

## "Whose Stuff Is This?"

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Genesis 1:1-8; 1:26-2:3 • January 29, 2012

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One day a group of scientists got together and decided that man had come a long way and no longer needed God. So they picked one scientist to go and tell Him that they were done with Him. So the scientist went to God and said, "God, We're to the point that we can clone people and do many miraculous things so we've decided that we no longer need you." God listened very patiently and kindly to the man. After the scientist was done talking, God said, "Very well, how about this? Let's say we have a man-making contest." To which the scientist replied, "Okay, great!" God added, "Let's do this just like I did back in the old days when I made Adam." The scientist said, "Sure, no problem" and bent down and grabbed himself a handful of dirt. God looked at him and said, "No, no, no. You go make your own dirt!"

Two weeks ago we began this series on what we mean when we say the Apostles' Creed each week and in particular what it means to say, "I believe in God." Then last week we started looking at who this God is that we say we believe in and we started with God as Father and Almighty. This morning we want to discover why we say that we believe in God who is the "maker of heaven and earth."

At first it would seem like this one is obvious. The very first words of the Bible are "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." Isaiah 44:24 says, "Thus says the LORD, your Redeemer, who formed you from the womb: "I am the LORD, who made all things, who alone stretched out the

heavens, who spread out the earth by myself." Psalm 148, a psalm of praise, is about all of creation praising the LORD. It mentions the sun, moon and stars praising God, mountains, hills, trees, animals, birds, insects, and people. Then it says, "Let them praise the name of the LORD! For he commanded and they were created. And he established them forever and ever; he gave a decree, and it shall not pass away."

In the New Testament, the Gospel of John begins by echoing the words of Genesis 1: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made." And in the passage we just heard from Acts 17, the Apostle Paul tells the people of Athens about "The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth."

These are just a few examples. Cover to cover, the Bible tells of the creative work of God in making and caring for his creation. So on one hand, in order to rightly confess our belief in God, we naturally must call him the creator of heaven and earth. But there's more to it than that. So to help us better understand what we mean when we say that God is the Creator, I want us to look at three points, and they all begin with the letter "O." We're going to look at the *origin*, the *operation* and the *ownership* of the world. Let's begin with *origin*.

In addition to stating the faith of the Church, the various

creeds and confessions that have been created over the years are usually in response to some heresy that is troubling the Church at the time, so that every line of the creed is in response to the heresy. This is no different. The early Church believed that it was important to emphasize God as creator in order to counter other common ways of understanding the natural world.

Remember that the Apostles' Creed was developed in the first couple of centuries following Jesus' resurrection and there were two major beliefs about the beginning of the world competing with the Christian/Jewish understanding. One of the things that the early Church had to deal with was Greek and Roman pantheism, which believed that everything is God - trees, rocks, everything. You find this same thinking today in the so-called "new age" religions or philosophies.

The other thing the early Church had to deal with was the heresy of Gnosticism. This one was even harder because it was from people within the Church. The Gnostics, which get their name from the Greek word for "knowledge," believed that they had been given secret knowledge about God. If you didn't receive this secret knowledge, then you were "out," so to speak. As part of this, the Gnostics believed that all matter was evil. As such, a perfect, holy God wouldn't and couldn't defile himself by having anything to do with evil material things.

So when we say we believe in God who is the creator of heaven and earth, we are making a statement not just about God but about the physical world, also. Today we still very much need to declare that God is the One who brought everything into being other than himself.

There are many in today's scientific community who would very much like to be able to prove that God does not exist. They would have us believe that everything in the universe is merely a random accident. That the elements were there and just happened to come together in just the right way that life was possible. But the more they learn about our world, the harder it is to deny that it was carefully planned and ordered. The underlying theme of Genesis 1 is that God created something out of nothing, that he created order out of chaos.

One day there was a doctor, an engineer, and a lawyer having lunch. They began to argue over which profession was the oldest. The doctor said, "God took one of Adam's ribs to create Eve. That was the first surgery, so clearly medicine was the first career." The architect then said, "Well, before Adam was even made, God was designing and creating order out of chaos. If that's not engineering, I don't know what is." Finally, the lawyer, who had been sitting quietly, spoke up and said, "where do you think the chaos came from?"

For us to declare that we believe in God as the maker of heaven and earth, is to say that God is the source of everything and that everything exists for a purpose. All parts of our created world, and all people in it, have intrinsic value because God created them that way. But we are also declaring that God is outside of the created world and so nothing in creation can be considered to be God. He is bigger than we can even imagine and he can intervene in the world to accomplish His purposes. We call those things "miracles."

That's the *origin*. The second point is what I'll call the

operation of the world. When we say God is the maker of heaven and earth, we mean more than the view of "deism," which believes that God created everything but is like a cosmic "clockmaker" who made the world, wound it up, so to speak, but now just lets the world run itself.

Instead, we believe that God is actively involved in everything that goes on in our lives. Again in Acts 17 Paul tells the people of Athens that God "himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything." He then says, "he is actually not far from each one of us, for 'In him we live and move and have our being.'"

We call that the "sovereignty of God." In other words, God can do whatever He wants whenever He wants and apart from His active work in the world every moment of every day, everything would revert to chaos. If God took away His controlling, guiding hand, everything would cease to exist. It would be instant lights out.

The third point I want to make is the *ownership*. If we're honest, this one is the hardest for most of us. We may not have trouble accepting that God created everything or even that He keeps it all going. But it's this third area that impacts our lives directly. If God still owns everything, that means I don't own it. But that's exactly what the Bible teaches us.

This is what we mean by "stewardship." A steward is someone who takes care of someone else's belongings. A wine steward, for example, manages someone else's wine cellar. We call them flight attendants now, but they used to be called stewardesses because they managed someone else's airplane cabin. Their primary job is not to bring you a snack

and drink, their job is to manage the passenger cabin and to make sure you behave.

In the same way, Genesis 1 tells us that even though God is the owner of everything in the world because He made it, we also discover that He has given us a job to do in management. Verse 26 says, "Then God said, 'Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion (that means management authority) over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.'" Then He made cats to remind us that we're not God.

When we confess that God is the creator and sustainer of heaven and earth is a declaration that nothing belongs to us. We are merely managers of what belongs to God. We

have the responsibility to respect the natural world but also to enjoy it. To declare that God is the owner reminds us that one day we will have to answer for how we managed what God has given us. Have we used it in the way He has directed us? I hate to tell you, this includes your money. It all belongs to God.

The great news is that when we manage it properly, God will use us to accomplish His purposes. Jesus himself said, "the one who is faithful with little will be entrusted with much."

So remember, when you call God the "maker of heaven and earth," you are declaring the *origin* of the world - ordered and created by the Word of God, not by random chance; the *operation* of the world - sustained every minute by God's active work; and to confess the *ownership* of everything by God, but that He calls each of us to be faithful in managing the portion of His world that He has put in our care. Which means we get to partner with God in the creative process of keeping chaos from intruding in our world.

*Amen.*