

I Believe in God, the Creator

SCOTT HOEZEE

The astronomer, Carl Sagan, wrote the forward to a book by physicist, Stephen Hawking; and Sagan claimed this: Hawking is attempting to understand the mind of God; and this makes all the more unexpected the conclusion of the effort: A universe with no edge in space; no beginning or end in time; and nothing for a creator to do. Now, science should not intrude on theology, but some like Carl Sagan want to claim that the universe is self-created. Christians disagree. We believe in God, the Father Almighty; creator of heaven and earth. Today on *Groundwork*, we will explore this. Stay tuned.

DAVE BAST

From Words of Hope and ReFrame Media, this is *Groundwork*, where we dig into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Dave Bast.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And I am Scott Hoezee; and Dave, with this program we are now on program number three of what will probably end up being a 12-part series on the Apostles' Creed; and we began this series looking at the nature of creeds in general. Why do Christians need these summary statements of belief? We looked at the history of them—the history of the Apostles' Creed specifically; and then we started to explore the three parts of the Creed, and we are starting with the part of the Creed dedicated to God, the Father. Still to come, starting in the next program, we will go to the section dedicated to God, the Son. Eventually we get to God, the Spirit; but right now, we are looking at God, the Father. We looked at the Person of God, the Father in the previous program: that he is almighty; and now we are going to look at the work of the Father.

DAVE BAST

Right; he is the creator of heaven and earth; and of course, the Bible simply assumes the existence of God. The Bible doesn't try to prove that there is a God...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DAVE BAST

People are divided on that question, clearly; although the vast majority of people today even, and throughout history, have believed that there must be a God. Where did all this come from? Why is there something rather than nothing? How did the universe begin; and you either have to believe there is no answer to that question: The universe just is, as you hinted in the intro to this program, Scott, that some scientists believe in sort of the everlasting nature of the universe; or you have to believe that there is a God who was there in the beginning, which is what the Bible says.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Exactly; Genesis: In the beginning, God...in the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth; and in the Creed, the work of creation...and as we will say, the work of providence...of superintending and taking care of that creation...is designated to the Father; but, in terms of the doctrine of the Trinity, Dave, this actually gets a little bit tricky because of some of what is revealed to us also in the New Testament about who did what in the creation.

DAVE BAST

Yes, right; because the New Testament very clearly affirms that it was the Son who was involved in the creation...who was the agent of creation, maybe we would say. So, you get a passage...a famous passage like John 1:

In the beginning was the Word (which is a reference to Jesus) and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ²He was with God in the beginning. ³Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made.

Jesus the Word is the one who does the creating.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; as the Bible commentator, Frederick Dale Bruner, often notes: You know, in Genesis you get all those lines: Let there be...let there be...let there be...let there be light, let there be daffodils, let there be bullfrogs...well, that is the Son doing the talking; it is the Son saying: Let there be light; let there be daffodils...so, the Son is involved. We get this also, by the way, Dave, from the Apostle Paul in Colossians 1: A passage we have looked at in other contexts on *Groundwork*.

¹⁵The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. ¹⁶For in him all things were created: Things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities. All things have been created through him and for him.

DAVE BAST

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

So, there it is again. The Son was...and the Spirit, too, we should point out...

DAVE BAST

Right, yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

All three Persons were involved in the act of creation, even though we can still sort of see the work of the Father as being sort of central to overseeing that entire act.

DAVE BAST

Yes; and you might ask: Well, why is this important? One reason that it is important is because it is important for us to remember that all of God is involved in all God's works. So, creation is not just God, the Father; and salvation is not just God, the Son...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DAVE BAST

For that matter; because one of the early heresies that afflicted the Christian Church was sort of dividing up history and saying: Well, the Old Testament...that was God the Father, and he was mean and he was nasty and judgmental; now, in the New Testament, we've got God, the Son—Jesus—and everything is cool. No; the Church Fathers and theologians said: No, that is not right. All of God is present in creation; all of God is present in salvation as well.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; another...one of the very first heresies in the First and Second Century, already, Dave, was Gnosticism, which also tried to put distance between God and the physical world. The physical world was considered gross and fallen, and the goal of spirituality was to distance yourself permanently, from all things

physical. There again, the Bible says no, no. The creation is good; God made it, and through the Son, God will redeem it. So, this is the work of the Father; and of course, it involves the Son and the Spirit, and that is why the Creed...the Apostles' Creed...views creation as principally the Father's work; but Dave, one thing we should point out is, you know, in all of our debates the last hundred-plus years over evolution and the age of the universe...and you know, we call them creation wars and creation controversies...we have had this tendency to do something Christians didn't used to do, and that is to say: Creation was once and done a long time ago...

DAVE BAST

Yes, yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Boom! God created... Boom! Now, God clapped the dust off his hands and walked away, and creation was done. That is not true. Christians believe in something called in Latin *creatio continua*—the ongoing act of creation. God is still creating today!

DAVE BAST

Yes, absolutely; and speaking of heresies, there is another common heresy that is still very much with us, I think, called Deism; and that is the idea that, well, yes, God created things in the beginning, and he kind of started the world running, and then he stepped back and he is just uninvolved...up there somewhere with his arms folded; and we can get the wrong idea, even from Genesis when it says that God rested on the seventh day. There is some wonderful truth packed into that idea, but part of that truth is *not* that God stopped working—that God does nothing...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DAVE BAST

The Bible very clearly says that God continues to be involved. There is a wonderful line, I think by G. K. Chesterton, somewhere that says: The sun doesn't get up each morning...the sun doesn't rise each morning because of the unalterable laws of physics. The sun rises each morning because God says: Get up!

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; Psalm 19: The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands. ²Day after day, they pour forth speech...^{4b}In the heavens, God has pitched a tent for the sun. ⁵It is like a bridegroom coming out of his chamber; like a champion rejoicing to run his course. ⁶It rises at one end of the heavens, makes its circuit to the other; nothing is deprived of its warmth.

So, there it is, Dave. God says to the sun: Get up, you know...and sometimes we see a beautiful sunset over the ocean, and it is just gorgeous as the sun slips below the horizon. You sort so want to say: Do it again.

DAVE BAST

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Do it again; and God says: I will, tomorrow...tomorrow.

DAVE BAST

Exactly...like a kid when you do a trick, or play a game with them: Do it again...do it again! We all have a little bit of that in us, yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

You know, my friend Deb Haarsma, who is an astronomer, and the president of the BioLogos organization right now...she points out that with our telescopes now we see these giant gaseous clouds of nebulae, which

are star nurseries. God is making new stars right now, which is a very exciting thought. He is making new daisies every day. He is making new babies inside a woman's womb every day. God's act of creation didn't just get finished long ago, it goes on and on; and that is a wonderful thing.

DAVE BAST

A wonderful thing; and a wonderful truth. So, we believe in God, the Father Almighty, who is the creator; and with the Son and the Spirit, created everything in the beginning, but continues to be involved intimately and directly in bringing new life and new things into existence—the ongoing creation; but this idea that we confess in the Creed, also contains within it another wonderful doctrine...not just the idea of creation, but the idea of providence, the doctrine that God continues to rule over the whole world, and that is what we want to explore next.

Segment 2

SCOTT HOEZEE

You are listening to *Groundwork*, where we are digging into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Scott Hoezee.

DAVE BAST

And I am Dave Bast; so, we are talking, Scott, about God, the Creator...the creator of heaven and earth.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Exactly: I believe in God, the Father Almighty, creator of heaven and earth...an echo of Genesis: In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth; and we could point out, by the way, that in Hebrew that phrase: Heavens and the earth is called a *merismus**. In Hebrew, and in the ancient world, whenever you took two opposite extremes, it stood for the whole. So, by saying God created the highest places (the heavens) and the lowest places (the earth), it is saying God created everything in between from A to Z...the whole enchilada...everything...

DAVE BAST

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Was created by God...*but*, as you just said, Dave...that means everything is being superintended by God, and that leads us to the doctrine of *providence*.

DAVE BAST

Providence, from another Latin word, *provideo*...to provide...we get that word from it, or to see ahead...to superintend...to watch over...to bring all the necessities of life for his creation and for his creatures; and that is an idea that emerges clearly in the Bible, especially in the Old Testament...when you think of some of the beautiful wisdom literature in the Psalms, or the book of Job, for that matter.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; in fact, we did a series on Job recently. We will be referring to it for another reason in just a few minutes. Job, you know, is full of questions, but at the end, God comes and does a rather surprising thing: He takes Job and his friends on a kind of whirlwind tour of the cosmos; but along the way, we get all kinds of lines like this...like Job 38, 39, 40...and what these verses point to, Dave, is God's continued activity in taking care of the world. So, God says to Job:

38:34“Can you raise your voice to the clouds and cover yourself with a flood of water? 35Do you send the lightning bolts on their way? Do they report to you, ‘Here we are!’? 36Who gives the ibis wisdom, or the rooster understanding? 39Do you hunt the prey for the lioness, and satisfy the hunger of the lions, 40when they crouch in their dens or lie in wait in a thicket? 41Who provides food for the raven when its young cry out to God and wander about for lack of food?”

So, here we've got God saying: You know what? I am taking care of stuff right now; which to an unbeliever would sound ridiculous...

DAVE BAST

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

They would say: Lions eat because they hunt gazelles. The lion kills the gazelle and brings the meat back to its cubs. The Bible says: True, but I [God] am the one who helps arrange that. I am making sure the ibis and the rooster and donkeys and the lion and the raven are taken care of. God is active in his creation, taking care of it to this day.

DAVE BAST

Well, or another beautiful passage that says exactly the same thing, Psalm 104: ²⁷All creatures look to you to give them their food at the proper time. ²⁸When you give it to them, they gather it up; when you open your hand, they are satisfied with good things. ²⁹When you hide your face, they are terrified. When you take away their breath, they die and return to the dust. ³⁰When you send your Spirit, they are created; and you renew the face of the ground.

Now, that says *all* creatures, and that includes us. So, what the Bible says is that life comes from God and death comes from God, too: When you take away their breath, they die. Again...and this is not just an Old Testament theme...think of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount, when he talks about the flowers of the field, whom God clothes; and the birds of the air, whom God feeds; and he cares for us as well, Jesus says; even more so.

SCOTT HOEZEE

You know, Mahatma Gandhi obviously was not a Christian, but he had some beautiful sentiments, with which Christians can surely agree; and Gandhi said once: God is as near to us as flesh is to fingernails; and that is a very Christian sentiment. You mentioned in the last segment, Dave, that Christians are not deists. We don't think God just sort of wound up the universe like a clock at the dawn of time, and now he has just been letting it tick down on its own while he is off doing something else. No, God is here; God is intimately involved. He is not aloof; he is not deaf to our cries; he is not unaware of our needs. No, God isn't bound by time, like we are; and yet, somehow he is always aware of where *we* are in time, and is present to us in that way.

DAVE BAST

But of course, this raises an issue for us as believers, and this is something we have talked about frequently on other *Groundwork* programs. It is what is often called the problem of evil. So, if God is so close to me...if God is so caring for me...if God is watching over every detail of my life, why do these terrible things sometimes happen? And did God do that? And did God send that accident? Did God cause me to have cancer? You know, these are not easy questions. We are not going to answer them here, again; as I said we have dealt with them frequently before; but, it is important to at least acknowledge that, and to recognize that faith can win through some of these issues, and continue to hold onto this belief in the providence of God.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And in our final segment of this program in just a few minutes, Dave, we will look at another reason why we have a cause for hope despite the hard pastoral questions that providence raises. Right; so Psalm 104 says if you take away their breath, they die. Well, okay; but you know, when a 4-year-old dies somebody will say: Why did God take away her breath? She was just an innocent little child. Hard questions. Jesus, in Matthew 5, as part of the Sermon on the Mount, does a little bit of a different twist on this. Jesus says: ⁴⁴I tell you, love your enemies; pray for those who persecute you, ⁴⁵that you may be children of your Father in heaven (and then this line; Jesus says:) He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good; and he sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.

So, often we ask the question: Why do bad things happen to good people? Jesus here sort of makes us ask the question: Why do good things happen to bad people?

DAVE BAST

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And Jesus says: Because God does that.

DAVE BAST

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

He takes care of everybody; and sometimes the same rain that benefits the righteous and their crops benefits the unrighteous and *their* crops.

DAVE BAST

Absolutely.

SCOTT HOEZEE

These are difficult matters.

DAVE BAST

Books have been written addressing the problem of evil...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Libraries worth of books are written.

DAVE BAST

Yea; but we rarely address the problem of good...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DAVE BAST

Which is what Jesus raises in this idea. I mean, the truth is that life is complex, and life is messy; and what we really believe when we hold onto the doctrine of providence is that things don't happen to us simply because of random chance...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DAVE BAST

That, no; God doesn't directly cause evil. That is a libel...that is a slander of God and his goodness; but at the same time, when evil blights our lives, we don't have to think that we have slipped out of God's hands somehow...that he is no longer in control.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DAVE BAST

So, that is where we come down; and I often think, Scott, of a verse from the psalms that I love: I do not occupy myself with things that are too high for me. I can rest secure in the knowledge that God is the Father

Almighty—the Creator and sustainer of heaven and earth.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And we mentioned...and we would refer our listeners to dive more deeply into this question as you dig into scripture, as we do here on *Groundwork*...we do have that series on Job about suffering. We did a program on the prophet Habakkuk a while back, which also talks about unanswered prayer; but Job ends up with exactly what you just said, Dave. God comes and shows him all these wonders, and Job just ends up saying; I guess I just don't know enough to figure this out, but I will still trust God; and that, I think, is where we come out; but, there is another reason why we can trust God even when bad things happen, and we are going to take that up as we close the program in just a moment.

Segment 3

DAVE BAST

I am Dave Bast, along with Scott Hoezee, and you are listening to *Groundwork*, where today we are diving into the phrase: I believe in God, the Father Almighty, creator of heaven and earth. So, we have talked about God as creator; the whole Trinity involved in that, but especially the work of the Father, originating the universe in continuing to create new life, and especially in watching over it in the doctrine of providence in the sustaining rule of God, who governs all things.

SCOTT HOEZEE

So, what benefit for our lives is this belief in God, the creator, and God, the provider? As we close the program, let's think practically about that. We will start with God, the Father as creator; but there are a myriad of ways that a robust belief in God as creator applies to our lives; but Dave, one of the things that it means is that we just have endless reasons for which to give God praise. Ever more reasons as we explore the creation and learn more about it, to give God praise, because he made it all. I mean, we can thank God that he didn't make just one kind of flower...he didn't make just roses...he made all kinds of flowers. In fact, when my family goes to Colorado, if you get up above twelve thousand feet in the mountains, trees cannot grow. There is not enough oxygen anymore. It is an alpine tundra environment; but when we go there, in the national park...the Rocky Mountain National Park...along the trail in summer are these impossibly small flowers that grow and survive in this harsh, harsh tundra environment; and they are tiny...impossibly tiny...like every petal is about as thick as a sewing needle, but they are bright, bright purple, and bright, bright yellow; and you look at those and say: God made that! That is just amazing. What an awesome and imaginative God we serve.

DAVE BAST

Absolutely; I mean, you could apply that to almost any part of the universe. Think of the oceans that teem with these creatures...everything from a blue whale, the biggest living creature on earth...to the plankton that they eat that are impossible to see with the naked eye, almost...so, yes, this wonderful variety...and you know, Scott, I am often struck...you will be maybe watching some person being interviewed or something or other, and they will say: I am just so thankful...so thankful; and I always wonder, do you know to whom you can address that thanks...that praise? If you don't believe in God, who are you thankful to, you know?

SCOTT HOEZEE

Years ago, my wife and I toured the great sequoias...the giant redwoods north of the Golden Gate Bridge in San Francisco; and it is like a cathedral in there; it really is. People are hushed in there. We went to a little coffee shop next to the national park there afterwards, and there was a woman at another table talking to a man, and she said: This may sound strange, but when I was out there, I just felt like singing. And what I wanted to say was: To whom? To whom would you address your song? I know to whom I would address my song; maybe she did, too; but we would give thanks to God. It reminds me of Gerard Manley Hopkins, Dave, a poem called *Pied Beauty*, where Hopkins wrote: Glory be to God for dappled things—for skies of couple-color as a brindled cow; for rose-moles all in stipple upon trout that swim; fresh-firecoal chestnut-falls; finches' wings; landscape plotted and pieced—fold, fallow, and plough; and all trades their gear and tackle and trim; all things counter, original, spare, strange; whatever is fickle, freckled (who knows how?) With

swift, slow; sweet, sour; adazzle, dim; he fathers-forth whose beauty is past change: Praise him.

DAVE BAST

A great poet—a deep, and not always easy to understand or untangle poet; but this idea of the beautiful variety of nature...we are thankful for that; but, I think, Scott, too, there is something else that we as believers can take comfort in when we think about the doctrine of creation and providence, and that is the fact that God is truly with us...that he became one of us. We are going to dig into this more in the next program...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes.

DAVE BAST

About Jesus; but he came into the creation, which is rather mind-boggling, to think that the Creator entered creation himself as a creature to be with us and to care for us.

SCOTT HOEZEE

C. S. Lewis once said that if you go to a play, if the playwright...the person who wrote the play...steps onto the stage, that means the show is over. It doesn't mean that in Christianity. The show was just beginning when the playwright—the author of creation—Jesus—became flesh; and because he came here, Dave, he also entered our sorrows; and on the cross he entered our death; and so when we think of providence now...and we were talking about the hard questions a little while ago, and death is a hard one...we know, as Paul writes in Romans 8:

³⁸I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers; ³⁹neither height nor depth nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Not even death can cut us out of God's providence now.

DAVE BAST

And that is why Paul says, too, earlier in that same magnificent 8th chapter of Romans: ²⁸paraphrased In all things God will work for our good—all things will work together for our ultimate salvation; even the bad things that happen, like the cross...the worst thing of all...God has the power to turn that somehow into a lasting benefit that will end in glory for us, and for the whole creation. So, you know, this is unspeakable comfort, and I think it has been to Christians down through the centuries; that the things that happen to us cannot separate us from God...they cannot somehow derail God's purpose in our lives, which is to bring us to glory.

SCOTT HOEZEE

So, every time we, along with sisters and brothers along the ages and around the globe on any given Sunday...and any day...we speak that first line: I believe in God, the Father Almighty, creator of heaven and earth...we are really, indeed, summing up the very essence of our faith and all that brings us comfort; thanks be to God.

DAVE BAST

Well, thank you for listening and digging deeply into scripture with *Groundwork*. We are your hosts, Dave Bast with Scott Hoezee, and we hope you will join us again next time as we turn to the next section of the Apostles' Creed and begin our study of God, the Son.

Connect with us at groundworkonline.com to share what *Groundwork* means to you; or tell us what you would like to hear discussed next on *Groundwork*.

* Editor's note: *Merismus* is a literary term that has its roots in the Greek language. This literary device is a type of synecdoche, and it means that two extreme opposites are listed to include everything else in-between.]

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