

CHURCH OF THE REDEEMER

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Series:	The Heidelberg Catechism		Pastor/Teacher
Number:	16		Gary L.W. Johnson
Text:	Acts 17:24-31		
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The Ruler of All Things

10. Lord's Day

Question 27. What dost thou mean by the providence of God?

Answer: The almighty and everywhere present power of God; (a) whereby, as it were by his hand, he upholds and governs (b) heaven, earth, and all creatures; so that herbs and grass, rain and drought, (c) fruitful and barren years, meat and drink, health and sickness, (d) riches and poverty, (e) yea, and all things come, not by chance, but by his fatherly hand. (f)

(a) Acts 17:25 Neither is worshipped with men's hands, as though he needed any thing, seeing he giveth to all life, and breath, and all things; Acts 17:26 And hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation; Acts 17:27 That they should seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after him, and find him, though he be not far from every one of us: Acts 17:28 For in him we live, and move, and have our being; as certain also of your own poets have said, For we are also his offspring. Jer. 23:23 Am I a God at hand, saith the LORD, and not a God afar off? Jer. 23:24 Can any hide himself in secret places that I shall not see him? saith the LORD. Do not I fill heaven and earth? saith the LORD. Isa. 29:15 Woe unto them that seek deep to hide their counsel from the LORD, and their works are in the dark, and they say, Who seeth us? and who knoweth us? Isa. 29:16 Surely your turning of things upside down shall be esteemed as the potter's clay: for shall the work say of him that made it, He made me not? or shall the thing framed say of him that framed it, He had no understanding? Ezek. 8:12 Then said he unto me, Son of man, hast thou seen what the ancients of the house of Israel do in the dark, every man in the chambers of his imagery? for they say, The LORD seeth us not; the LORD hath forsaken the earth. (b) Heb. 1:3 Who being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high; (c) Jer. 5:24 Neither say they in their heart, Let us now fear the LORD our God, that giveth rain, both the former and the latter, in his season: he reserveth unto us the appointed weeks of the harvest. Acts 14:17 Nevertheless he left not himself without witness, in that he did good, and gave us rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness. (d) John 9:3 Jesus answered, Neither hath this man sinned, nor his parents: but that the works of God should be made manifest in him. (e) Prov. 22:2 The rich and poor meet together: the LORD is the maker of them all. (f) Matt. 10:20 For it is not ye that speak, but the Spirit of your Father which speaketh in you. Prov. 16:33 The lot is cast into the lap; but the whole disposing thereof is of the LORD.

Question 28. What advantage is it to us to know that God has created, and by his providence does still uphold all things?

Answer: That we may be patient in adversity; (a) thankful in prosperity; (b) and that in all things, which may hereafter befall us, we place our firm trust in our faithful God and Father, (c) that nothing

shall separate us from his love; (d) since all creatures are so in his hand, that without his will they cannot so much as move. (e)

(a) Rom. 5:3 And not only so, but we glory in tribulation also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience; James 1:3 Knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience. Ps. 39:9 I was dumb, I opened not my mouth; because thou didst it. Job 1:21 And said, Naked came I out of my mother's womb, and naked shall I return thither: the LORD gave, and the LORD hath taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD. Job 1:22 In all this Job sinned not, nor charged God foolishly. (b) Deut. 8:10 When thou hast eaten and art full, then thou shalt bless the LORD thy God for the good land which he hath given thee. 1 Thess. 5:18 In every thing give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you. (c) Ps. 55:22 Cast thy burden upon the LORD, and he shall sustain thee: he shall never suffer the righteous to be moved. Rom. 5:4 And patience, experience; and experience, hope: (d) Rom. 8:38 For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, Rom. 8:39 Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. (e) Job. 1:12 And the LORD said unto Satan, Behold, all that he hath is in thy power; only upon himself put not forth thine hand. So Satan went forth from the presence of the LORD. Job. 2:6 And the LORD said unto Satan, Behold, he is in thine hand; but save his life. Acts 17:28 For in him we live, and move, and have our being; as certain also of your own poets have said, For we are also his offspring. Acts 17:25 Neither is worshipped with men's hands, as though he needed any thing, seeing he giveth to all life, and breath, and all things; Prov. 21:1 The king's heart is in the hand of the LORD, as the rivers of water: he turneth it withersoever he will.

Our English word *omnipotent* is derived directly from the Latin OMNIPOTENTIA, which, as you can see, is formed by OMNIS (all) and POTENTIA (power), thus its meaning, "having all power or might." In classical Christian theism, *omnipotence* is one of the attributes of God.¹ We find this attribute repeatedly underscored throughout the Scriptures. The book of Revelation, in particular, accents this attribute of God. "Alleluia: for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth" (KJV).² You may have encountered in a college class or elsewhere some smart aleck asking the question, "Can God make a rock so big He can't move it?" Such questions contain obvious contradictions and are therefore strictly meaningless.³ The omnipotence of God is limited *only* by His essence or nature and not by anything external to Himself. "Thus," notes Richard Muller, "the fact that God cannot do evil, cannot die, and cannot cease to be Father, Son, and Spirit is not a limit on or a contradiction of His *omnipotentia*."⁴ The opening verse of the Bible declares the omnipotence of God (Genesis 1:1). He is the almighty Creator of all things. The early church grasped the critical importance of this doctrine and this is reflected in the Apostles' Creed. "The doctrine of creation," writes Robert A. Morey, "was viewed as the beginning point of all theology."⁵

I. THE GOD MEN INVENT

Wrong views of God and of our relationship to Him are the chief source of false religion and idolatry. God is not:

- A. A Limited Being. This was one of the major problems that Paul saw in much of pagan religion (verse 24). Sadly, there are those today (within the ranks of Evangelicalism) who likewise embraced the teaching that God is a limited being.⁶
- B. A Remote Being. God is not removed from us. He is not an absentee-landowner. Because He is a God that is near to us (verse 27), we are responsible and accountable to Him.
- C. An Abstract Concept. God is not simply a force or a source of energy. He is a person and acts according to His nature.

II. THE GOD OF THE BIBLE

The Apostle Paul declares to the Athenians that he serves the true and living God.

- A. He is Omnipotent. He is a personal being distinct from creation. He is the Creator and preserver of all things.
- B. He is Omnipresent. He is not far from any one of us, but is everywhere – beholding (Hebrews 4:13), directing (Ephesians 1:11) and controlling all things (Romans 8:28). We are dependent and responsible to Him. This is Paul's underlying promise. All that exists does so because God is the Creator. We are dependent on Him because we are His creatures and as believers we are dependent on Him in a special sense. Our spiritual life and continuance is not due to any law, nor is it innate⁷ – we are absolutely dependent upon Him for everything.

CONCLUSION: The doctrine of creation is rightly considered one of the pillars of Biblical Christianity, and this is one reason why it has been the focus of opposition down through the years. "Once God is no longer viewed as the Creator of heaven and earth, then He is no longer the God who gives the world its existence. He becomes just one of many gods, all of whom derive their existence from the world!"⁸ "God,' said VanTil, 'is the Creator; the world is his creation.' Over and over again in class he would draw two circles on the blackboard: a large circle representing God and a smaller circle below it representing the creation. The two were connected by lines representing providence and revelation, but VanTil emphasized the distinctness of the two circles from one another. He insisted that Christianity has a 'two-circle' worldview, as opposed to secular thought, which has only 'one-circle' thinking. Nonbiblical thought makes all reality equal: if there is a God, he is equal to the world. But for Christianity, God is the sovereign Creator and Lord; the world in is no sense equal to him."⁹

ENDNOTES

- ¹ There are at the present time a number of theologians claiming the *Evangelical* label, but who have openly repudiated classical theism with its emphasis on God as being all-knowing (omniscient), all-powerful (omnipotent), all-present (omnipresent) and unchangeable (immutable). For a critical evaluation of this school of thought, see Robert B. Strimple, "What Does God Know?" in *The Coming Evangelical Crisis*, ed. J.H. Armstrong (Moody, 1996), pp. 139-154.
- ² The NIV Bible reads, "Hallelujah! For our Lord God Almighty reigns." The Greek word PANTOKRATÆR is the compound of PAS (all) and KRATEÆ (power, might), thus the equivalent of omnipotent. This designation of God is used nine times in Revelation, cf. 1:8; 4:8; 11:17; 15:3; 16:7, 14; 19:6, 15; 21:22.
- ³ cf. A.J. Hoover's excellent little book, *Don't You Believe It! Poking Holes in Faulty Logic* (Moody, 1982), p. 17.
- ⁴ R.A. Muller, *Dictionary of Latin and Greek Theological Terms* (Baker, 1985), p. 208.
- ⁵ R.A. Morey, *Battle of the Gods: The Gathering Storm in Modern Evangelicalism* (Crown, 1989), p. 155. Not everyone has grasped this significance. O. Sydney Barr in his exposition of the Apostles' Creed makes no mention of the doctrine of creation and passes over the phrase, "Maker of heaven and earth," in quick fashion; cf. his *From the Apostles' Faith to the Apostles' Creed* (Oxford, 1964), p. 20.
- ⁶ Clark Pinnock, perhaps the most noted of the new breed of Process Evangelicals, declares outright, "I stand against classical theism." cf. his essay in *Predestination and Freewill: Four Views of Divine Sovereignty and Human Freedom* (IVP, 1986), and my review of this book in *The Westminster Theological Journal* (Vol. XLVIII, Fall 1986, No. 2), pp. 391-398. Pinnock's "god" is a very finite god who cannot know the future or control events as they unfold.
- ⁷ One of the most dreadful heresies of modern times is that spawned by the Word of Faith teachers (the health and wealth gospel that is promoted by Paul Crouch on TBN). These include Kenneth and Gloria Copeland, Fred Price, Casey Treat, Jerry Savelle, et. al., cf. Hank Hanegraaff, *Christianity In Crisis* (Harvest House, 1993), and D.R. McConnell, *A Different Gospel: A Historical and Biblical Analysis of the Modern Faith Movement* (Hendrickson, 1988), for documentation and refutation.
- ⁸ Morey, op. cit., p. 157.
- ⁹ As cited by John Frame, *Cornelius VanTil: An Analysis of His Thought* (P&R, 1996), p. 53.

