

Westminster Larger Catechism

Question 15

Halifax, 28 October 2007

Q. 15 What is the work of creation?

A. The work of creation is that wherein God did in the beginning, by the word of His power, make of nothing, the world and all things therein for himself, within the space of six days, and all very good.

Introduction:

Today in our series on the Larger Catechism,

- we begin looking at the details of how the LORD works out His decrees—
 - Last week, I showed you that He executes His eternal plan (or His decree) in the works of creation and providence.
 - The Bible tells us the LORD “works all things according to the counsel of His will.” (Eph 1:11).
 - That means that whatever has happened in the past as well as whatever will happen in the future is what God decreed before the foundation of the world.
 - We can only know what He has decreed by either looking at what He has actually done or by looking at what He has *told* us He will do.
 - And, because it is often the case that we do not know for sure what He has done in the past,
 - (we do not have records about many things, or our the records are not accurate)
 - our best resource for learning of God’s past, present, and future acts is His Word, given to us in the pages of Holy Scripture.
 - Of course the LORD does not reveal everything to us in Scripture—
 - We do not know the day of Christ’s return—
 - We do not have detailed accounts of all the wars of the world or of all the things that God made—
 - We do not have a list of the names of all the elect...
 - There are many things that we do not know...
 - But in the Bible,
 - We have all that we need to know in order that we may serve the LORD acceptably through Jesus Christ.

- Deuteronomy 29:29 says:
 - **“The secret *things* belong to the LORD our God, but those *things* which are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law.”**
- He keeps many things to Himself, but all that He has revealed in the Word is for us.
 - It is a tremendous privilege to have His Word that even shows us the way of salvation...
 - And in gratitude to Him, it is only right that we should cherish the Word and receive with faith all that He has said.
 - If we do not, we call God a liar.

Today’s topic, “The Creation of the Heavens and the Earth,”

- is an important part of God’s revelation that is often not believed, even by those who claim to be His disciples.
 - This is a gross inconsistency.
- The creation account is just as much a part of God’s Word as any other—
 - and you can be sure that the one who rejects this part of God’s Word will easily give himself liberty to reject another part, even a moral part, that rubs him the wrong way.
 - It is very rare to find those who believe in the doctrine of eternal punishment, but reject the Bible’s account of creation.
 - Or those who reject the Bible’s teaching about homosexuality and hold to a six day creation.
- Let me move on to our text...a text that ought to be believed if you are disciple of Jesus Christ.
 - Our text is Gen 1:1–2:3 where we are given an account of God’s work of creation in Holy Scripture.
 - Listen now as I read to you from God’s holy Word:
 - READ> Gen 1:1 – 2:3

Tonight I want to look at five simple things that we are taught and ought to believe about creation that are set forth in this account...

I. First, we are taught here *that* God made heaven and earth

- A. The opening verse declares it plainly: “God created the heavens and the earth.”
 1. “Heavens and earth” refers to *everything* that makes up our material world.

- a. This is clear as the narrative proceeds
 - In verse 3 you see that even light is said to be created...
 - this is inclusive of all energy and such...
 - In verse 14-15, you see that the great celestial bodies are said to have been created on the fourth day...
 - What a marvellous thing this is when we consider all the billions of stars and such that make up our universe!
 - In verse 20-21, birds and fish are created on day five,
 - and on the next day, the land animals and man himself are created.
 - Nothing is excluded.
 - b. Colossians 1:16-17 states expressly that everything is included:
 - Col 1:16-17: For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him. And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist.
2. The word in the Hebrew translated *created* in Gen 1:1 is the word *arb* which always refers to that which is made out of nothing.
- a. *arb* is used only of God for the simple reason that no one else is able to create out of nothing.
 - We always start with something...
 - And because this is the way it is for *us*
 - it is very difficult for many modern men to suppose that it could be different for God...
 - b. But I want you to stop and think about this...
 - Where did even the space in which all these things were created come from?
 - Where did the laws come from and ideas...
 - These things are not self-existing things...
 - No, they are very obviously the product of the transcendent God who dwells in a whole different dimension...
 - It is a marvellous thing that all you can see around you is even here at all!
 - c. God tells us that it all came from Him and that He made it from nothing.
 - He did not have to obtain the materials because He called them all to be.

B. This is a very wonderful thing

1. All this stuff came from God!

a. You see His power...

- What a mighty God He is to place the sun and the moon and the stars in the heavens on a single day...
- To call into being the earth with all of its complexities of life that man has not even yet discovered...

b. You see His wisdom and imagination

1) We think we are smart when we discover DNA and have just barely begun to understand how it functions...

- But the Lord is the One who designed it all and made it from nothing according to His decree!

2) We think we are artists,

- but He is the one who came up with the whole idea that there should be such a thing as a rock or a tree...
 - such a thing as seeing and hearing and touching...
 - There could have been some other sense than the five—
 - something entirely different but just as real...
 - It is all His handiwork and invention.

c. You see His love and goodness...all the things that are made for us.

- The focus is on these things as they relate to man
 - light is given so that we may see...
 - the sun and stars are given to mark the seasons and to be sources of light.
 - In verse 29-30, the LORD gives the fruits and vegetables to man to eat.
 - And just think of all the varieties He has given to us—
 - all the beauty for no other purpose than our enjoyment...
 - all the tasty foods and beverages—for no other purpose than our enjoyment.
 - He is no utilitarian God!
 - He is a generous bountiful God who loves to make His creatures smile!

2. We ought to worship and give thanks to Him and trust Him when we consider the things that He has made.
 - This alone, not even considering our redemption, is sufficient reason for us to worship Him forever and ever.
 - What a glorious difference there is between us and the LORD!
 - We are mere creatures, but He is the Creator who calls into being what was not as though it is.

C. That God did this is something we just know—even without special revelation

1. Rom 1 says that God's eternal power and divine nature are clearly seen by us through the things that He has made.
 - a. To any pure soul (of which there are none human remaining) it is patently obvious that this material universe is not self-existing.
 - The more we learn about it, the more we see the marvellous design and wisdom in it all.
 - b. As humans, we are different from the animals in that God has made us in His image and given us a sense of Himself...a sense of Deity...
 - This is our great privilege—and it makes it possible for us to know God through His creation...were it not for the fall...
 - Yet, even so, we are framed to know that He is through the things He has made...
2. To deny that He is the Creator of all, we must suppress the truth that is obvious to us as humans...
 - It is a desperate activity that taxes the best and the brightest minds...
 - They come up with one theory after another, and hang on to theories as truth that should have been discarded long ago.
 - When He is denied, man is no longer different than the beasts, and soon he starts to live like them...
 - He ceases to worship God and then God gives him over to live like an animal, giving him over to degrading passions.
 - This is what we see happening in our society today.
3. With all of this suppression of truth going on around us,
 - We should be especially thankful for the creation account that God has given us...
 - It enables us to not be deceived when we are Christ's disciples—to have proof from scripture of what we know to be true intuitively...

- That God made the heavens and the earth.
- Because we have an account of it in the word, we are not vulnerable to be led about by every wind of doctrine that man invents in his effort to suppress the truth.

II. Secondly, we are taught in Gen 1 *when* God made heaven and earth

A. It says “in the beginning”

1. Creation is not something He dragged out over a long period of time...
 - It might have been interesting if He had...
 - You would be driving down the road and suddenly there would be a new sort of tree that would appear in front of you—
 - or a new animal that no one had ever seen the likes of before.
 - or maybe something that was as different as an animal is from a tree that you had never imagined.
 - It would make things interesting for sure,
 - but God has chosen to give us a more stable environment to live in.
 - an environment that we can study and understand.
2. We are told in Gen 2:1-2 that all was complete after six days...
 - v. 1: The heavens and earth were finished
 - v. 2: God ended His work
 - v. 2: God rested from His work
 - v. 3: He established the weekly cycle for us to commemorate His work

B. It is best to understand that these days are literal, 24 hour days.

1. The real problem of those who doubt this is a problem with the supernatural character of the events.
 - a. They want to have a naturalistic rather than a theistic basis for their own existence.
 - Really, I can't be quite that hard on them—
 - There are many reformed theologians who certainly do have a theistic basis and believe that God can and did create out of nothing who suggest longer days or the framework hypothesis—
 - but their arguments seem to be solely to accommodate the unbelieving scientists who are obviously mistaken because they are

trying to explain human existence without a creator...an impossibility.

- One of the dangers of these other theories is that they suggest that there was death before the fall, and that the world was a place of violence and destruction before there was a curse.
- At the same time, there are many first-rate scientists who believe in 6 twenty-four hour days who have demonstrated how the flood is a much better way to explain how all the fossils and supposed geological ages were formed.

b. The difficulty of trying to explain everything on naturalistic principles without God's intervention can best be illustrated by looking at the creation of Adam or of an oak tree out of nothing...

1) God did not create Adam a baby, but a man...

- He did not at first create an acorn but a tree.
- Yet, any scientist who sought to explain where they came from and refused to believe what God said—that He created the tree and the man last week...
 - would look at the rings on the tree and say...
 - see, the tree has growth rings—it has lived through 30 seasons of years—
 - and the man—he cannot be a week old—look at him—he is full grown and he can speak.

2) Now of course no scientist is faced with this exact problem, but this illustrates the nature of the problem...

- If the scientist refused to believe that God created the world and all that is in it,
 - Then he has to try to figure out how all those animals and things came about on their own,
 - and he has to assume that they all just gradually came out from other things without any outside involvement.
 - And they have no way to know where the materials and laws came from in the first place...
 - They are just here and they just evolved...
 - It is really a most fantastical theory,
 - And many scientists realise it—but rejecting God's word, they have no other choice.
 - It is really quite unreasonable...

- It is reasonable to believe the testimony of God.

2. Let me show you how the scripture indicates that the world was made in six 24 hour days:

a. First of all, the word *yom* is used which means day—the word in English has essentially the same range of usage as it does in Hebrew.

1) The primary meaning of the word speaks of a twenty-four hour period.

- A secondary meaning is of day as opposed to night.
- Another is of a period—“Back in my day”—or “In Abraham’s day”

2) Some have argued that this last usage applies here...that the days refer to long periods of time or ages.

- This is often said to try to make room for more time...
- But there is no exegetical basis for this...
 - When the word is used of a period or an age, it is always very clear that this is the usage...
 - and here there is nothing to indicate that it has any other meaning.

b. And there are several other things that indicate that *yom* is used here of twenty-four hour days.

1) First of all, that it has the ordinal attached to it—“the first day,” “the second day.”

- Nowhere is the word used in this way when it refers to an age.

2) Secondly, that each day is said to have a morning and evening.

- that indicates that they are twenty-four hour days.

3) Thirdly, that God built into creation the Sabbath week, suitable to man’s constitution—and calculates the time based on the days of creation.

- In this, it almost seems like God chose the length for creation based upon what was most suitable to man and his constitution.
- He made us to function best on a seven-day cycle, and there is no reason to suppose that the original days are of different length than the subsequent days.

III. Thirdly, we are taught *how* God made heaven and earth

A. He spoke it into existence by the word of His power...

1. Illustrate:
 - a. In v. 3—He speaks light into existence.
 - b. In v. 14—He speaks all the hosts of heaven into existence—all the planets and stars and galaxies!
 - c. In v. 24—He speaks all the land creatures into existence.
2. This creative word is His word of decree or His word of power by which He calls things that are not so that they suddenly appear.

B. The only way we know that God did this is by faith...

1. I mentioned before that it is intrinsic to us to know that God made everything,
 - but to know that He did it by mere speaking is not intrinsic to us...
 - It is something we only know because God has told us.
 - a. Hebrews 11:3 explains that we know this fact by faith...
 - **Heb 11:3: By faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that the things which are seen were not made of things which are visible.**
 - b. What does it mean, “by faith?”
 - Many people have the idea that faith is just believing something to be true, even though there is no evidence for it...
 - But in scripture, faith is not that at all!
 - In scripture,
 - faith is believing something is true because God said it.
 - It is believing the testimony that God has given.
 - God’s testimony is the fullest evidence imaginable!
 - Surely you would sooner believe your Creator than a historian or a scientist that cannot think outside the box of his naturalistic presuppositions!- 2. Believing that God created by the word of His power is a touchstone of our faith...
 - by that I mean it is something you can test people with to see if their faith is real.
 - a. Romans 4 shows that Abraham was able to believe that God could give him a child only because he believed that God could call into existence what was not.

- A person who cannot believe that Jesus healed people and gave them perfect and immediate use of their arms or legs—even when they were amputated...
 - does not really believe that God can call what is not as though it is...
 - He does not really believe that God can give life to dead sinners.
- b. You see, regeneration is a greater miracle than creation!
 - God speaks life into us by the word of His power...
 - If you don't believe in a God who can do that, you don't believe in a God who can save you...
 - and you need to be saved!
- c. As I mentioned before, this is also a good test because it is almost invariably the case that those who reject moral teachings or doctrinal teachings in the scripture that do not suit them also reject a literal six day creation.

IV. Fourthly, we are taught *in what condition* God made heaven and earth

A. The Lord makes a point of telling us this...

1. After each successive stage, He tells us that it was good...
 - You can see that comment at the end of each day's work...
 - He looks at what He has done, assesses it, and declares it to be "good."
2. Then, after man was made, He tells us it was "very good"...
 - This is based upon His divine judgement!
 - He was pleased with what He had made including man!

TRANS> Of course, God knew what He had made and did not really need to inspect it...

- but He declares what He thinks of the creation for our benefit.

B. This has a number of important theological implications for us

1. First, this teaches us that God is a God who inspects His creation—
 - a. He is the judge of it and has an opinion concerning it.
 - He reveals this from the beginning—that He is concerned about what we do—He is not detached and indifferent...
 - b. Now that we are fallen,
 - It offends many people that God does judge His creation...

- But it is His right to do so—it is His—it is for Him to declare what He thinks of it.
 - We must all answer to Him for what we are and for what we do.
2. Second, it teaches us that God only creates what is good.
- You must not think that the human race was always corrupt!
 - God fully approved of us when we first came from His hand.
 - Solomon says:
 - **Ec 7:29 Truly, this only I have found: That God made man upright, but they have sought out many schemes.**
 - God is not the author of sin; sin is our doing—
 - It is our corrupting of His good creation.
 - This is why our offense is so great.
3. Thirdly, even inclusive of the fact that we fell, from God’s standpoint, it is all very good.
- Even the sin itself has its purpose...
 - God will gain glory to Himself through it.
 - When He pronounced man as very good,
 - man had not fallen, but he was subject to falling...
 - Still, God saw this as very good because He had purposed that man should fall.

V. Fifthly, we are taught *why* God made heaven and earth

A. In one way, we have seen that it was very much for man

1. The things made are presented from his perspective—the light for him to see, the sun and moon and stars for measuring time, the plants for food...
2. The man is given dominion and called to subdue the earth...
 - He was to put it to use for himself...
 - God planted the first garden, but Adam and his descendents would plant many more gardens...

B. But the whole creation is at last for Him

- This is brought out in three ways...

1. First, we can see that it had to be for Him because there was no one around to tell Him what to do when He created...
 - a. Obviously, if you do something when there is no one else around to do it for,
 - you do it for yourself.
 - Of course God's self is three persons, so we may say that they created for each other, but all is for God.
 - b. It may also be the case that He had in mind doing much for His creatures whom He was about to create...
 - but as He was the one that was forming them with things that they would like and things they would not like,
 - lying at the foundation of His plan to make "happy" creatures or blessed creatures with many things done for them...
 - there remains the fact that He did it all for Himself.
 - c. This is very simple and very obvious,
 - but it very difficult for us in our pride to accept.
 - We feel that somehow we ought to have been consulted about the way things were to be done...
 - but there was nothing to consult until we were created, and once we were created, we are what we are.
 - It is so hard for us to accept it, but there is no other option...
 - The potter has a right to make what he wants with the clay.
 - The only basis we have for rendering a judgement about it is the sense of justice that He has put into us.
2. Secondly, that God created all things for himself is brought out in what we have already seen...
 - That God judges the earth...declares the creation to be good or not good.
 - This judgement is the way He reveals Himself to His rational creatures...
 - showing that He hates sin and evil and loves righteousness.
 - In 1 Thessalonians 1:9-10, we are told that when the Lord comes to judge at the last day,
 - He will be coming to be glorified in His saints and to be admired among all those who believe...
 - In no way is God's character more strikingly revealed to us than when He judges us for the sin that displeases him.

- You learn a lot about anyone by learning what pleases them and what displeases them.
3. Thirdly, that God created all things for Himself is brought out in Gen 2:3 with the institution of the Sabbath.
- a. The Sabbath is sanctified, or holy—
 - The day was made holy for man...
 - Holy means set apart to God.
 - It is a day set apart for man to worship God!
 - And the main thing that He was to be praised for was what?
 - For His creation!
 - That in six days He made heaven and earth...
 - Man was given a day to celebrate the creation and to give honour to God...
 - b. How are we to do this?
 - By remembering what He has done for us in creation!
 - By remembering the glorious way He did it!
 - By praising Him with thanksgiving and offering ourselves to serve Him with joy.
 - c. He made us and all things for Himself,
 - and we find our place only in submission to Him...
 - It is all for Him, so let us consciously give ourselves up to Him with joy and gladness.