, between the earth and the sun and the moon, is the setting of what we come to know as time on earth.

[10 : 38] There are other parts of time you could go into, but I want to really come to the way that this is specifically mentioned, this reference to God creating these objects in our heavens and the stars as a polemic against idolatry.

This is a book written by Moses. God inspired Moses to write these first five books of the Bible. That's what we believe. Many liberal theologians dismiss that, don't even regard this account of creation.

Not just atheists, but liberal theologians who don't believe the inspiration of the Bible have come largely to reject this as accurate or reliable historical narrative or narrative describing how creation came about.

But what I'm really concerned about is, especially for the younger folks who are facing the theory of evolution as promoted in schools or through colleges, universities.

And it's a long-standing thing now, although it's still a theory. It's actually promoted pretty largely as if it were fact. And you don't find it being presented as a theory and mentioned as a theory.

[11 : 52] It's mentioned as if it had been established as fact. That life on earth began in the simplest form and that from that simplest form developed all the other different kinds of life that you now have over a long, long period of time needed for that development.

Millions if not billions of years as we know years in time. Millions if not. That's what is largely taught in classic evolutionism. And Moses, as he's inspired by God to set, this is set, remember, for the people of Israel.

This is set for people surrounded by paganism. Surrounded by ideas of the origin and the purpose of the world that contradict the teaching of God and the word of God.

It's not just for our day. This was true for the people of Israel and the people of Judah. And they should have seen, even from the account they had in Genesis, that God having created the sun and the moon and the stars, and God being in control of their order and where they're placed, and that they're there for the benefit of mankind, all of that should have steered them firmly away from the idolatry that came to venerate, to worship, to deify these objects.

Because all down the course of history, you've had that practice in paganism, in ungodly systems of belief, where from time to time and even to this day, the sun is worshipped, the moon is worshipped, the stars are worshipped.

[13 : 32] Remember, this was something that was true of this island. I'm saying was true of this island, for all we know, it may yet be true of some people in this island.

There's an account, for example, I don't know exactly what year it was, in the 1800s, perhaps, or even the early 1900s. Because I want to think that pagan superstition and practice was something that preceded the gospel, and once the gospel came, it immediately got rid of such superstition and practice from everybody's minds.

That wasn't the case. There's an account of a woman who was seen. This was witnessed by another woman who told her son about it.

And her son has related this in certain accounts of it. The woman, at night or on a bright evening with moonlight, saw this other woman taking earth from a neighbouring croft and throwing it into her own croft and at the same time worshipping the moon.

The moon was bright in the sky, and here was this woman taking earth from this field of this other woman, a field that grew nice crops, and she was taking the earth into her own field and worshipping the moon.

[14 : 56] Why? Because she believed in the power of the moon to do things. In other words, to transfer the fertility of her neighbouring croft into her own.

To make our stuff grow as well as if not better than our neighbours. To steal the power, to steal the might, the ability, the fertility of that croft and transplant it into her own.

That was believed as a pagan superstitious belief, and it was just a couple of miles from here. The gospel came into our island and into other places, such as you find in the cities that Paul mentions when he went there with the gospel.

Pagan superstition was rife. As he went through Athens, he was absolutely struck with the sheer amount of idols, the number of idols that were virtually in every door and every house that were in the streets of Athens.

Now, that's something that this is directed against. These verses are there so that Israel would know for sure that they had no right and no human being had a right to worship these objects.

[16:24] They had been created by God. They were not gods. They were not influential. They were not able to influence human life. They were there because God created them and set them where they are.

And set them in the courses that they have. Now, it's still the case that you find certain kinds of practice current in our day that are pretty much the same as the sort of things we've mentioned. You find people thinking about the arrangement of the planets, the arrangement of the stars. You young people will come across that in things like magazines. Maybe you'll find some people in school.

And you adults as well will find people who consult things in newspapers or whatever. Just daily to consult the stars. And there are people who make millions from pretending to be experts in predicting your future depending on the arrangement of the planets and the stars and where they're set.

And the horoscope, it's not just something that's harmlessly neutral.

[17:37] It's not just a pleasant pastime. It's not just something that the Bible sort of passes over as if it didn't really matter. The Bible is very graphically against it.

Why? Because it's idolatrous. And everything that's an idol is an offense to God. And you see, what these people had done was either reject God altogether.

These people that Israel were surrounded by, the Canaanites and other tribes that they eventually came to live amongst. And having set aside a proper idea of God, they then set up their own ideas of God.

And they fashioned their own God, sometimes out of metal, sometimes out of wood. And it doesn't matter what we replace God with. Whether it's that sort of thing, you'd probably think it ridiculous. Now, in our circumstances, just to go out, cut down a tree and make a little statue out of it, and actually then bow yourself down to it. It happens in other parts of the world for sure.

[18:42] But you and I might think, well, that's a bit ludicrous to think of that in our country. But then you find practices like reading the stars and consulting horoscopes and going to people who pretend to be able to read your hand or whatever it is to predict the future for you.

That is idolatrous. That is actually taking the place of God as the director of your life. As the one who alone has control over people's lives. Whose influence through the gospel is the influence that we want our lives developed under.

And that's why the Bible treats idolatry as really serious stuff. It's not neutral. It's not harmless. It's serious because God's displeasure is drawn to it. Why did he speak so frequently to Israel, to Judah, through the prophets, from passages in passages such as we read in Isaiah in chapter 44. Why did God, through Isaiah, ridicule the practice of idolatry? And what a fantastic passage that is as you read through it. Read through it again tonight. Read through it slowly.

[19:54] And look at how Isaiah sets about ridiculing the practice of idolatry. Showing it up in its futility and its foolishness and its sinfulness. Because here, he says, is a craftsman making an object of worship.

And the craftsman gets tired. And he has to go and eat. And he uses part of what he's making into a god to cook his food on. And yet Isaiah says, they don't actually discern.

They're so blind in their idolatry that they don't really appreciate how ludicrous it is that you would fall down before the same sort of thing as you yourself have created and as you cook your dinner on.

You see, idolatry makes you blind to the most important things. And when you go through to the passage we read in Romans, you can see, and we've mentioned this before, in the Canaanites.

That the Canaanite religion was a horrible religion because it had in its practices things which were what you and I would now call seriously immoral practices.

[21 : 10] Sexual deviation and debauchery. And when you read through Romans chapter 1 and you see how that chapter ends, with human beings leaving the order that God himself had set, as we'll see when we come to the creation of human beings, for a man and a woman, or a man and a wife together.

When they had abandoned that, men with men, women with women, that's what it's like in our generation.

That's what's promoted. That's what's seen in terms of equality with what you and I would call marriage or proper relations. And what does the passage say?

Well, it says that it began with them not accepting what the creation itself clearly set forth of God. His eternal power and Godhead.

And because they were setting that aside or just stamping it down really is the kind of idea there. It wasn't that they didn't know this. But they debased the knowledge they had.

[22 : 21] And instead of that, worshipping the true God as they should, they made all kinds of carved images out of the shape of animals and human beings and creeping things.

And then God gave them over to further debauchery. And it's out of that that you get these debauched relations. And out of that you get the sinful lifestyles that Romans 1 mentions.

In other words, you could say, sinful lifestyles today that actually include homosexual practice and such things as the Bible denounces. Sinful practice, sinful practice, sinful practice, such as making things like adultery or relations out with marriage acceptable and valid.

Where does all that come from? It comes from idolatry. It comes from human beings elevating their own minds above the mind of God.

And when you put your own mind above the mind of God, there's no telling what you'll end up with. Especially when you read there that God gives you over to that mind and just lets you get carried away with it.

[23 : 38] That's what's really frightening. It's not that human beings can actually reach the point where they put God aside or make images of God or elevate their own thinking and just forget about God altogether.

And this Bible is that God looks on from heaven and says at a point of his own choosing, whenever he chooses, it's not for us to say, but at a point of his own choosing, he says, well, fine.

That's how you want it. Get on with it. Get on with it.

All of that is again directed as worship to the God who is creator and redeemer. And designed as well as that at the same time to be a polemic.

A polemic is really just an argument against or a strong argument against something. It's against idolatry here. That polemic, that strong argument against is also found in the Psalms.

[25 : 06] And it's a wonderful thing. Kenny mentioned how wonderful I think it is to be given the privilege of leading God's people in prayer. That really is so.

Maybe we don't appreciate that very much, but it is. But it's also a huge privilege to realize what it is God has given us to sing. And not only can we read the Psalms in their polemic against idolatry.

We can sing praise to God using these words. The words that God has given against idolatry. We use the same words in praise to God. We use the same words in praising Him.

In singing His praises. In extolling and exalting His virtues as the creator of the universe. As the redeemer of His people.

And as we do so, we come ourselves virtually to weep over the idolatry of our day as well. How could human beings do this to God?

[26 : 11] How could they be so stupid and so blind as to worship the creature more than the creator? Rather than the creator.

But that is idolatry. And that's why it's serious. And remember this as well. That although we've become very used to the idea of a multi-faith society.

And very used to the idea that other so-called faiths are placed on the same level as Christianity.

And if some people think that others are more valid than Christianity, then that's okay.

You just have to leave them like that. You mustn't try and go to them with the gospel to try and change their minds. You and I have to remember what God says.

You shall have no other gods before me. That's the bottom line. Everything that's worshipped instead of God.

[27 : 15] And every worship that pretends to worship God by means of idolatry. God specifically denounces. And you know that's God in his kindness.

Showing human beings the error of their ways. That's why it's so serious. That human beings decide to ignore it. To turn it aside.

To do their own thing. That's why of course the gospel is so important to us as reaching into an idolatrous world. A world that's filled with its own sense of its own importance instead of God.

Because only the gospel can change human minds into the minds that worship the true God as creator and redeemer.

Secondly there's creation and multiplication. Which involves the multiplication of all of these things that we mentioned there that we read through in the chapter.

[28 : 23] The vegetation, the animals and so on. The fish and the animals versus 11 to 12. 20 to 25. We're not going to go through that. But I want to pick up two things that again is important.

Firstly how that contradicts classic evolution. That this happened over a series of loads of billions of years. And that you have a development from simple life into the most complex in terms of human complexity.

And what a complex being a human being is. Just very briefly. God created each species of life. Separate from every other species. Evolutionists will tell you that from the very simplest form. All the life that you know now has actually evolved.

The Bible tells you every species of animal and indeed of plant was created like that by God in the beginning. Now that doesn't mean there's no development within a certain species.

[29 : 32] So that takes on characteristics that differ from the way it first started. For example you find that in agriculture things are worked so that.

For example you take an animal, a cow that's got a very high milk yield. And you can take that and breed from it down through a number of years. Until you've eventually got a herd of very high yielding milk cattle.

That's development within a species. But it doesn't turn that cow into a goat. Or into something other than a cow. And it's quite well known that the people of St Kilda had developed very large big toes.

And people think that it's because they actually had so much of their time spent climbing rocks and climbing cliffs. They developed specially strong feet.

And larger big toes than usual. So we understand. But that didn't turn them into monkeys. It didn't turn them into another species. It's a development within a species.

[30 : 42] Given the environment they're in. And there's nothing wrong with thinking that. Because the Bible doesn't actually teach anything against that. What it does teach is that one species does not turn into another species.

And a whole lot of inter-species are in between. In the sort of in between stages. Which evolutionists, despite all the efforts, have never found an in between one species and another. Nor will they. Because God created the species to begin with. That's the first thing there is against classic evolution. Teaching there as well as against idolatry.

Secondly, creation and multiplication is a preparation for mankind's arrival. It's wonderful the way you read through this chapter all the way down until you come to verse 26.

And everything before verse 26 is preparation for what God did when he created man. By the time Adam was created.

[31 : 54] And then Eve of course as well. By the time Adam was created. God was ready with the best and the most fitting environment for him.

He was just created into. A wonderful environment. Rich with everything that he needed. And that was prepared for him before he was created himself.

So everything there is a preparation for the arrival, for the coming of the pinnacle of creation. Which is mankind. Human beings. And there is a parallel with that preparation in our redemption.

Jesus said in John 14. As the disciples began to appreciate what he meant. In terms of his going away. That he was serious about it. And how were they going to cope.

And how would they survive without him. Let not your heart be troubled. In my father's house. There are many mansions or dwelling places. I am going to prepare a place for you.

[33 : 04] If I go and prepare a place for you. I will come again and receive you to myself. That where I am there you may be also. And then you go through the Bible. 1 Peter chapter 1 verses 3 to 4.

Where Peter speaks there about being born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. Unto an inheritance uncorruptible and defiled. Reserved in heaven for you.

Who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation. What does he say? He say the same as what happened in Genesis chapter 1. In the literal environment.

Physical environment. That God had ready for Adam. Well he is telling us God has the environment of heaven actually ready for us to go into when the time comes. You are being prepared for it.

But it is already prepared for you Peter is saying. And isn't that a rich concept as well. That you think of God having gone to all the trouble.

[34 : 04] Including the death and resurrection of his son. To prepare that environment of glory of heaven. So that you and I when we would come to be placed there.

Will find it already and prepared. Perfectly adapted for. Perfectly shaped. Perfectly provided.

For the kind of beings. Glorified human beings will be. And it is no accident at all that the Bible finishes in the book of Revelation.

With imagery that strongly borrows from the imagery of Genesis 1 and Genesis 2. Let me just finish with a reading from these passages.

Chapters 20 to 21 and 22 especially. When you find for example chapter 21 verses 1 to 5. I saw a new heaven and a new earth.

[35 : 07] For the first heaven and the first earth had passed away. And the sea was no more. And then it goes on to speak about the new Jerusalem. And God saying that the former things have passed away.

And he was seated on the throne and said behold. I am making all things new. Go then to verses 22 and 23.

I saw no temple in the city. For its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb. And the city has no need of the sun or moon to shine on it.

For the glory of God gives it its light. And its lamp is the Lamb. There is no more sea. There is no more sun. There is no more moon. It is a new creation.

But light still exists. More than ever before. For human beings. It is the light of Christ. The light of the Saviour in himself.

[36 : 04] And then you go to chapter 22. Where you read. The angel showed me the river of the water of life. Flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb. Through the middle of the street and on either side of the river.

The tree of life. With the twelve manner of fruits. Yielding its fruit each month. No longer will there be anything cursed. But the throne of God and the Lamb will be in it.

And the servants will worship them. They will need no light of lamp or sun. For the Lord God will be their light. And they will reign forever and ever.

There is the pinnacle of God's creation. Glorified human life. With God.

In glory. The separation. Of what is to come. From what is now. There was a song.

[37 : 04] Seventies I think. If I remember rightly. Called. On top of the world. Those who were listening to songs of that type. Will know it was by the Seekers.

I think. If I'm not wrong. But it went something like this. I'm on the top of the world. Looking down on creation. And the only explanation I can find. Is the love that I found.

Ever since you've been around. Your love's put me. On the top of the world. Of course that was used. As a love song. People in love. To sing to each other.

But let's adapt it. Let's think of the love of God. Let's think of our praising God. In terms of our creation. And redemption.

And finally glorification. Let's think of it as something. That you could apply to. Looking down on creation. From your pinnacle of glory. I'm on the top of the world.

[38 : 01] Looking down on creation. And the only explanation I can find. Is the love that I found. Ever since you came around. Your love's put me.

On the top. Of the world. Let's pray. Almighty God. We thank you. For that power.

That created us. And redeemed us. And the power. That has prepared for us. That glorious future. That destiny. That inheritance. That you have promised.

To your people. That they know by faith. Is as real. As the world. They see around them. Lord. We thank you. That that will never fail. Of it being fulfilled. And that as the hope.

Of your people. Reaches towards. That glorious inheritance. We thank you too. That they are kept. By your power. Through faith. And to. That salvation.

[39 : 00] Oh Lord. Help us. We pray. To give you thanks. For the way. That you have given us. A mind. That accepts. Your word. And its teaching. For the way.

That you have brought us. Out of. Human superstition. And pagan ideas. For the way. That you have united us. To your truth. And to the truthfulness.

Of your written word. Help us to prize this. Oh Lord. To seek day by day. Further illumination. And teaching. And direction. From your spirit. Grant that as we.

Express. Our thankfulness. To you. That we may seek. To acquaint. The world. Of our day. With these great issues. Hear us now. We pray. For Jesus sake.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

[39 : 54] Amen. Amen.