

Lecture 21 – The Work of God: Creation (cont.); Providence

“Blessed be your glorious name, and may it be exalted above all blessing and praise. You alone are the Lord. You made the heavens, even the highest heavens, and all their starry host, the earth and all that is on it, the seas and all that is in them. You give life to everything, and the multitudes of heaven worship you.” *Nehemiah 9:5b-6*

Key Terms

Source, one, sovereign, unique, creation as good, preservation, government, concurrence

Objectives

- *Consider and summarize the significance of asserting the doctrine of creation.
- *Identify, locate, and summarize Scripture’s teaching on various aspects of providence.
- *Explore implications for Christian discipleship of the doctrine of God’s providence.

The Work of God: Creation (cont.)

II. Theological Significance of the Doctrine of Creation

- A. God is the source of all things.
- B. One God is the sovereign LORD: polemic against polytheism
 1. God has no rivals.
 2. The polytheistic worldview
 - a. The gods hold only a local sovereignty.
 - b. The gods are not separate from the world.
- C. God is utterly different from what He creates.
 1. The world is not divine.
 2. A two-factor worldview
- D. God’s creative act is unique.
 1. It is unlike human creative acts.
 2. God’s creativity is bounded only by His will.
 3. Importance of the doctrine of God
 - a. God is never frustrated by His works.
 - b. Rejection of chaos interpretation of Genesis 1
 4. Import for doctrine of man: God creates; humans fashion.
- E. Creation is good. Nothing created is intrinsically evil.
 1. Augustine: “Whatever is, is good.”
 2. Cosmological dualism is contrary to the biblical doctrine of creation.
 3. The biblical worldview (Creator/creation distinction) over against the Greek (mind/matter distinction [dualism]).
- F. Implications of the goodness of creation
 1. The goodness of creation thrusts moral responsibility upon man.
 - a. Moral norms come from, within, and through the structure of creation.
 - b. Man cannot justify immoral behavior by blaming an evil creation.
 2. Creation is to be a part of, rather than eclipsed by, Christian piety.
 3. Asceticism is not a biblically legitimate method of spirituality.
 4. All of creation is creature, and therefore good (Matt. 6:26-30; 10:29).
 5. No autonomous nature.

Providence

I. Preservation

- A. Is God's providence a present reality or merely a primeval constitution?
 - 1. Planning
 - 2. Present, active maintenance
 - 3. Deism
- B. The biblical foundation for divine preservation
 - 1. Nehemiah 9:5-7
 - 2. Isaiah 40:12-31
 - 3. Psalm 148
 - 4. Hebrews 1:3
 - 5. Colossians 1:15-17
- C. A response to deistic notions of providence (an autonomous physical universe)
 - 1. Neither God nor His creation can be abstracted from the other.
 - 2. God does not will to be God apart from the world.
 - a. God does not will the creation to be the creation apart from Him.
 - 3. God's promise/faithfulness keeps the creation together and working.

II. Government

- A. Creation is a dynamic reality.
- B. Man as the vice-regent of God
 - 1. God's original intention
 - 2. Man's failure
- C. The kingdom of God
- D. Government includes sustenance (Psalm 33)
- E. The extent of divine government
 - 1. God sustains and directs the universe (Ps. 103:19; Dan. 4:35).
 - 2. God governs the natural order (Ps. 135:6-7; 104:14-15; Mt. 5:45; 6:25-30).
 - 3. God governs the angels, including Satan (Ps. 103:20-21; Job 1:12).
 - 4. God governs the nations (Ps. 47:7-9; Dan. 2:20-21; 4:34-35).
 - 5. God governs human beings (1 Sam. 2:6-7; Gal. 1:15-16; Ps. 31:14-15).
 - 6. God governs animals (Ps. 104:21-30; 1 Kg. 17:4-6).
 - 7. God governs the free actions of people (Ex 3:21; 12:35-36; Ez. 7:27).
 - 8. God governs over sinful actions (Acts 2:23; 2 Sam. 24:1; 1 Chron. 21:1).
 - 9. God governs accidental occurrences (Prov. 16:33; Mt. 10:29).

III. Concurrence

- A. God and man together in history in covenantal relationship
- B. What concurrence is not
 - 1. It is not to be understood through Aristotelian categories of causality.
 - 2. Concurrence is not a synergistic division of labor.
- C. The covenantal realities of Scripture
 - 1. God is sovereign over and active in all His works.
 - 2. Human beings are responsible for their historical cultural behaviors.

“Scripture nowhere suggests that God’s work is limited by human activity or that God’s activity negates human enterprise...He who understands well biblical teaching of God’s government knows that it is no despotism, compulsion, or sort of overpowering which renders real creaturely activity null or impossible. He knows that it is a divine ruling in and over all creaturely enterprise.”

“God writes history with the acts of man. That is the terrible seriousness of history, that God works in it and man is responsible for it. Behind all views of concurrence...the reality of history must be seen.”

G. D. Berkouwer