



THE WHOLE COUNSEL OF GOD

PART 2 : CREATION

CORNERSTONE
CHURCH

EQUIPPING
COURSES

THE WHOLE COUNSEL OF GOD PART 2: CREATION

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THE WHOLE COUNSEL OF GOD PT 2: CREATION

INTRODUCTION

Welcome to the second part of our Equipping course on doctrine entitled *The Whole Counsel of God*. In the first part of our course we covered *Knowing God* and in this part we will cover *Creation*.

Doctrine is a summary or set of teaching on a certain subject in scripture. You create a doctrine by accumulating all that is revealed in the Bible about a certain topic and drawing it all together to form a conclusion.

The many broad topics which form a doctrine are what are discussed in this course. Understanding the many subjects in the Bible is a very important part of the Christian life.

The purpose of *The Whole Counsel of God* series is not to teach a particular set of doctrines as much as teach how we can come to form solid, good, liveable, Biblical doctrine. This is about strengthening our faith and using the Scriptures in the way God intended. It's no good

just learning set out doctrines from a textbook at a theological seminary. Sooner or later in our Christian life we will be faced with many other doctrines, and if we don't have a solid conviction of our own, these other doctrines can undo us and perhaps even shipwreck our faith. (See 1 Timothy 1.)

Knowing God, living with Him and in Him, is the point of doctrine and theology. In the first part of our course we cover this in more detail. What makes this Cornerstone Church course slightly different to other works on this topic is that it attempts to be practical. What we mean by this is that we are emphasizing the 'therefore' part of the teaching. For example, in this part on creation we will find out that God is ultimately in full control of His creation and therefore we can live free from anxiety and worry.

We aim to apply the teaching extensively. Sometimes we will even choose to leave out some of the extensive theoretical debate in order to favour application.

The overall theme of this second part of our Whole Counsel of God course is this: **God is behind it all.** It marries the doctrinal teaching on creation, providence and man. What He has made, how He has made you and I to be, and how he now relates to all of this are the major questions that need answering. We will attempt to provide these big answers while dealing with some of the smaller questions as well.

Approaching a doctrine of creation

As with anyone attempting to compile a doctrinal teaching there are many issues clouding the water. This is the case when wanting to try and compile any comprehensive teaching in the Bible. Creation is

particularly messy at this point in time. The Bible-science controversy has made it difficult to present a doctrine without much added pressure. Michael Eaton believes that our strong Greek philosophical heritage also affects our approach to creation. Akin to this there are numerous experts today who have made creation their field of expertise. Some of the supposed experts don't even have a degree in Bible interpretation. With the coming of the Internet information is widely disseminated by any source and there is no safeguard.

Knowing this in advance can help us understand that it's even more important for us to approach this carefully. The guiding principle will be to interpret Scripture and let it teach us what it wishes to before we bring our questions to it. There is no problem bringing questions to the Bible, we just need to know how to go about not forcing the Bible to answer in detail what it doesn't.

It's also problematic when we attempt to fill in all the gaps in our understanding. It is a fairly common problem. There are a lot of things where we have to honestly answer and say, 'I don't know'. It's not that we don't know anything, or that we shouldn't seek to know things, it's just that we don't always understand how the revealed truth fits together.

For example, how can Jesus be one hundred percent human and one hundred percent God? How does the Trinity really work? We don't know. We know some truth about these matters but we don't really know exactly how it works out. It's best to simply understand the truth revealed and then enjoy living with it. The Trinity is hard to understand but you can live with God being three persons. In fact, it's actually quite easy. Jesus's exact nature is a mystery but yet you can live with this man in heaven!

The doctrine of creation is much the same. We can't know exactly how God put it all together but we sure can enjoy that He did! We can enjoy his creation without having to understand everything about it.

We will take a careful and slow approach to this subject. As with all of our courses we've consulted extensive material to put it together. The material consulted for this course was:

Michael Eaton:

- *Whole counsel of God* teaching series (available at <http://cornerstonechurch.co.za/the-whole-counsel-of-god/>)
- 6-part teaching on providence preached at Westminster Chapel
- Preaching Through the Bible: Genesis 1-11

Wayne Grudem: *Systematic Theology* (ISBN 978-0310286707)

J Rodman Williams: *Renewal Theology* (ISBN 978-0310209140)

Millard Erickson: *Systematic Theology* (ISBN 978-0801036439)

David Atkinson: *The Bible Speaks Today: Genesis*

(ISBN 978-0830812295)

Tremper Longman: *How to read Genesis* (ISBN 978-0877849438)

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CONTENTS

Part One: God created everything.....9

Part Two: Asking the right questions.....18

Part Three: God made us.....32

Part Four: Man made glorious.....42

Part Five: The world is under God's control.....67

Part Six: God is behind it all.....55

Part One:

GOD CREATED EVERYTHING

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" (ESV).

Genesis 1:1

"In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth" (ESV).

This first part will cover the teachings of Scripture regarding creation that are most clear and agreed upon. The second part will move towards the more debated issues regarding the teaching of creation.

Upon approaching a teaching on creation it would be good for us to

understand that what we are dealing with is a revelation from God. Much like the rest of Scripture there is faith required to believe and to understand what has been made. The point of the Hebrews text quoted above is that the Christian community can know on a very deep level that the same God who has made them new and given them new birth also created everything we see in this world.

There are three reasons a Christian believes in creation: (1) revelation, (2) faith, (3) Scripture. God reveals Himself and His works which we believe to be true and then what we know is true is proven as such by the Scriptures.

How to read Genesis

This question might not seem as important to you as it actually is. Genesis 1-11 explains to us the origins of the major components of life. Our understanding of creation, man, sin, marriage, family, faith and more are all formed in Genesis. If you have read Genesis however you will find some puzzling language and imagery inside it. A talking serpent and angels sleeping with women are bizarre for a historical narrative.

Whatever the name for the genre and style of Genesis there are two important truths that we must see. Firstly, Genesis is *history*. It portrays the history of the world, its people and especially God's people. Whatever Genesis says historically is accurate. It is to be taken as literally as any historical narrative would. Secondly, Genesis is *written creatively*. It uses *picture language* to tell us about real, historical events. The exact name given to the style of writing is under intense debate but what is not argued is that some parts of Genesis are not academic, plain narrative. Some call it 'theological history'

others 'history in a parabolic style'. It is not a history textbook.

For instance, the snake is certainly a picture of Satan. So did a serpent actually speak? Considering the genre we must answer this question carefully. While it remains fully possible that a snake can talk, a better answer may be that Satan communicated with Eve and that is what the Genesis narrative is telling us. In other words, the historical, literal fact is that Satan communicated with Eve, but exactly how it happened is left to how the account is told. It is not the important question to ask. What might be an important question, however, is why Satan is portrayed as a snake, or why he was in the garden, and so on and so forth. We need to allow Genesis to teach us what it sets out to do in its own style.

The important task is coming to the conclusion of what the book is in fact teaching. What we are saying by this is that Genesis is more interested in teaching us that God made it all than it is teaching that 'this is exactly how he made it'. It is crucial to grasp this.

The praise test

If you were to begin to dig into all the theories and ideas out there about creation you would very quickly become confused. How could we possibly know we were walking down the right road? Here is one test: Does your understanding of creation lead you to praise God for what He has done? If it doesn't you're on the wrong road. Biblical evidence shows that people who grasp creation marvel and wonder in a deep humility that leads to praise.

Psalm 148 praises the Lord for His creation. Verse 5 then praises Him for making all of it. Likewise Psalm 104 begins with praise from the soul

and then moves to explain why to praise – look at all He has made! Psalm 145:5 tells us to meditate on His works of creation.

Let's now begin where the Bible begins at Genesis 1:1: "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth" (ESV). This tells us more than what at first meets the eye.

An important fact of creation is that God was already there

God was not created. As far back as our minds can imagine God has been around. He was there before 'the beginning' of creation. This boggles the mind. The Hebrews way of using the word 'beginning' usually refers to the beginning of an event or period. God was there before He began to create.

Automatically this excludes a number of creation ideas out there:

- Atheism – people who believe there is no God at all.
- Polytheism – people who believe in more than one God. There was only one God before creation. If there were others, and there are not, they were made by this one and cannot be equal with Him in any way.
- Pantheism – this refers to any teaching that says God *is* creation, or that a *part* of creation is God. This is clearly not taught in this verse (or any verses).
- Eternal matter – some people believe that matter has always existed, that matter is eternal. This is not what we see in these verses.
- Fate – this is a belief that there are powers out of our control that are making things happen. 'Mother nature' (Gaia) is the

queen of fate. This is not right. Fate is not the controller or maker, God is.

This verse introduces us to a God who has always existed and is utterly self-sufficient. His existence is *apart* from creation. He is not part of creation other than being the creator of it. His fingerprints are on it but he is not it or has not become it. It follows then that all that God has made is His. The ultimate owner, author and power is the God who made it.

There are further implications to this:

- The world, the way it runs and should run is up to God to decide.
- This is why sin exists. To be out of touch with God means to be out of touch with the one who has sovereign rights and control over the universe.
- The world, the way it runs and should run are within God's ability to control.
- This means that God is more than able to control our lives.

Another important fact of creation is that God made the universe from nothing at all

When Genesis 1 says He made the 'heavens and earth' it means He made everything and there was nothing before this moment. This phrase is much like the phrase 'from Dan to Beersheba' which means everything in all Israel. Colossians 1:16 has the same sentiment: "In Him all things were created... visible and invisible". There is nothing that exists that God didn't make Himself by His own words. He made the

physical world but also the spiritual world. Every power, every angel, was made by Him. Absolutely nothing exists that God didn't make.

Can you see why thoughts of His creation are supposed to end in praise? Nothing is out of His control! He made it, knows how it works and runs it perfectly. He has perfect knowledge of everything at all times. The Lord who calls us to be His own is nothing less than the creator of it all. Who else need be on our side? Equally though, how terrible to be against Him!

Further, we are to know that God made it all from nothing. The direct emphasis of Hebrews 11:3 is "so that what is seen was not made out of things that are visible." God made everything from absolutely nothing.

The implications of this point are positive and negative. Negatively, if a person believes that matter is eternal then God fails to be sovereign, independent and the only one worthy of worship. "What right has God to demand that He be ruler if matter always existed?" asks Wayne Grudem. Positively, if God made everything then all He has made has purpose and meaning.

It is important to realise that God's work of creation is a completed work

The process of creation is finished. The word 'created' implies that God is finished with the work. God was satisfied with His workmanship in making the world. He made it and considered it 'good' (Genesis 1:31). To use and enjoy the world is right and what we are supposed to do. Although sin has caused catastrophic trouble in the world, God's goodness is still in it and can still be readily seen. Our role still remains the same as it was originally - enjoy and steward this amazing creation

made especially for us.

This is seen in Genesis 1:2. "The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters." This Scripture tells us two things we are missing in this early stage of creation: *form* and *occupation*. The earth was to be specially formed for its inhabitants. It was also void, it was being made for us but we were not on it yet. The rest of the creation account tells us how these two things came about. The whole universe was made for us and we were placed in it! How wonderful. All of this for each of us!

There is a view of creation that is becoming more widely spread that concerns us at this point. You may have heard of *process theology*. This is a doctrine that claims that God in 'process', figuring out in real-time the best response to what people do freely. He is learning about his creation as it develops and figuring out how best to deal with it. But this is not true. God has finished making the universe. Although it is alive and full of activity and many things seem new, this is not the case. All that can be known is known by Him. The creation with all its vastness, infinite complexity and all that is still to be invented and done is all as God made it to be. Man is just discovering what was already there. God is not figuring it out; He knows everything there is to know about it already. He has already saved it from destruction. Jesus was slain before the world was even made (Revelation 13:8) -- He saved it before He made it! It is completed. There will never be an anomaly, secret power or unknown force that could interfere. Nothing other than what God made in full knowledge exists!

This is also important for the Christian who is concerned with the many mysteries out there. Aliens, other galaxies and other life forms,

time travel and all the conspiracy theories of the universe are all known by God. No need to worry. We will still need the Lord Jesus to save us no matter what happens tomorrow! All these things won't change what God has revealed to be true. Jesus is His final word. Even if we were to relocate to live with five-headed friendly monsters on the planet Zoron we would still need to be in relationship with the God of creation as man's primary purpose.

Why God created the world is only His to know

The absence of 'because' in Genesis 1:1 is a significant omission. God created the universe because it was His will to do it. He doesn't need to explain His reasons for doing this. Revelation 4:11 says, "Worthy are you, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honour and power, for you created all things, and by **your will** they existed and were created." It pleased Him to create for reasons that are solely His.

Scripture does hint of another reason for creation though: the glory of God. Angels cry in Isaiah 6:3, "The whole earth is full of His glory!" The universe was to be the manifestation of His goodness, mercy, power, truth and wisdom. All that God is is a God of glory. "God did not create the world for His own satisfaction or self-fulfilment, but to allow all of creation to share the richness, the wonder, the glory of Himself," says J Rodman Williams.

We do know of one reason God didn't create the world: necessity. Some writers have put forward this strange idea that God needed something to love. He was lonely and needed fellowship. Wrong. Acts 17:25 clearly states that God needs absolutely nothing. He didn't create the world out of any need or pressure or longing. He is not frustrated, subject to forces of evil or ever pressured to act. He created simply

because it was His will. God is complete without creation.

We will do well to let the Scriptures teach us what we are to know about this world God has made. Let it lead to praise as we ponder God and all that he has made.

Part Two:

ASKING THE RIGHT QUESTIONS

In the previous section we covered the major background ideas of creation that should be grasped. We briefly touched on why God created the universe. Now we will look briefly at how and when He created. Again we will proceed slowly. The huge controversy and argument that has polarised Christianity from science in recent years is regrettable, but hopefully we can avoid going down unnecessary tangents.

Asking the right questions

Most of the controversy that has arisen hinges around the Bible seemingly disproving science or science seemingly disproving the Bible. Having heard the endless arguments it becomes a challenging

task to read these scriptures afresh. But it is a process we must go through. The key questions to ask are: "Why did the Holy Spirit have Genesis 1-2 included in the Bible? and "What are we to gain from reading Genesis 1-2?" Knowing exactly what the limitations and purposes of Genesis are will help us a great deal in our task.

A further principle to establish in the beginning is the willingness to say, "We do not know." Many Christians are comfortable with this. Many aren't. Surely there are many things we don't completely know. But that is not to say that we don't know anything and Christianity is a faith based on nothing else but myth. Not true. We know an awful lot about what we need to know. We know about salvation; we know about God's character; and a large amount of other topics in Christianity. But when we look at the exact way in which God created there are some things we simply do not know.

Equally, science should be willing to admit the same. Science is ever changing. Many assumptions are not as certain as we would hope. Humility on both sides will save many people from losing out on what is a wonderful doctrine.

Consider these facts before deciding whether Genesis is telling us exactly when and how God created the universe:

- **The Bible's whole emphasis**

The Bible is given to teach people primarily about God. The first question we are to ask when reading it is, "What does this teach us about God?" The second question is, "What does this teach us about what God has done and is doing?" We are going to be using these questions when we read Genesis 1-2 and see what the passages teach

us about God and his creation. However, we might find the second question is not answered in as much detail as the first.

- **Near Eastern traditions**

Another important hermeneutical task is to read Genesis in the context of its own world and time. The book wasn't written in a vacuum. There are at least three credible creation accounts from the near eastern world from non-Jewish sources. When scholars look at these accounts they note that Genesis clearly and even deliberately opposes some of those accounts. The writer(s) of the book didn't have scientific evolutionary thoughts on their mind when they wrote it -- they would have been thinking of their place and time.

Egyptian texts

- Acts of creation are attributed to various deities.
- Creation emerged out of the waters of Nun.
- The creator god Atum or Amon-Re emerged from the waters in an act of self-creation. He emerged from a primeval mound of dirt similar to soil left behind when Nile flood waters subside.
- Humans were created by the tears of the god of the sun.

Mesopotamia

- The oldest deities are Apsu and Tiamat. The waters under the earth and the sea produced the next generations of gods.
- The heavens and earth came about after generational tussles between different gods. It ends in a battle between Marduk and Tiamat. Marduk lets loose a wind from his stomach that

shoots an arrow into the stomach of Tiamat, killing her. Marduk splits the body of Tiamat 'like a drying fish'. The splits become the earth and the heavens.

- Marduk executes Quignu, the demon god, for his crimes, and his blood is used to make humanity.
- This blood is used by Enlil the creative god. Enlil kills one of the lesser 'good' gods and mixes the two bloods with clay to make humanity.

Canaan

- Israel has close relations with the Caananites in the Old Testament accounts and would have been familiar with their gods. So we can expect there to be some contrast with these gods in the Old Testament.
- Their main gods are Baal, El, Asherah and Anat.
- Very little exists in writing about their beliefs.
- The main idea of their creation story is a conflict story between two gods, Baal and Yam. Baal battles, defeats and drinks Yam. What is believed to have followed is similar to the Mesopotamian account in principle.

Background from Longman: How to read Genesis

Similarities to the above accounts:

- A period of chaos followed by order.
- The making of man from the elements.

Differences to the above accounts:

- Yahweh created the cosmos. Marduk, Baal, Atum and all the other gods never did that great act.
 - Yahweh is unrivalled, unlike the previous accounts, where there are great battles and power struggles between gods.
 - The personal attention to creation by Yahweh versus a seeming by-product.
 - The great care and attention by Yahweh in making man versus the little respect humanity receives in the other accounts.
-
- **Genesis counter teaching**

From this small little survey it comes clear that one of the main purposes of the Genesis authors was to explain the nature of the Creator through contrasting him with the other myths at the time. The contrasts are striking. While this may not be all that Genesis is doing it certainly is supposed to counter near eastern teaching.

But we can draw principles from this that are relevant for us today. What we learn from the Genesis account unique to Yahweh against other gods is fundamental to the faith:

- God created everything. He is not a created being.
- There is no rival to Yahweh. Yahweh is one God.
- He ordered creation and made it the exact way he wanted it to be made.
- Yahweh makes man out of the earth and fills him with His own breath.

- Man is created to work in God's creation but Adam and Eve in the garden have dignity and purpose. They don't exist just to please grumpy gods.

Again Genesis may be doing more than answering the other ideas of the day but it is certainly doing that as well. One of the rules of interpreting Scripture is to 'find out what it was saying to that time and to those people' and then realise the principles stay the same. In other words 'it is saying to us now what it was saying to them, then'.

- **Taking evolution to Genesis**

So now we come to the present day. As we read Genesis we need to ask the right questions. It seems to be widely assumed today that Genesis was written to answer the theory of evolution. It surely can, in its own way, but what needs to be determined is exactly what it says. It would seem odd that the original writers were thinking of evolution when they wrote this account!

Before we get to some of the answers we would do well to first realise that the three main schools of thought: creationism (creation science), intelligent design, and evolution have grounds on which they base their theories on. While there is something to be said of the different definition of a scientific 'theory' and the way we usually use the word 'theory' (the former is based on repeated testing and confirmation through observation and experimentation) it is important to understand that science is an ever-changing discipline that doesn't claim to have all the answers. "No theory [of science] is ever considered strictly certain as science accepts the concept of fallibilism." (Wikipedia.) 'Fallibilism' is "the philosophical principle that

human beings could be wrong about their beliefs, expectations, or their understanding of the world, and yet still be justified in holding their incorrect beliefs." (Wikipedia.) In other words - science doesn't claim as much as some believe it does!

- **Problems with evolution**

People who believe evolution need to realise that the theory is not as water tight as they think. The theory does have some major problems that are unsolved. Some of these problems are noted by non-Christian scientists and even atheist philosophers (see Thomas Nagel, *Mind and Cosmos: Why the Materialist Neo-Darwinian Conception of Nature Is Almost Certainly False*).

Here are some of the problems evolution faces:

- An inability to explain where even the first matter came from.
- Inability to explain how chemicals formed a cell. The answer of time is insufficient evidence for scientists.
- Inability to explain how such enormous changes take place in species where our best attempts at interbreeding can't change the genome of a species (dogs are still dogs).
- The theory cannot explain how some aspects of creatures needed change but others had to remain. How did evolution 'know' they had to remain in order to be profitable in the future (eg. Bombardier Beetle)? For evolution to 'know' anything it has to become intelligent, which presents a philosophical problem for the theory.

Thus evolution remains a theory. It is a scientific theory, but it is not

more than that. Read this carefully: **Evolution is a theory that is actually just a modern creation account.** If you lived in the near eastern culture of the Babylonians, for example, and had a different idea on how the world came about, you would probably be laughed at or considered crazy. The same is true today, the theories have just changed. The difference with evolution, however, is it just doesn't have any gods in its story. Rather it teaches that chance, force, nature and time are responsible for creation as we know it -- randomly and without intelligence. It is an interpretation of what science observes. In this light, what Genesis says about evolution is much the same as what it says to near eastern accounts of creation: God has always been there. God made it all. Chance, time and nature's selections (in a manner of speaking) are all the working of God.

- **No conflict**

Francis Schaeffer wrote a book titled *No Final Conflict* where he argues that when all the facts are rightly understood there will be no final conflict between science and scripture. He makes the point that it is impossible for science and the Bible to be in conflict because God is the author of both of them. Christians need not be scared of science or scared of people who claim science has disproved God or the Bible or anything. Most people who make these claims actually know less than they pretend to!

Current points of conflict

- **Evolution involved in creation**

Theistic evolution is a theory that tries to put together evolution and

creation. Some God-fearing evangelicals believe in this theory. Basically it follows that God was involved in certain parts of the evolutionary process. This is a difficult position to defend biblically. While theistic evolutionists say that the result was just as God wanted it to be in the end, the Bible does make comments on the process of creation. A big point is the scriptures refute any idea of randomness. It also says that God created kinds of life forms, not one or two that became everything we now know on their own. These are just two difficult facts to defend but you should make up your own mind.

- **The age of the earth**

For most of church history the earth was thought to have been made in six literal days. That would put the earth at a few thousand years old at the most. This wasn't argued until carbon dating and age theories advanced, which tell us that some articles are thousands if not millions of years old. There are only two options to believe here and they differ by a meagre 4.5 million years!

- **The age of the human race**

Much like the age of the earth, for most of church history people were considered to have been made in the beginning with the earth. In other words, humans were as old as the earth. Earliest records of paintings show that by 10,000 BC people were around. Other sciences tell us that skilful man came about at 2-3.5 million years ago. Again, there is considerable argument.

What it would be good for us to realise in summary is that today there are two arguments being brought to Genesis – evolutionary theory and

science. The arguments of evolution and science seem to be supporting each other and intertwine. But in order to think clearly about our response it helps to separate them, which many scientists have no problem doing. When you separate science and evolution, Genesis has every answer we need to counter the theory of evolution. Genesis answers randomness; it answers godlessness and indifference; and ultimately answers the modern creation theory: evolution.

It is when we bring science to Genesis that we need to walk carefully. Remember this is where we are claiming that Genesis is not teaching us exact science. It is not a textbook on physics! Genesis is not telling us how old man and the earth are. Because of how Genesis is to be interpreted and read there is no argument between Genesis and science. Some say this is putting our head in the sand but this is not the case. We are dealing with everything as it is.

The main teachings on creation in Genesis

Please don't forget we are to be more concerned with the teaching of Genesis rather than fitting and correlating it with science. We are now going to delve into its teaching.

1. Creation reveals God's loving, gracious power

The whole creation narrative carries warmth. Michael Eaton says we are to conjure up in our minds a picture of a joyful carpenter making a work of art for his grandchildren. We see God with favour, thoughtfulness and pleasure, making every little detail that he knew would mesmerise and impress us. Think of the near eastern accounts or the modern theories -- what a difference!

We are to be astounded by His immense power. He makes something come about by just speaking. He can make things with His words! We have never and will never see such power in action until God fixes up this world again.

2. God was doing the creating actively and purposefully

- God present and active

The Father, Son and Holy Spirit are all there at creation. The Holy Spirit is over the waters. Close and involved. God speaking denotes personal involvement. He tells everything to become what it needs to be. There is no sense that creation took itself into being. None at all. Consider these words describing God's activity in Genesis 1-2: *created, said, called, saw, let there be, separated, made, blessed, I give you, I have given, His work, formed, planted, breathed, made to spring up out of the ground, took the man, caused.*

Obviously there is no randomness here. That sense is not conveyed at all. And this is the teaching of the whole Bible on the subject. God is a present and active God with His creation. Anthropomorphisms (the attribution of human characteristics or behaviour to a god, animal, or object) regularly describe Yahweh. Think of such things as 'God walked', 'God changed His mind', 'God the Father' describing God as someone we can and should relate with. God is personal. God created the world with all of His faculties engaged and operating.

3. God made the universe in a series of creative works

There is a process or story to creation. It follows a logical order. God makes the universe, He populates the universe, then when it's ready

He makes mankind and puts us into it.

Trying to understand exactly how God did this scientifically has immediate problems. We very soon start to realise that the Genesis narrative seems to be unconcerned with scientific ideas and the exact process of creation.

- **What is a 'day'?**

Is this a period of time? Is it a literal 24 hours? Are these periods of revelation? Are they geological ages? Are they 24 hours that are actually 1,000 years?

The most natural reading of the text means we should take a day to be a literal 24-hour period. But yet the sun is only made on day four. And in Genesis 2:4 it says that God made it all in just one day!

There are other questions too. How was Adam supposed to have named all of the animals on day six if one day means 24 hours in the text? The New Testament also makes it clear that the seventh day of rest has not actually ended. But then what does 'and it was morning and it was evening' mean if not denoting a literal day?

Wayne Grudem says, "The possibility must be left open that God has not given us enough information to come to the conclusion of what a day really means in Genesis 1." This is the conclusion a large majority of respected Biblical scholars come to.

A mature answer to the question of how old the earth is then will have to be, "We don't know that for certain, and Genesis is not at pains to tell us."

The literary structure of the creation account should be noted. Remember the three big 'parts' to creation: the universe, its living inhabitants, and man. The first three days correspond with the last three in a careful structure:

Day one	Day two	Day three
Light	Sky, water	Land

Day four	Day five	Day six
Sun, moon, stars	Birds, sea creatures	Land animals, man

This structure is called the 'literary framework view'. This view claims that the Lord is not at pains to be scientific but is showing us something else. He is structured and ordered but is using literary devices to explain an almost unexplainable event.

This view has its critics. The strongest argument against it is that it would seem as though the account does give us the strong impression that we are to read it chronologically and take it all at face value. It does have process and order and is more than just a literary device.

To summarise this point it seems that God does intend to show us He made the universe with a series of creative works. We don't know much about how long it took and exactly what happened in each part or period. We are meant to see that God is purposeful, ordered, and in careful preparation. He created the world with regularity and order. This is the reason science even exists! Creation shows great variety and order. He skilfully puts each part together to fit perfectly.

- **The creation was for man**

The account clearly shows man's relationship to creation. Genesis 1:28 tells us it was made for us to rule over, enjoy, and live from. He made man a special garden to live in that was even more splendid than all else he had made. "Every tree was pleasant and good for food", says Genesis 2:9. Each animal was to be named and appreciated by man.

You can hear God in such joy and pleasure saying, "Look at all I made for you! Isn't it brilliant! Go, enjoy!"

A few notes on common questions:

1. What about the dinosaurs?

We do know they existed. Scientific opinion varies as to how and when they became extinct. Old earth and young earth theologians have differing ideas as to how and when they lived. The difference is whether humans lived with them or not. Most theologians hold that they probably disappeared in the flood. We have the bones and we know they existed. We are not very sure about anything else. It's all speculation at best.

2. Did death come in before the fall?

This is a concern for old earth supporters. Did many animals die for millions of years before Adam and Eve sinned? The answer is that the curse of death was for Adam and Eve. The death spoken of is death for humans. We cannot know whether God made animals to live and die initially.

Part Three:

GOD MADE US

We now focus on God's creation of human beings. Our quest to find out who we are and where we come from are not to be the biggest questions of life for the Christian, surprisingly enough. God answers them right at the beginning of His Bible. He wants us to know who we are and what we were made for. He wants us to understand ourselves to the greatest degree we can. It would help the entire world and save it from so much trouble if we would all just believe Genesis 1 and 2.

Not unlike the creation of the universe, the creation of mankind has numerous points of question and even controversy. The approach of this booklet will be to stick closely to Genesis 1-2 and get the teaching from there most centrally. We won't delve deeply into philosophy here. The sections will be titled as questions that the Scriptures are

answering for us as the account moves forward.

Who is man?

Genesis 1:26

"Let us make man..."

Genesis 2:7

"Then the Lord formed the man..."

Man is God's name for the distinct and special individuals He would finally place in the rest of creation. The word *adam* is the Hebrew word for *man*. It has three main uses in the Old Testament. It refers to humanity, male humans, or an individual person. The context determines what it is saying.

We are to notice that humanity exists because of a purposeful act by God

There are many different ideas today of who man essentially is:

- Material – worth 45-100 Rand in minerals.
- Biological – highest mammal.
- Psychological – environmental construction.
- Economic – he is what he eats. Unit in an economic system (Karl Marx).
- Sociological view – all determined by society and culture.
- Philosophical – animal that can reason.

- Existentialist – man is what he makes himself to be. The pawn of the universe.
- Machine – man is defined by what he can do.
- Sexual being – all human behaviour is to be understood as modification of sexual energy.
- A free being – freedom from restraint is the important issue.

The Christian view of who man is can be summarised by saying we are living, intelligent beings made actively, carefully and purposefully by God (Psalm 139: "let us..."). Man is then, at his essence, God's creature. "I am formed by God, for God" and this is our ultimate identity.

Even though man is above the animal world he is under God

Psalm 8 covers this theme. God has made man. Further in this study we will see the extremely high position God has placed man in. But man is still under God. Many people fail to see this.

- Humans are not God. Nor little gods. Humans are not the highest object in the universe
- Humans are part of creation with no independent existence.
Man will never be self-ruled.
- Our power, intellect and all facets are limited, although we are a masterpiece of creation.

Why did God make us?

Isaiah 43:7 "...whom I created for my glory."

This is the big question. This is *not* the question, "Why did God make me like this?" which a person asks when they dislike their freckles!

The reasons God made us are the same as for all of creation. Firstly, He ultimately just wanted to. Secondly, He did it because He is a God of glory. While God didn't *need* to create us it is very important to know that we are important to God himself. We are truly important and valuable to God for all eternity. Who you are and what you are seriously matter to God. He made us for Himself so we could share in his glory.

What then is our ultimate purpose in life?

Our purpose is fulfilling what God created us to do. We are to thoroughly enjoy God and delight in our relationship with Him. We are to work the earth. 'Finding your purpose' is a buzz statement in today's world but many people mean something different to what the Scriptures teach us.

Think of some of the Psalms: "There is nothing upon earth I desire more than you." (Psalm 73:25.) "For a day in your courts is better than anything else." (Psalm 84:10.) Our ultimate purpose is to know God and be what he designed us to be as human beings: and we were designed to know him!

How did we come to exist?

Here we shall consider briefly how God made humans. The first question to answer is: are we to consider Adam and Eve as actual people? The traditional view is that Adam and Eve were the first two actual people formed from the hand and breath of God in space and time. The other view is that Adam and Eve are symbols for humanity. The second view becomes difficult to maintain when we consider Paul's use of Adam as an individual compared with Christ in Romans 5 and 1 Corinthians 15. The most clear conclusion is that Adam and Eve were, according to Scripture, the first actual people that existed.

There are five theories here as to how we came to exist:

- Naturalistic evolution – random, natural principles.
- Fiat creationism – it was a decisive creative act of God.
- Deistic evolution – much the same as a naturalistic view, but God, not chance, is the starter of the process.
- Theistic evolution – God started the process and at a distinct point added a spirit to man.
- Progressive creationism – at separate, distinct times God acted. Then he left it to do its own thing (evolution). Then he acted again. Then he made man. And so on.

Much like the creation argument these views are recent additions. The theory of evolution and scientific advances have caused us to ask questions about creation. We won't cover the last chapter again, but what we know here is that we came to exist when God made two people. The Genesis account doesn't tell us much more.

What is it to be made in the image of God?

Genesis 1:26 "...make man as our image according to our likeness".

The primary characteristic of man which sets us apart from all else God has made is that we are made according to His image and likeness. But what does this mean?

As with most points in doctrine studies there are a number of views. We will go through some of them. We will then go through a process of trying to understand what the Scripture is trying to teach us about ourselves.

Essentially there are three major views as to what man as the image of God means:

- **Substantiative view** – most dominant in church history. It views some characteristics or qualities in man to be the parts that bear the image. "let us make humans who look like us". In the 5th century Athanasius argued that the main quality we share with God is Reason. The enlightenment era argued that it is our enlightened state that is the same. Augustine saw it as our memory, our affection, and our will.
- Pros – there are certainly aspects of humans that differ from the rest of creation and share great similarity with God.
- Cons – the characteristics vary between people depending on what the characteristic is (intelligence, affection, moral decisions). In other words, are more intelligent people more like God's image? Obviously the answer is no, we are all in

God's image.

- **Relational view** – man can relate to God. The image is present when man best reflects God by being in close relationship with Him. Thus *fallen* man does not contain the image.
- Pros – it is true that humans share the ability to relate to God in a way that nothing in all creation does.
- Cons – people who are disinterested in relating to God are therefore not made in the image of God.
- **Functional view** – man exercises dominion – not something he has or does. This view comes from Psalm 8 where image is connected with dominion.
- Pros – dominion is unique to man. Psalm 8 and Genesis have a close relationship.
- Cons – Psalm 8 never mentions the image at all.
- Genesis doesn't speak of dominion and the image having a logical link. It says, "make them... and let them also have dominion". *Dominion* and made in His image appear to be two separate, distinct properties of man.

There are four considerations we can follow to try and decide what all this means:

1. Looking as closely as we can to the language of Genesis 1:26 we firstly notice that being in His image is not something we possess it is

what humankind is. Linguistically the verse could better be read: "let us make man as our image according to our likeness." The whole of the man or the whole of humanity is made as the image. By being human we are the image of God.

We are also to note that this image is within the entire human race. It is not connected with sinfulness or obedience. Murder is prohibited for all humans in Genesis 9:6 because all are made as the image of God. Man is God's image.

2. We can determine that the Scripture is not telling us exactly in what way we are like God. It tells us in Genesis 5:3 that Adam had a son Seth in his own likeness and after his image. We are like God the same way that Seth is like his Father. They are similar but we don't know in exactly what way and to what extent.

3. Looking closely at what we know of God from Genesis 1:1-25 we learn that we are made in His image and likeness. What have we learned about God so far that we could be like? The following:

- God is personal. We can think, reason, communicate.
- God is holy and righteous. We were created good.
- God is ruler and king. We will be given dominion.
- God is creator. We show creativity.

New Testament usage of image:

- Jesus is the perfect image of God (Colossians 1:15).
- James 3:9-10 says we sin against people when we curse them with the tongue because they are made in the image of God.

- We are shepherding God's world.

Near eastern usage:

- A statue – a king – a coin.
- We are God's representatives, His living image here on earth.

Putting all of this together explains something of what it means that we are made as the image of God. It means that every human being is made like God and represents God in this world. If you wanted to comprehend something of what God is like you should look at humans. There is something special in our very make up that sets us apart from creation and is more like God than anything else He has made.

It is these two aspects – being like Him and representing Him -- which we are to understand that tell us that man is still in the image of God even though sin has distorted and perverted the image. Colossians 3:10 says we are being renewed into the image as it should be. We see this perfected in Jesus on earth. When Christ returns His people will be returned to the perfect image again (1 John 3:2).

What does being made in his image mean to us?

- **We belong to God**

We belong to him whose image we bear.

- **Every person carries value**

Human life is sacred. Life is to be valued.

- **It helps us understand the second commandment**

No other image / idol. The human race is supposed to be the image of God.

- **It helps us understand sin**

We lost our image in some major respects. Not all of it, but some. Sin is therefore being less than what we are supposed to be. It is being less than the design of man. Rationally speaking, sin doesn't make sense.

- **Jesus is the perfect image of God**

Those who follow Jesus are being restored to the perfect image of God.

- **When we pursue godliness we are pursuing what we were saved for**

Coming back to being who we were made to be starts in this life. It will continue until Jesus returns.

Part Four:

MAN MADE GLORIOUS

We now continue to look at God's creation of mankind. There are many questions to ask and scripture is not silent on this topic. We are slowly moving through the major ideas present in Genesis about humanity.

What is the nature of man?

- Man has a two-part nature

This is introduced in Genesis 2:7, "Then the Lord God formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living creature."

Why did the Holy Spirit tell us this? What are we learning about ourselves here? The emphasis is that man is a whole being. This is not technical, scientific language. Man is a whole person. He is from the earth. He is made of chemicals, substances and functions like the other animals. If God so chooses he will return a man to the earth as dust. Equally, if God so chooses man will take on an immortal body and be with Him.

Man is 'breathed' into by God. Man is a complex personality with a 'non-material' part to him. Man is essentially two parts in nature.

The way the Bible deals with the physical body is not that difficult to follow. The physical body is:

- From the earth (Genesis 2:7)
- Not eternal (people die in Scripture)
- To be obedient to God's ways (1 Corinthians 6:20)
- An entry point for temptation (Romans 8:13)
- Controllable in its passions (Romans 6:12)
- To be changed into an eternal / immortal one (1 Corinthians 15:51-54)

The Bible's dealings with the 'non-material' part of man is a little more difficult to follow. The Old Testament is non technical with regards to the nature of man and also emphasises the whole man.

- Many references to all your heart and soul, which means everything (Deuteronomy 4:29)

- Numbers 14:21 - refers to Caleb's attitude
- Ecclesiastes 12:7 - refers to the part other than the body which goes to God when we die

The Old Testament teaches that man is a body and a complex personality. The New Testament seems to emphasise the same idea but uses more terms:

- Matthew 10:28 - body and soul = whole person.
- Matthew 26:41 - spirit and body = whole person.
- Luke 8:55 - spirit returned and she comes alive.
- Acts 2:26 - heart is glad, body rejoices.
- Ephesians 2:3 - lived with sinful nature = (desires and thoughts).

Difficult Scriptures:

1 Thessalonians 5:23 talks of "spirit, soul and body [to be] kept blameless'.

Hebrews 4:12 talks of 'dividing between soul and spirit... discerning the intentions of the heart.'

The New Testament uses soul and spirit interchangeably. The soul or the spirit departs at death. People are either "body and soul" or "body

and spirit" and the soul and spirit can sin. When we try to get too technical we will find ourselves getting too confused.

But the New Testament exhibits the same idea that man is two parts in nature. When it mentions more than two it is talking about aspects of our personality of life. Body = part of this world, soul = relating to yourself; spirit = relating to God.

Nowhere does it teach that man has a dead spirit that God makes alive. Romans 6:11, Ephesians 2:1 tell us that the whole person is dead in their sins but they can be made alive in their relationship to God.

Some teach that we are three-part beings (body, soul, spirit are three parts; or body, soul, mind.) Is this something we can live with?

- It's complex to live with three parts. Which part does what? Do you hear God in your spirit but not your mind? Every part seems to intertwine with the other? When we start creating too much separation it presents problems, making people over-spiritual at times. Some people go so far as to say that all that matters is their spirit, meaning they can do what they like with their body!
- We could miss that physical and emotional problems affect spiritual conditions. Some people compartmentalise sanctification (the process of holiness).
- Sometimes people fail in growing up because they are trying to unify the parts or get one part to control the other.

Where do our non-material parts come from?

There are three main ideas:

- Pre-existent Spirit which enters into us at birth
- The Bible says God foreknew that we would exist but it doesn't say we were pre-existent. This idea is found in eastern religions.
- Creation theory - individually created at the point of conception
- This has the most overwhelming evidence.
- Psalm 139 - "knit me together".
- Zechariah 12:1 - knits the spirit of man within him.
- Traducian - spirit and body generated by parents
- Explains passing of sin and genetics

Conclusion

Scripture doesn't adequately explain genetic passing of personality and it's the philosopher not the Christian's job to think on that.

Male and female

Genesis 1:27; 2:18-25 is important teaching on the nature of man. Humanity is in two - male and female. Males and females make up the human race.

This is a huge subject in and of itself. We'll have to limit ourselves to a few comments however:

- We are to notice that the relationship that men and women will have, expressed most closely in marriage, is reflective of the relationship between Father, Son and Spirit.
- We are to notice that men and women are equal in personhood and importance.
- The roles of the men and women are slightly different.

In summary, man was made to be male and female. He exists of material body and a non-material part called the spirit, soul or heart.

What should man do?

- **Dominion**

Humanity is to have dominion of the earth as those who are made in the image of God and are to represent God. The key word is 'stewardship' not exploitation; management not destruction; sustainability not reckless expansion. Genesis 2:15 tells us to *work* and *keep* the garden. This is part of dominion. This also means that man was made to work and work was not a part of the fall.

- **Reproduction**

In pagan fertility cults the people ask the gods to let them reproduce. Things are different in Christianity, however. God's image and likeness in us means that we get to share something of his love and creativity -- we get to enjoy the thrill of creatively making and loving new life.

- **Relationship**

Man is made to relate to his environment and God. Relationship with God requires knowledge of the will of God. Moses says, "I want to know your ways so I can know you!" (Exodus 33:13.) It was the same at the beginning of creation. We need to know our fellow human beings, the world we live in, and our creator God. We are to relate, engage and commune with all of these in different ways, all in the image and likeness of the creator.

Man is fallen

Genesis next picks up a vital part of humanity, our fall. Not everyone thinks that mankind is fallen.

- Some think man doesn't really have a problem. A few defects here or there but essentially we are good in our heart.
- Some think man is simply maturing and improving.
- Some think man's biggest problem is ignorance. We just don't know enough yet.
- Some think man's biggest problem is rule and suppression. Man needs to let go and do all that is on his heart.
- Some think man's biggest problem is negativity. He needs to think and see things positively.

Adam is open to testing

While God created man perfect in righteousness there was the ability for this righteousness to be tested. Adam is told there is one thing he is not to do: eat from the tree of knowledge of good and evil. The tree

is aptly named. If Adam tastes its fruit he will know evil. The word *knowledge* is used at times in the Old Testament as the opposite of ignorance. Adam will experience and be aware of evil. Ignorance and righteousness will be lost to him. If man continued to only eat of all the other trees and the tree of life they would live forever in righteousness and goodness.

Adam is the representative of the entire human race

Adam (meaning *humanity* -- the word only becomes a name in Genesis 3:17) is the first man and is the representative for the entire human race. What happens to Adam happens to every person. Romans 5:12-21 makes this clearer.

Here are some of the ideas of how man came (or comes) to sin.

- Pelagianism - we are sinful because Adam and culture and our parents are all bad examples. We are only accountable for the things we are able to do and we are able to live righteously.
- Augustine - we inherit Adam's sinfulness genetically (almost a biological inheritance).
- Federal theology -- Adam was sinning on behalf of us, thus it is as though we were sinning.

Adam is the most perfect specimen of the human race. What happened to Adam would have happened to any one of us. Adam was our representative (Romans 5:12). But in much the same way as Adam represented us so did Christ, says Romans 5, except he brought salvation. To be in Christ is to have salvation!

The price of Adam's sin was death for humanity

The entire human race died when Adam and Eve came to know about evil. Genesis 3:7 says their eyes were opened and they lost their innocence and righteousness immediately. They would be filled not with righteousness but desire for evil now that they had tasted it. James 1:13 says God cannot be tempted by evil but man sure can! Death came to humanity.

But Adam lived for 930 years, so what was this death? Living forever was not a part of the way God created mankind. Adam and Eve had to eat of the tree of life for that. Later in Genesis 3:22 they are banished from the garden so they cannot eat of the tree that will cause them to live forever.

What is the death that was promised if not immediate physical death?

- It involves having **a nature that will know and have a taste for evil**

Genesis 3:7 says, "their eyes were opened". They were no longer ignorant of evil. Man would want to taste evil until a remedy would come. This is what Romans 6 calls 'being enslaved to sin'. You cannot not want it! Humans now know evil, their very nature knows its taste and wants it. Man's very nature is stained with evil. If it were not so, he would never be tempted by it.

- It means that man has a **ruined relationship with God**

Genesis 3:7-8 tells us that immediately they felt self-conscious. They felt exposed and ashamed. They suddenly wanted to hide from God.

They feared Him. They didn't want Him to know them. He was estranged from them. It was from their side. Desire for the knowledge of God left them immediately.

- Death is **ruined relationships with fellow humans**

The first thing Adam does is blame Eve. What a difference from before! It would only get worse from here unfortunately. The situation would spiral very quickly into murder, adultery, polygamy and all manner of evil man will do to his fellow man.

- Death means **experiencing the hostility of Satan**

Genesis 3:14-15 says that the relationship between Satan and people will be one of hostility. The temptation that the devil presented in the Garden of Eden was mild compared with what he would now be able to do to man.

- Death means a **broken relationship between man and the creation**

Chapter 3:16-19 tells us that people will experience eeking out a living from the creation that was supposed to readily and easily sustain them.

- It involves **being subject to getting old and dying**

God removes the ability for man to live forever as he forfeited the privilege. God will not have sinful man live forever. This is out of mercy -- can you imagine living in a sinful, dying body forever? So Adam dies in Genesis 5:5.

- Death means **alienation from the presence of God**

Adam and Eve are driven from the garden and access is blocked to paradise with God (Genesis 3:24).

We are not told at this point how long this death lasts. It certainly goes on beyond the grave unless a major intervention takes place. Humanity is fallen. Every human is dead. That is the state of humanity.

Man redeemed

Reading Romans 1-3:20 brings you to much the same conclusions as the above section on man being fallen. Paul says, "None is righteous, not one" (Romans 3:10). Then in 3:21 Paul launches into his gospel message with two words: *But now*. Compared to *none is righteous, not one*, Paul says 'a righteousness of God has been revealed, it comes to man through Christ if they believe'. What news!

Man may have another state. Man fallen may become man redeemed. Man unrighteous and dead may become man righteous in Christ and alive.

The book of Revelation gives us a picture of the future of man fully redeemed:

- We will once again eat from the tree of life and live forever (Revelation 2:7).
- Heaven will be like a new paradise of God (Revelation 2:7).
- We will be restored to the presence of God (Revelation 21:3; 25).
- Righteousness and ignorance of sin will return (Revelation

21:27).

- Satan will never enter there (Revelation 20:14).
- Every symptom of death will be no longer.

For now we live in a redeemed but not yet fully redeemed state. We are still to have our physical bodies fully redeemed.

Romans 5:12-21 outlines what man redeemed looks like:

- Redeemed man has **a righteousness given to him**

'Righteousness and life came into the world through one man', Jesus. It is a righteousness from God himself. It is not our own. It is therefore a perfect and whole righteousness. It brings us back to man's original state as 'good' to which 'God was pleased with all He had done when he looked at creation'.

- Redeemed man has **justification given instead of judgement and condemnation**

Verse 16 and 18 say judgement and condemnation fall away in place of justification. This righteousness given to us through Christ means that the place Adam had before he sinned becomes ours again. We are justified - declared as having done nothing wrong. If God were to come us and say the same as Genesis 3:11, "Have you eaten of the tree of which I commanded you not to?" our answer would be, "no I haven't". And He would agree. Justified. Declared to be guilt free and acquitted of the charge of sin. 'There is no sin to be found here!'

- Redeemed man has **life given back to him**

Verse 18 tells us life comes through Christ. We now have a restored relationship with God. The potential for restored relationship with people comes to us as well.

- Redeemed man is **waiting for his immortal body**

Romans 5:21 and 6:23 tell us that death is replaced with eternal life. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 15 what we are waiting for is our bodies to be changed to our immortal, imperishable ones. These bodies will be ours at the resurrection. 1 Corinthians 15:45 says, "The first man (Adam) became a living being, the last Adam a life-giving spirit." The first Adam received life from God. He lost it. Jesus Christ, the last Adam, has the power to give life back. Each person will be raised to life because Jesus has the awesome power to make people alive again.

There is more to the state of redeemed man than mentioned here. We've just looked at what correlates most closely with the Genesis account. The doctrine of redemption is a glorious and full one that we can rejoice in and study our entire lifetime.

Part Five:

THE WORLD IS UNDER GOD'S CONTROL

How God controls the world falls under a doctrine called *providence*. Contemporary Christians desperately need to come to grips with the teaching of providence. Most have probably not even heard the word before! The world today is increasingly asking questions and attributing natural disasters, poverty, and its frequent chaos to God. Is this valid? If not, why?

How does God influence the affairs of the world? How real is the freedom humans have to act? Does God always get what he wants? Does God foreordain evil acts? These are major questions and Christians need to think about such things. It is no easy process dealing with them. There is a lot of teaching and Bible understanding required.

A brief history of the doctrine of providence

1st - 4th century

The doctrine was mostly a series of arguments against pagan and heretical thought. These arguments were mainly about proving that there is a loving God who cares for this world. Evil was attributed to sin alone and all evil was a result of sin.

4th - 8th century

The theologians during this time built on previous ideas but sought to defend God's care especially when the Roman Empire fell. The reconciliation of human freedom with divine sovereignty began to receive attention.

Early 5th century

Augustine (a well known church theologian) was the first to claim two tensions: (1) man sins freely and is responsible for his own sin, (2) human beings without help cannot stop sinning.

In contrast to this there was also the rise of Pelagianism which states that (1) it's not just to hold people accountable for wrongdoing when they can't do anything else, so therefore (2) all humans possess the ability to behave righteously.

5th - 17th century

This long time period is characterised by preoccupation with human freedom and divine action.

17th - 18th century

Intellectuals in the enlightenment of the 17th and 18th century began to look not at salvation but God's control of the world. Non-Christian thinkers came up with the idea of general providence – a sort of general control, like a distant superintendent. Miracles were denied.

The 20th century

The process theologians emerge. They believe God is 'in process' -- making up the world's future and determining his responses in real time. Essentially, God is learning about man as time goes by and changing and adjusting what he does accordingly.

Today

Today people are confused about providence. Evangelical pastors show a wide variety of different thoughts. The options are many:

- Atheist – no God, future uncertain, death is cold and impersonal.
- Deist – distant God. No interfering. Mechanical view of the world. No miracles.
- Polytheism – many gods (even the saints and Mary). God vs. Satan worldview.
- Determinism – fate is fixed. What will be will be. Impersonal. Random.
- Fatalistic religions – Islam and others.
- Evangelical Christians – man's freedom, God's sovereignty, and uncertainty. Christians are just as affected by things that go

wrong as non-Christians. There seems to be no special care for Christians.

People in the world either have a great problem or great love for God's rule of the world. There are reasons for this. Science, major calamities and the modern age have fuelled scepticism while people view the world as though they are the centre of it more than ever. Providence is always about 'them', which leads to major questions that are very difficult to answer in a general sense. But when providence is not always about the individual things can begin to make much more sense.

In the Church, modern evangelical pastors are more concerned with motivation and behaviour than belief. The result is that providence has left pulpits.

But consider the following texts:

Acts 2:23

"This Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men".

Acts 4:27-28

"Truly in this city there were gathered together against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, to do whatever your hand and your plan had predestined to take place".

Genesis 45:5

"And now do not be distressed or angry with yourselves, because you sold me here, for God sent me before you to preserve life".

Phil 2:12,13

"Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure".

Psalms 103:19

"The LORD has established his throne in the heavens, and his kingdom rules over all".

God is so thoroughly and totally in control of every minute detail of our world that his control allows for real human freedom. It is a mystery but it works out when you live it: you will experience the ability to totally trust God to care for you while also realising that God doesn't force you to do anything and your choices have consequences.

How does God relate to the world?

1. **He is involved and busy with the world**
- **He preserves the world**

God maintains His creation and keeps it in existence. He is keeping the universe from harm and destruction and he is providing for the needs

of the members of his creation. (Erickson: 415).

Colossians 1:17

"And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together."

Hebrews 1:3

"[He] sustains all things by the word of his power."

Acts 17:28

"In him we live and move and have our being."

Nehemiah 9:6

"You are the LORD, you alone. You have made heaven, the heaven of heavens, with all their host, the earth and all that is on it, the seas and all that is in them; and you preserve all of them; and the host of heaven worships you."

2 Peter 3:7

"But by the same word the heavens and earth that now exist are stored up for fire, being kept until the day of judgment and destruction of the ungodly."

Job 34:14-15

"If he should set his heart to it and gather to himself his spirit and his breath, all flesh would perish together, and man would return to dust."

Psalms 104:29

"When you hide your face, they are dismayed; when you take

away their breath, they die and return to their dust."

God gives us breath each time we take one! Thus the world 'operating on auto-pilot' is not taught by Scripture. Neither is the idea that God is a type of handy-man, jumping in to fix things when they go wrong, but is otherwise hands-off.

- **He preserves His people with great care**

The Scriptures give special attention to God's preservation of his people. Matthew 10 tells us he knows the hairs on our head. Matthew 6 tells us he cares for the birds, so how much more does he care for us? John 10 tells us his preservation is also expressed in the fact that he will never remove his love and is always keeping us: "My sheep shall never perish", "No one will snatch them out of my hand."

Biblical writers, when thinking of God's preservation, came to a definite sense of confidence. See Psalm 91.

- **He is leading the world somewhere**

In His control of the universe God cooperates with everything he made to bring it to a place that He determines. He is guiding and steering the whole universe.

Hebrews 1:3

"He [Jesus] 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".

This word 'uphold' is used in the New Testament when things are carried from one place to another. It is in the present participle, which means that God is continually carrying and bearing up all things.

Ephesians 1:11

"In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will."

Isaiah 46:9-11

"I am God, and there is none like me,
declaring the end from the beginning
and from ancient times things not yet done,
saying, 'My counsel shall stand,
and I will accomplish all my purpose,'
calling a bird of prey from the east,
the man of my counsel from a far country.
"I have spoken, and I will bring it to pass;
I have purposed, and I will do it."

Nothing in all of creation is outside of God's providence. The Scriptures tell us that God says to the snow "fall" and to the rain "fall" and that the lightning is said to be His (Job 37:6-13). God feeds the animals. (Matthew 6:26.) Even seemingly random events like casting lots is up to Him (Proverbs 16:33). Thus we have to say that even if we know the natural or scientific cause we cannot say God didn't have anything to do with it.

His providence extends from the biggest matters to the smallest with regards to humans:

- His leadership extends to nations. God controls, raises up and allows nations to fall. (Job 12:23 -- "He makes nations great, and he destroys them; he enlarges nations, and leads them away.")
- God plans our days before we are born (Psalm 139:16).
- God takes care of our daily needs (Matthew 6:11, 'give us our daily bread').
- He is involved with each step and action (Jeremiah 10:23 -- "I know, O LORD, that the way of man is not in himself, that it is not in man who walks to direct his steps.")
- Success and failure come from God (Luke 1:52).
- Talents and abilities come from the Lord (1 Corinthians 4:7).

Again, this is deeply mysterious. Our modern perception of the world causes us to miss the strength of this truth. **God's leading and directing is centred on bringing redemption and salvation, not on an individual's happy comfort.**

- Providence is not working for or against anyone. It has no interest in race, nations or people. God does not have any favourites.
- Providence is working for His purpose. It is working for salvation and redemption of the world. God's providence is His making everything right again.

'Today we ask the question "is God on my side?" we should ask "am I on his side?"' -- Michael Eaton.

2. His providence works together with our world

God's providence and the world acts in some predictable ways. Natural laws of nature are God's laws. He leads the world predictably. Seasons are God's idea, says Ecclesiastes. His upholding the world means that Science exists. We can examine regularity because He leads it that way and mostly doesn't break the laws of nature he upholds.

Equally, under his leadership we can make real choices with real consequences. One of the biggest problems people have with the doctrine stated so far is that we seem to then be 'robots in a large puppet show'. But Scripture assures us this is not the case! This isn't fatalism! This is known as an *antinomy*. The doctrine contains two truths that remain true even though we cannot reconcile them perfectly. God directs one-hundred percent and man has choices that are one-hundred percent man's. We do not know how this works. When God sets himself to judge man his justice is perfect. He causes no man to sin and in fact tempts no one (James 1:13). God hates evil. God doesn't contradict our will. What we do, we do willingly. God lets us be ourselves.

What are the characteristics about how God relates to the world?

This is adapted from Michael Eaton's sermons on providence.

1. Mysterious

God doesn't explain more than we can read in Scripture. We do not know how it works, but it does work. God's process is often mysterious. His creativity is unusual at times. World history is colourful and rich. We cannot expect to understand all there is to know about

God and his workings. The Spirit tells us what we need to know but equally no mind has conceived what God has prepared, says 1 Corinthians 2.

2. You can live with it

Living with the idea of providence is actually easy to do, even if it's difficult to understand. You will find you can still trust Him totally.

3. It is unfinished

We are not at the end of history yet.

4. It demands faith

Job, in the end of the book of Job, comes to trust God. He realises that God does know what He is doing. God's promises can hold us despite the huge mystery that's involved. Habakkuk also came to praise God even when he didn't understand everything.

5. Providence is salvation-centred

This is explained above. Providence is working for salvation and not for anything else.

6. It enables confidence

His control leads to confidence. We can be confident of decisions and where things are going.

7. He does everything by the blood of Christ

The world would be alienated from God unless the blood of Christ was present. 'Slain before the creation of the world' (Revelation 13:8), Jesus 'forebears the sins of the world'. Providence only exists because of Christ.

Part Six:

GOD IS BEHIND IT ALL

We began with the creation of the world and the universe. We then looked at the details of how God made humanity. We are now trying to understand how God controls it all. In this final part we'll explore this mysterious subject a little more deeply.

A small summary from Part 5:

- God is so in control it allows for human freedom.
- God is in control of all personal circumstances. If you really believe in creation, you believe this even when all things seem to work together for 'bad'.
- God even gets His will done through the wickedness of men.
- God works in mysterious ways.

- When everything is going wrong, everything is going right.

These are not all easy to grasp.

Understanding a little more about the mystery of evil

The last teaching looked at the detailed and intricate control that God has of the universe. Immediately this poses a problem for us, and the problem is evil. If God is so in control, what about all the wrongdoing that is going on, with the seeming lack of intervention? Is God causing it? Is God allowing it? Does God take pleasure in it? What does rampant evil mean for our faith in God?

There are two main areas where people have problems:

- God's total power
Does God somehow lack total power? Can he not stop evil?
- God's goodness
Why doesn't God do something to stop evil?

1. The origin of evil is not revealed in Scripture

- Understanding it would in some ways justify it.
 - Eg. If you understand the background of a person you can almost 'justify' their behaviour. But we cannot justify evil.

2. Scripture does tell us that God can use evil acts to fulfil his plans. And His plans are for his glory and our good

- One nation can be the judgment of another. (Isaiah 13-23.)
- The hardness of Pharaoh's heart was an important component in God's dealings with Israel and Egypt. (Exodus 9.)
- Joseph was sold into slavery by his brothers who were jealous of him, but later on it says this was God's plan. (Genesis 50:20.)

3. Scripture also tells us God never tempts anyone and totally hates all evil (James 1:13)

- God is never responsible for any evil act or thought. The evil he uses is not His.
- People are rightly blamed and judged for evil acts.

4. Scripture tells us that suffering has meaning for the Christian (1 Peter)

- Suffering is part of the fallen world for everyone.
- Suffering is a means to grow in faith.
- Suffering has meaning for the Christian.
- Suffering is a means of growth.
- Suffering should be expected in the walk of faith (Matthew 5:11).

These affirmations often remain intellectual. There are some things we understand and some things we can't. What a person really needs is to

learn to cope with trouble. Understanding some of its parameters doesn't help people to cope much. What we really need in tragedy, most of all, is God's presence - something Job came to grasp at the end of the book of Job.

Learning to live with God and mystery

There are times when things go wrong -- very wrong -- for people. It happens to Christians. It leaves concern, doubt and a bitter taste. How can we cope with trouble?

The answer is that we have to discover faith. The answer is not understanding evil or a principle of life but getting to live again with God when bad things happen.

1. If we could explain God, what kind of God would He be?

- Mystery is a part of God that we can come to love and rest in. When God says, "My ways are not your ways" in Isaiah 55:8, he said this to Israel to comfort and encourage them. When we don't know, we can know that He knows. "We wouldn't understand even if He told us" says Habakkuk 1:5.
- We don't know how this works. Romans 8:28 -- "And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose." But we know it does work!

2. God wants us to trust Him

- What does He want more than anything else? To believe Him on His word alone.

- What we do know about God is enough for total trust and confidence. Consider His goodness, care, knowledge, promises of a saviour, sending of Jesus, proof of future plans in Jesus, and promises for the future.
- His words loom large: "I know what I am doing! I know everything!"
- In the end God wants us to come to the point where he can ask us: "I know this is tough for you and you don't understand but can I be enough for you? Is it okay that I know and I know what I am doing? Can I be enough for you even though you don't understand it all?"

3. If only we kept in mind how good God has been to us

- We don't know the extent of his protection.
- We sometimes fail to realise that we deserve nothing. Expectation adds to the difficulty of evil. What do we really deserve?

Job, Habakkuk, and Psalm 73 have the same treatment for coping with evil. Fellowship with God himself is the only remedy. We don't need answers -- we need God himself. Rescue is not solely intellectual it is experiential. No one can get to heaven by intellect, God has to be experienced.

Psalm 73 (from Michael Eaton's sermons on providence)

1. The writer of the Psalm ran into trouble

- His trouble started by looking at the life of the wicked.

- He noticed how easy life seemed for them.
- They even scoff at God (v.11) and it doesn't cause them trouble.

2. His trouble caused Him to be extremely close to backsliding

- V.13-14 -- he believes His service and love for God are a waste of time.
- This is the temptation when people fall into trouble.

3. He is rescued from backsliding by a tiny thought

- v.15 -- his thought was that if he backslides on purpose he will injure other people.
- Many times a small opportunity or thought can rescue the Christian.

4. He realises that intellectual understanding wouldn't rescue him (v.16)

5. He decides to get back to the fellowship (v.17)

6. He then begins to think of the future (v.18-22)

7. He comes to care only about the presence of God in his life (v.23-28)

Each follower of God will have to learn to cope and enjoy the God who is mysterious. Intellect will only take us so far. A real living connection with God is the only way to understand the mysteries of life.

How does His control relate to prayer?

Prayer itself contains some mystery. The common question posed to prayer is 'Why should I pray if God will get his will done anyway?' It would seem that the Scriptures are not at pains to answer this question in particular. In the Bible people pray and pray and pray.

1. We are not to treat God as predictable

- Jonah 2:9, "Who knows? God may turn and relent". When it comes to prayer there are not supposed to be fancy formulas and technical procedures (faith, His will).
- We are to pray as though the outcome is not fixed at all.
- Far from discouraging prayer, this is to encourage it. Who knows?

2. We are encouraged to see God as our Father, especially in prayer

- "Our Father" -- not Lord, not God. When it comes to prayer we are not to let the all knowing nature and sure will of God override the Father picture.
- He gives us the dignity of asking.
- The reason we are burdened is that he is prompting something.
- "He knows already" is said to comfort not confuse in Matthew 6:8.
- God wants relationship.
- Gods asks us to ask.

3. God himself says prayer is valid

- 2 Chronicles 7:14, "If you pray and seek me... I will hear". It's not a game. Prayer affects how God acts.

In the end we don't know how or why prayer works, but it does.

What does the future hold?

God is in control of His creation. Where then is He taking it?

God is working for His purposes. He is working for salvation and for His glory. He is working all things for His perfect and right plan. He is making everything right. He is taking everything back to where it was before sin came in. We are included in this. He is in the process of lavishing His grace upon us, redeeming us, buying our freedom, forgetting our sins, getting us to join His plan with Him.

We now come to the end of this brief look at God and the world that He has made. Hopefully this broad overview will encourage you to dig deeper. But most of all, to love the God who made you, with all of your heart.