

Of Creation in General.

by John Gill

John Gill's sermon explores the nature, origin, and significance of creation as an act of God's divine will and power.

Scripture: Genesis 1:1-3, Psalm 104:24, Proverbs 16:4, Isaiah 55:7, John 1:1-3, Romans 1:20, Ephesians 1:11, Colossians 1:16, Hebrews 11:3, Revelation 4:11

Topics: "Creation", "Divine Sovereignty"

Description

John Gill expounds on the doctrine of creation, emphasizing that all things were created by God out of nothing, aligning with His eternal purposes and decrees. He explains the nature of creation, distinguishing between immediate and mediate creation, and highlights that the ultimate purpose of creation is to glorify God. Gill also discusses the role of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in the act of creation, asserting that it was a deliberate and instantaneous act of divine will. He concludes by affirming that the created world serves both God's glory and the good of humanity, urging believers to worship and trust in their Creator.

Transcript

A Body of Doctrinal Divinity

Book 3--Chapter 1

OF CREATION IN GENERAL.

Having considered the internal and eternal acts of the divine mind, and the transactions of the divine Persons with each other in eternity; I proceed to consider the external acts and works of God, or his goings forth out of himself, in the exercise of his power and goodness in the works of creation, providence, redemption, and grace; which works of God, without himself, in time, are agreeable to the acts of his mind within himself, in eternity. These are no other than his eternal purposes and decrees carried into execution; for "he worketh all things after the counsel of his own will" (Eph. 1:11).

I shall begin with the work of creation, which is what God himself began with; and shall consider the following things concerning it. 1. What creation is. Sometimes it only signifies the natural production of creatures into being, in the ordinary way, by generation and propagation; so the birth of persons, or the bringing them into being, in the common course of nature, is called the creation of them, and God is represented as their Creator (Ezek. 21:30; 28:14; Eccl. 12:1). Sometimes it designs acts of providence, in

bringing about affairs of moment and importance in the world; as when it is said, "I form the light, and create darkness"; which is explained by what follows, "I make peace and create evil": it is to be understood of prosperous and adverse dispensations of providence; which are the Lord's doings, and are according to his sovereign will and pleasure (Isa. 55:7).

So the renewing of the face of the earth, and the reproduction of herbs, plants, &c. in the returning spring of the year, is called a creation of them (Ps. 104:30). And the renewing of the world, in the end of time, though the substance of it will remain, is called a creating new heavens and a new earth, (Isa. 65:17). Sometimes it intends the doing something unusual, extraordinary, and wonderful; such as the earth's opening its mouth, and swallowing up the rebellious Israelites in the wilderness (Num. 16:30), and the wonderful protection of the church of God (Isa. 4:5), and particularly the amazing incarnation of the Son of God (Jer. 31:22).

But, to observe no more, creation may be distinguished into mediate and immediate; mediate creation is the production of beings, by the power of God, out of pre-existent matter, which of itself was not disposed to produce them; so God is said to create great whales and other fishes, which, at his command, the waters brought forth abundantly; and he created man, male and female; and yet man, as to his body, was made of the dust of the earth, and the woman out of the rib of man (Gen. 1:21,27), and, indeed, all that was created on the five last days of the creation, was made by the all-commanding power and will of God, out of matter which before existed, though indisposed of itself for such a production.

Immediate creation, and which is properly creation, is the production of things out of thing, or the bringing of a nonentity into being, as was the work of the first day, the creating the heavens and the earth, the unformed chaos, and the light commanded to arise upon it (Gen. 1:1-3). And these are the original of all things; so that all things ultimately are made out of nothing, which is the voice of divine revelation, and our faith is directed to assent unto and receive; "Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God; so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear" (Heb 11:3), but of things unseen, and indeed, which had no existence; for God, by his all-commanding word and power, "called things that are not as though they were" (Rom. 4:17), that is, called and commanded by his mighty power, nonentities into being; and this is what is meant by a creation of things out of nothing; and so the word *arb*, used for the making of the heavens and the earth in the beginning, signifies, as Aben Ezra and Kimchi observe; and indeed it cannot be conceived of otherwise, but that the world was made out of nothing; for, If nothing existed from eternity but God, or if nothing existed before the world was but himself, by which his eternity is described, and which he claims as peculiar to himself (Ps. 90:2; Isa. 43:10), and if the world was made by him, as it most certainly was, it must be made by him out of nothing, since besides himself, there was nothing existing, out of which it could be made; to say it was made out of pre-existent matter, is to beg the question; besides, that pre-existent matter must be made by him; for he has "created all things", (Rev. 4:11 and if all things, nothing can be excepted; and certainly not matter; for be that visible or invisible, one of them it must be; and both the one and the other are created of God (Col. 1:16), and this matter must be made out of nothing, so that it comes to the same thing, that all things are originally made out of nothing.

Besides, there are some creatures, and those the most noble, as angels and the souls of men, which are immaterial, and therefore are not made out of matter, and consequently are made out of nothing; and are brought from nonentity into being, by the almighty power of God; and if these, why not others? and if these and others, why not all things, even matter itself? As for that old and trite maxim, so much in the mouths of the ancient philosophers,[1] as well as modern reasoners, "*Ex nihilo nihil fit*", out of nothing, nothing is

made; this only holds true of finite nature, finite beings, second causes; by them out of nothing, nothing can be made; but not of infinite nature, of the infinite Being, the first Cause, who is a God of infinite perfection and power; and what is it that omnipotence cannot do?

Plato[2] owns that God is the Cause, or Author of those things, which before were not in being, or created all things out of nothing. 2. The object of creation, all things, nothing excepted in the whole compass of finite nature; "Thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure", or by thy will, "they are and were created" (Rev. 4:11), these all things are comprehended by Moses under the name of the heavens and the earth (Gen. 1:1), and more fully expressed by the apostles in their address to God, who is described by them as having "made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all that in them is" (Acts 4:24), and still more explicitly by the angel, who swore by the living God "who created heaven, and the things that therein are; and the earth, and the things that therein are; and the sea, and the things which are therein" (Rev. 10:6). 2a.

First, The heavens and all in them; these are often represented as made and created by God, and are said to be the work of his fingers and of his hands; being curiously as well as powerfully wrought by him (Ps. 8:3; 19:1; 102:25). They are spoken of in the plural number, for there are more heavens than one; there are certainly three, for we read of a "third" heaven, which is explained of "paradise" (2 Cor. 12:2,4), this is, 2a1. The heaven of heavens, the superior heaven, and the most excellent, the habitation of God, where his glorious presence is, where he has his palace, keeps his court, and is indeed his throne (Isa. 65:15; 66:1), and where angels dwell, and therefore they are called the angels of heaven, are in the presence of God there, and behold the face of our heavenly Father (Matthew 24:36; 18:10), and where glorified saints will be in soul and body to all eternity.

Now this is a place made and created by God, and as such cannot contain him, though his glory is greatly manifested in it, (1 Kings 8:27), it is where the angels are, who must have an "ubi" somewhere to be in, being finite creatures, and who are said to ascend unto, and descend from thence (John 1:51), and here bodies are, which require space and place, as those of "Enoch" and "Elijah", translated thither, and the human nature of Christ, which has ascended to it, and will be retained in it, until his second coming; and where the bodies of those are, who rose at the time of his resurrection; as well as all the bodies of the saints will be to all eternity: and this is expressly called a "place" by Christ, and is distinguished as the place of the blessed, from that of the damned (John 14:2,3; Luke 16:26), and is sometimes described by an house, a city, a country, kingdom, and an inheritance; and particularly it is called a "city whose builder and maker is God" (Heb. 11:10), for he that built all things built this; it is a part of his creation; and all things in it are created by him; he the uncreated Being excepted; even God, Father, Son, and Spirit; but the angels of it are his creatures; "He makes his angels spirits" (Ps. 104:4), of their creation, and the time of it, of their nature, number, excellency, and usefulness, I shall treat in a particular chapter hereafter. 2a2.

There is another heaven, lower than the former, and may be called the "second", and bears the name of the starry heaven, because the sun, and moon, and stars are placed in it; "Look towards heaven, and tell the stars", (Gen. 15:5; Isa. 40:26; Job 22:12), this reaches from the region of the moon to the place of the fixed stars, and to that immense space which our eyes cannot reach. Now this, and all that in it are, were created by God; he made the sun to rule by day, and the moon to rule by night; and he made the stars also (Gen. 1:16). 2a3.

There is another heaven lower than both the former, and may be called the aerial heaven; for the air and heaven are sometime synonymous; hence the fowls are sometimes called the fowls of the heaven, and sometimes the fowls of the air, they being the same (Gen. 7:3,23). Now this wide expanse, or firmament of

heaven, is the handy-work of God, and all things in it; not only the fowls that fly in it, but all the meteors gendered there; as rain, hail, snow, thunder, and lightning.

"Hath the rain a father?" None but God; and the same may be said of all the rest: (Job 37:6; 38:28,29). 2b. Secondly, The earth, and all that is therein. This was first made without form; not without any, but without the beautiful one in which it quickly appeared; and when the waters were drained off from it, and became dry land, it was called earth (Gen. 1:2,9,10) and as this was made by God, so all things in it; the grass, the herbs, the plants, and trees upon it; the metals and minerals in the bowels of it, gold, silver, brass, and iron; all the beasts of the field, and "the cattle on a thousand hills"; as well as the principal inhabitants of it, men, called eminently the inhabitants of the earth (Dan. 4:35).

Of the creation of man I shall treat in a distinct chapter by itself. 2c. Thirdly, The sea, and all that is in that; when God cleaved an hollow in the earth, the waters he drained off of it, he gathered into it; and gave those waters, thus gathered into one place, the name of seas (Gen. 1:10), and which were of his creating; "The sea is his, and he made it", (Ps. 95:5 and all in it: likewise the marine plants and trees, with other things therein; and all the fishes which swim in it, great and small, innumerable (Ps. 104:25,26).

Now these, the heavens, earth, and sea, and all that are in them, make up the world which God has created, and which is but one; for though we read of worlds, God has made by his Son, and which are framed by the word of God (Heb. 1:2; 11:3), yet these may have respect only to the distinction of the upper, middle, and lower world; for the numerous worlds some Jewish writers speak of, they are mere fables; and that the planets are so many worlds as our earth is, and that the fixed stars are so many suns to worlds unknown by us, are the conjectures of modern astronomers, and in which there is no certainty; revelation gives no account of them, and we have no concern with them; and were there as many as are imagined, and can be conceived of, this we may be assured of, they were all created by God. 3.

The next thing to be inquired into is, When creation began? or God began to create and bring things into being? and this was not in eternity, but in time; an "eternal creature", or a creature in eternity, is the greatest absurdity imaginable; to assert it is an insult on the common sense and understanding of men: it was in the beginning of time, or when time first began, as it did, when a creature was first made, that God made all things; "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth" (Gen. 1:1).

"And thou, Lord, in the beginning hast laid the foundation of the earth", &c. (Heb 1:10), these were the first that were created, and with these time begun; and every creature has a beginning, creation supposes it; for that is no other than bringing a nonentity into being; and therefore since what is created, once was not, it must have a beginning. Some philosophers, and Aristotle at the head of them, have asserted the eternity of the world; but without any reason; and is abundantly refuted by scripture; and therefore cannot be received by those that believe its divine authority; for that not only assures us that it was created in the beginning, and so had a beginning; but gives us an account of what was before it; as, that before the mountains were brought forth, or ever the earth and world were formed, God was, even from everlasting; so that an eternity anteceded the making of the world.

Christ also, the Wisdom and Word of God, was before the earth was; even when there were no depths, nor fountains abounding with water; before the mountains and hills were settled, and the highest part of the world made (Ps. 90:2; Prov. 8:24-30). A choice of men was made in Christ unto eternal life, before the foundation of the world; and grace was given to them in him, as their head and representative, before the world began, (Eph. 1:4; 2 Tim. 1:9). A full proof that the world had a beginning; and that there were things

done in eternity, before the world was in being.

To say the world, or matter, was coeternal with God, is to make that itself God; for eternity is a perfection peculiar to God; and where one perfection is, all are: what is eternal, is infinite and unbounded; and if the world is eternal, it is infinite; and then there must be two infinities, which is an absurdity not to be received. Besides, if eternal, it must necessarily exist; or exist by necessity of nature; and so be self-existent, and consequently God; yea, must be independent of him, and to which he can have no claim, nor any power and authority over it; whereas, according to divine revelation, and even the reason of things, all things were according to the pleasure of God, or by his will (Rev. 4:11), and therefore must be later than his will, being the effect of it.

And as the world had a beginning, and all things in it, it does not appear to be of any great antiquity; it has not, as yet, run out six thousand years, according to the scriptural account, and which may be depended on. Indeed, according to the Greek version, the age of the world is carried fourteen or fifteen hundred years higher; but the Hebrew text is the surest rule to go by: as for the accounts of the Egyptians, Chaldeans, and Chinese, which make the original of their kingdoms and states many thousands of years higher still; these are only vain boasts, and fabulous relations, which have no foundation in true history.

The origin of nations, according to the Scriptures, which appears to be the truest; and the invention of arts and sciences, and of various things necessary to human life; as of agriculture, the bringing up of cattle; making of various utensils of brass and iron, for the various businesses of life; and the finding out of letters; with many other things, which appear to be within the time the Scripture assigns for the creation; plainly show it could not be earlier, since without these men could not be long: nor does any genuine history give an account of anything more early, nor so early as the Scriptures do; and therefore we may safely conclude, that the origin of the world, as given by that, is true; for if the world had been eternal, or of so early a date as some kingdoms pretend unto, something or other done in those ancient times, would have been, some way or another, transmitted to posterity.

Under this head might be considered, the time and season of the year when the world was created. Some think it was in the vernal equinox, or spring of the year, when plants and trees are blooming, look beautiful, and all nature is gay and pleasant; and at which season in every year, there is a renewing of the face of the earth: and some have observed, in favour of this notion, that the redemption of man was wrought out at this time of the year, which is a restoration of the world; but these seem not sufficient to ascertain it.

Others think the world was created in the autumnal equinox, when the fruits of the earth are ripe, and in their full perfection; which seems more probable: and certain it is, that some nations of old, as the Egyptians and others, began their year at this time; as did the Israelites, before their coming out of Egypt, when they were ordered by the Lord to make a change; and from thenceforward to reckon the month Abib, or Nisan, in which they came out of Egypt, the first month of the year, and which answers to part of March and part of April; and which they always observed for the regulation of their ecclesiastic affairs, though with respect to civil matters, they still continued to reckon the year from Tisri, which answers to some part of our September; and it may be observed, that the feast of ingathering the fruits of the earth, is said to be "in the end of the year"; and when a new year begun; (see Ex. 12:2; 23:16).

But this is a matter of no great moment, which way soever it is determined; what follows is of more importance. 4. The author of creation is God, and he only; hence he is called the creator of the ends of the earth, of the whole world, to the utmost bounds of it; and claims the making the heavens and the earth to

himself alone; and a curse is pronounced on those deities that made not the heavens and the earth; and it is declared, that they should perish from the earth, and from under those heavens (Isa. 40:28; 42:5; 44:24; Jer. 10:11), and more divine persons than one were concerned in this work, for we read of creators and makers in the plural number (Eccl. 12:1; Job 35:10; Ps. 149:2; Isa. 54:5), and a plural word for God is made use of at the first mention of the creation (Gen. 1:1), and these divine persons are Father, Son, and Spirit, the one only living and true God; of the Father of Christ there can be no doubt; our Lord addresses his Father as Lord of heaven and earth, the possessor and governor of both, being the creator of them (Matthew 11:25), and the apostles expressly ascribe to him the making of the heavens, earth, and sea, and all that is in them (Acts 4:24,27), and he is said to make the worlds by his Son, and to create all things by Jesus Christ, (Heb. 1:2; Eph. 3:9), not by him as an instrument, but as a co-efficient cause; for the particle "by" does not always signify an instrument; (see Rom. 11:36), besides, it is expressly said of the Word and Son of God, who is God, that "all things were made by him, and without him was not anything made that is made"; and of him, the image of the invisible God and firstborn, or first parent and producer of every creature, that "all things were created by him, and for him"; by him as the first cause, and for him as the chief end (John 1:1-3; Col. 1:15,16), and the Son is addressed by his divine Father after this manner, "And thou, Lord, in the beginning hast laid the foundation of the earth, and the heavens are the works of thine hands"; and by him, the eternal Logos, the essential Word of God,[3] the worlds are said to be framed (Heb. 1:8-10; 11:3), nor is the Holy Spirit to be excluded from having a concern in the works of creation; since he not only moved upon the face of the waters at the first creation, and brought the unformed earth into a beautiful order, and by him the heavens were garnished, and bespangled with luminaries (Gen. 1:2; Job 26:13), but the formation of men is ascribed to him, "The Spirit of God hath made me, saith Elihu, and the breath of the Almighty hath given me life" (Job 33:4), and since the Spirit of God is the author of regeneration, which is a re-creation, or a new creation, and which requires the same almighty power to effect it, as the old creation did; and since he is the giver of all grace, and of every spiritual gift, which he dispenses to everyone severally as he will; no doubt ought to be made of it, that he had an hand in the creation of all things.

And this work of creation was wrought by God, Father, Son, and Spirit, without any other cause, principal or instrumental; not principal, for then that would be equal with God; nor instrumental, since creation is a production of things out of nothing, there was nothing for an instrument to operate upon; and since it was an instantaneous action, done in a moment, there could be no opportunity of using and employing one: besides, this instrument must be either God or a creature; not God, because it is supposed to be distinct from him, and to be made use of by him; and if a creature, it must be used in the creation of itself, which is an absurdity; for then it must be and not be at the same moment: nor could nor can creative power be communicated to a creature; this would be to make finite infinite, and so another God, which cannot be; this would be to make God to act contrary to his nature, to deny himself, which he cannot do; and to destroy all distinction between the creature and the Creator, and to introduce and justify the idolatry of the heathens, who worshipped the creature besides the Creator. 5.

The manner and order of the creation; it was done at once by the mighty power of God, by his all-commanding will and word, "He spake and it was done, he commanded and it stood fast" (Ps. 33:9), he gave the word, and every creature started into being in a moment; for though God took six days for the creation of the world and all things in it, to make his works the more observable, and that they might be distinctly considered, and gradually become the object of contemplation and wonder; yet the work of every day, and every particular work in each day, were done in a moment, without any motion and change, without any labour and fatigue, only by a word speaking, by an almighty "fiat", let it be done, and it

immediately was done; thus on the "first" day, by the word of the Lord the heavens and the earth were at once made, and light was called into being, "Let there be light, and there was light".

On the "second" day the firmament of heaven, the great expanse, was formed in the same manner, to divide the waters above it, gathered up and formed into clouds, from those that were under it upon the surface of the earth; and on the "third" day, in one moment of that day, God ordered the waters under the heavens to be gathered into one place called the sea, and leave the land dry, which he called earth; and in another moment of that day he commanded the earth to bring forth grass, herbs, and trees, and they sprung up at once.

On the "fourth" day he made the sun, moon, and stars in an instant, and directed their several uses; on the "fifth" day, in one moment of it, he bid the water bring forth fowls, and in another moment of it created great whales, and the numerous fishes of the sea; and on the "sixth" day, in one moment of it, he ordered the earth to bring forth living creatures, beasts, and cattle, wild and tame; and in another moment on the same day he created man after his image, his soul immaterial out of nothing, his body out of the dust of the earth; and in another moment on the same day created the woman out of the rib of man, immediately infusing into her a rational soul as into man, since both were made after the image of God; and thus God proceeded in the creation of things in the visible world, from things less perfect to those more perfect, and from inanimate creatures to animate ones, and from irrational creatures to rational ones; and in his great wisdom provided food and habitations for living creatures before he made them; and when he had finished his works he overlooked them and pronounced them all very good.

Nor is it any objection to the goodness of them that some creatures are noxious and harmful to men, since they become so through the sin of men; and others are of a poisonous nature, since even these may be good and useful to others; and God has given man capacity and sagacity to distinguish between what may be harmful to him, and what is salutary. There remains nothing more to be observed but, 6. The end of the creation of all things: and, 6a. The ultimate end is the glory of God: "The Lord hath made", in every sense, "all things for himself"; that is, for his glory (Prov. 16:4), and his glory is displayed in all, the heavens declare it, and the earth is full of it, even the glory of all the divine perfections; "for the invisible things of him", his nature, perfections, and attributes, "from the creation of the world", or by the works of creation, "are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made", which could never be made without them, "even his eternal power and Godhead"; all the perfections of deity, particularly his infinite and almighty power (Rom. 1:20), for as the prophet Jeremiah says, "Lord God, thou hast made the heaven and the earth by thy great power and stretched out arm" (Jer. 32:17), moreover the goodness of God is remarkably displayed in the creation; God appears therein to be communicative of his goodness, since he has not only made all things very good, but all conducive to the good of his creatures; the whole earth is full of his goodness; and men are called upon by the Psalmist to give thanks to God because he is good; and the principal things instanced in, in which his goodness appears, are the works of creation; (see Ps. 33:5; 136:1,4), &c. to all which may be added, the rich display that is made of the wisdom of God in the several parts of the creation; "The Lord by wisdom hath founded the earth, by understanding hath he established the heavens, by his knowledge the depths are broken up" (Prov. 3:19,20).

The wisdom of God appears in every creature he has made, in their form, shape, texture, and nature, suitable for what they are designed, and in their subserviency to each other, so that the Psalmist well might say, "O Lord, how manifold are thy works, in wisdom hast thou made them all!" (Ps. 104:24). 6b. The subordinate end is the good of man, of men in general; the earth is made to be inhabited by man, and all the creatures on it are put in subjection to him, and are for his use and service, as well as all that grows

upon it, or are in the bowels of it (Isa. 45:12,18; Ps. 8:6-8), the celestial bodies, the sun, moon, and stars, and all the influences of the heavens, are for his benefit (Gen. 1:14-18; Hosea 2:21,22), particularly the world, and all things were made for the sake of God's chosen people, who in the several ages of time were to be brought forth and appear on it; and in which, as on a stage and theatre, the great work of their redemption and salvation was to be performed in the most public manner; and they have the best title to the world, even the present world, Christ being theirs, whose is the world and the fulness of it (1 Cor. 3:22,23; Ps. 24:1), as well as the new heavens and the new earth, as they will be when refined and purified, the second Adam's world, are for their sakes; and in which none but righteous persons will dwell, even the whole church of God, when prepared as a bride for her husband, and where the tabernacle of God will be with men. 2 Peter 3:13 and Revelation 21:1-4, yea the angels of heaven are created for their use and service; they are all "ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who are heirs of salvation" (Heb. 1:14), wherefore upon the whole it becomes us to glorify and worship God our creator, to fear him and stand in awe of him, and to put our trust and confidence in him, both for things temporal and spiritual.

ENDNOTES:

[1] So Democritus. Diogenes, Epicurus, vid. Laert. l. 9, 10. "in Vita eorum.----nullam rem e nihilo gigni; nil posse creari, de nihilo----" Lucretius, l. 1. so Persii Satyr. 3. v. 84. "erit aliquid quod aut ex nihilo oriatur, aut in nihilum subito occidat, quis hoc physicus dixit unquam" Cicero de Divinatione, l. 3. c. 37.

[2] Sophista, p. 185.

[3] Pretty remarkable is the account given by Laertius in vita Zeno, of the notion of the Stoic, concerning creation, "with them," he says, "there are two principles of all things, an agent and a patient; the patient is substance, matter without quality; the agent on it is ton en auth logon ton qeon, God the Word; for he being eternal, effects or creates everything by or through the whole of it. "

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/john-gill/of-creation-in-general/>

Grow in Your Walk with Christ

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

www.sermonindex.net