

Trinity in Creation

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- [0 : 00] Well, I'm waiting for a couple of special guest speakers today, and I think one of them is on his way here.
- Good morning to you. My name is Zaidu, and I'm a hunter from the land of ancient Babylon. I was told that your teacher is going to talk to you about God and his creation.
- Well, we Babylonians have a great creation story called the Enuma Elish. It concerns the great primal forces of winds and water out of which all of the gods came that rule this world.
- Of course, these gods did not get along very well with each other. They fought and quarreled among themselves, and Tymat, the great water dragon, thought that these gods were so annoying and disgusting, so she created seven great monsters to destroy them.
- But the mightiest god of all, Marduk the Great, became the god's champion. And with the help of his bow and his quiver and the lightning bolts and the seven winds, he defeated and chained the seven monsters, and he slew Tymat.
- [1 : 35] Then he began to rule over all the hundreds of other lesser gods. One of these gods, Kingu, was used as a sacrifice so that his blood could be used to create human beings.
- Didn't you know that you were made from the blood of a god? Well, men and women were made to be the servants of the gods. They're slaves, really.
- I feel honored to be a servant of the great warrior god, Marduk. How about you? Hello.
- Euthemius is my name, and I greet you in the name of my teacher, the great Aristotle. Aristotle. After listening to that Babylon fellow, you are probably in need of some clear thinking.
- That is where we Greeks really excel. Why, in Athens, where I come from, we have a place called the Areopagus, where all men do all day long is think and reason and argue and discuss ideas.
- [2 : 52] Aristotle was dead and gone hundreds of years before your Jesus was born. And he considered the God question long and hard. Now, see if this doesn't make sense to you.
- Everything we see around us has form and substance. But each particular object we see was caused by something else.
- Well, Aristotle reasoned that there had to be an invisible first cause that would account for all these various things, from a tiny bug to a hungry hippo, from little pebbles on the beach to Mount Olympus itself.
- So he saw that all things had a kind of being, but they were also becoming. They were changing all the time. Their being was their actuality, and their change was their potentiality.
- For example, I happen to be a 65-year-old man, but I have the potential to be a 75-year-old man, if I live long enough.
- [4 : 05] But God, according to my teacher, is pure actuality, no potentiality. He's pure being, no becoming.

But by the power of attraction, a kind of divine magnetism, he causes all other things to be and to become. So, is Aristotle's God a good God?

Well, that presents a kind of problem. If you define goodness as being benevolent to somebody else, he defined the greatest good as thought, thinking, itself.

God brings about all kinds of good things, and some bad things, while himself being the ultimate good. But he's not really involved in a personal way, or even aware of what's coming out of him, what's happening.

It just kind of happens by accident, in a way. One of your historians, in fact, referred to Aristotle's God as being like the British monarch, a king who reigns but doesn't rule.

[5 : 19] And if he's just out there focusing on the greatest good, meaning himself, well, personal relationships are pretty much off the table, I'm afraid. But at least we've cleared away all that mythological nonsense that the Babylonian was talking about.

Anyway, thanks for listening. Salaam to you, my infidel friends.

I am Lahab, whose name means flame. And I come to your class in the name of the Prophet Muhammad. The servant of the one true God, Allah.

Allah is the one who has 99 great names. The one who has always been. The one who gave birth to all things. And who is to be worshipped and honored and served.

One of his great titles is Allah the Loving. Yes, it's true that Allah had no one to love before he created everything else. But why should that matter to an unworthy servant like myself or to infidel dogs like...

[6 : 32] Well, all we need to know about this supreme being is that he is, that he's given us his law in the Quran through his great prophet Muhammad.

And to faithful Muslims who, one, declare their faith in Allah. Two, pray their ritual prayers five times a day. Three, give the required alms to the poor and needy.

Four, fast during Ramadan each year. And five, make the journey to Mecca once in their lifetimes to visit the Kaaba. Allah, those faithful ones will be welcomed into paradise.

The great quest of my life is to surrender to the will of Allah so I can draw closer to him. That is one of the meanings of the word Islam, to surrender.

We believe your Jesus was truly a prophet, but don't think he ever claimed to be the Son of God. Indeed, Allah is the Holy One, the one and only, the all-sufficient supreme being.

[7 : 34] And if you are smart, you will surrender to him and begin seeking to earn his love. Farewell, my friends.

Hello, class. You may call me Lucius. I am a follower of Marcia Nepontis, one of the most famous of the Christian teachers of Gnosticism.

Like all of you, we believe salvation is by faith in Jesus Christ. And we believe Christ came to earth from heaven to die for men's sins. But you must realize the New Testament doesn't reveal all that Jesus wanted us to know.

Oh, by no means. You see, even though the so-called God of the Old Testament created the physical world, yet there is beyond this universe a higher plane of reality.

A spiritual world where the Most High God dwells in unapproachable light. The Old Testament, the Old Testament Yahweh, is a lesser deity who was created rather by accident from the bowels of the ancient female spirit, Sophia, whose name means wisdom.

[8 : 57] This Yahweh, which we call a demi-urge, created this cruel, crude material world in mockery or base imitation of the spiritual plane.

We believe in the higher God who sent his Son with a saving message of love. He actually created Jesus as a full-grown man, not some virgin-born babe in a manger.

And Christ taught his message of love and forgiveness over against the cruel, brutal, harsh writings of the Old Testament, the legalistic God.

That's why the religious leaders of his time put him to death, you see. And the higher secret knowledge that Jesus didn't tell his twelve apostles, they passed on to us through people like Thomas and Judas and Mary Magdalene, as well as other mysterious writings.

True salvation, you see, is to be released from these crude physical bodies and rise up through the secret knowledge to the spiritual plane.

[10:10] Yahweh may have created the world, but it is a mere stage of preparation for the true knowledge of God, the one, the unknowable supreme being, who will eventually suck all this physical stuff back into himself and all once again will become one.

Isn't that awesome? Anyway, thank you for letting me share my special insights with you, my friends. So now we've heard from representatives of four different creation accounts, and there are certainly hundreds of other ones at large in the world.

But let's look at each of these and hear your comments about them. The Babylonians believed in a pantheon of gods. The strongest one, Marduk, created mankind from the blood of a lesser god that he beheaded.

People were created chiefly for what purpose? To be slaves, right?

In Psalm 96, 4 and 5, we read, For the Lord is great and greatly to be praised. He is to be feared above all gods. For all the gods of the people are idols, but the Lord made the heavens.

[11:33] Second, the Greek Aristotelian thinkers reason that the supreme god is a being or force that eternally causes all other beings to be and to become what they're changing into.

So this being must exist in order to create and cause motion, but it does so unconsciously or impersonally by a kind of attraction.

That's the purpose for its being, which means that his existence depends on the creation, depends on the universe and vice versa.

Do you have any comments about that? That's right. Acts 17, 24 and 25, Paul is talking to the Areopagus and he said, The one you worship without knowing, him I proclaim to you, God who made the world and everything in it, since he is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands, nor is he worshipped with men's hands as though he needed anything, since he gives to all life, breath, and all things.

Well, Lahab, our Muslim visitor, described Allah, who has existed alone for all eternity and is the creator of all that is, including us.

[13:11] And in ways, that sounds a lot like the God we worship. How is it different? Jim?

Jim? Right. We're worshipping a trinity of persons within the one God.

Right. In Islam, God has no son, no Holy Spirit. Although they accept the Torah as authoritative, the five books of Moses, they believe the New Testament is corrupted, so they don't accept those writings as authoritative.

And finally, Lucius the agnostic shared his secret knowledge of the one, the ineffable God of Gnosticism. What does the word gnostic mean?

Knowledge, right. Comes from the Greek gnosis, which we get in English words like agnostic and prognosis and diagnosis.

[14:24] Some of the gnostic ideas about hidden or higher knowledge or higher truths were borrowed or stolen, really, from the New Testament writings.

Can you think of any examples of that? Are the New Testament talking about a higher knowledge?

In 1 Corinthians 8, 1 through 3, read, Now concerning things offered to idols, we know that we all have knowledge.

Knowledge puffs up, but love edifies. And if anyone thinks he knows anything, he knows nothing yet, as he ought to know. But if anyone loves God, this one is known by him.

So knowledge is something that God gives us, but there is a deeper knowledge that is beyond the knowledge of men, beyond the knowledge of this world.

[15 : 32] Actually, some believe that Gnosticism was founded by Simon the Magician that's talked about in the book of Acts, but it really can't be well defined because Gnosticism was made up of a lot of different teachings from a lot of different self-styled teachers.

Well, this week and next week, we want to examine what Michael Reeves has to say about the Trinity and how they're involved in creation.

The Bible, as we've already seen, is full of references that point to or imply the tri-personal nature of the one true and living God.

And we're hopefully going to see that this three-person God has a crucial importance as to how and why God chose to create the universe.

Brother Reeves begins this chapter with an intriguing question. If you were God, now think about this, why would you ever want to create a universe?

[16 : 42] What are some of the answers that are possible for that? If you were God, why would you even want to create a universe? I mean, if I, in case of the land, was God, all that sort of kind of I guess I would want to really have a good time or something like that.

So I created a universe. Just for amusement? Yeah. Just to break the monotony? Any other ideas coming to mind? To bring himself glory?

To bring himself glory. That's a good reason. What other reasons might there be? A lot of man-made religions have followed the lead of the Babylonians and Marduk.

People were created just to serve the gods and let them kick back and relax so God would have someone inferior to order around. I think that's the way a lot of children feel about their parents.

These are just bigger versions of myself who are in charge. They're ogres who tell me what to do all the time and there's this chain of command in the universe and I'm sort of at the bottom of the chain unless you count the pets of the family that I get to kick around.

[18 : 17] At the top of the chain is this supreme commander, God. He has the top authority and everybody answers to him. But hopefully thoughtful people can maybe think of the supreme being as not just the source of all authority but the source of all good.

The Greeks supposed that God was just an uncaused first cause and was the ultimate good simply because he made all the other goods possible.

Reeves writes that even though Aristotle's God is technically good he's hardly kind or loving. He doesn't freely choose to create a world that he might bless it.

It's more that the universe just oozes out of him. Sort of like the force in the Star Wars trilogy. That leads to a theory that God is so dependent on the universe that both he and the universe are eternal.

They have to exist together. So the first major idea of this chapter on creation single person gods would have little or no reason to create in the first place unless they were for selfish reasons or worse for totally impersonal processes.

[19 : 49] If they did choose to create it we would be for needy or selfish reasons. But if we read in the scriptures the word blessed most of the times that is found in scripture it doesn't refer so much to God blessing us but to him being the blessed God.

If you look at all the passages about blessed the word blessed it's always blessed be the Lord blessed be God blessed be he who created all things.

So God is this blessed being. He's full of blessing. He's full of happiness, of joy because he's a trinity. and we've already learned that the trinity shares this common bond of love with one another.

God is always looking for a way to express that love. It would be puzzling if a single person deity self-centered deity chose to create.

That would make us scratch our heads. Why would he do that? But what if God were an eternal father who's eternally begetting a beloved son and loving that son in the eternal spirit?

[21 : 12] This is no needy, lonely, inward directed single person. He's the ever blessed ever blessed God. Like in the hymn joyful joyful we read the words thou art giving and forgiving ever blessing ever blessed wellspring of the joy of living ocean depth of happy rest.

Thou our father, Christ our brother, all who live in love are thine. Teach us how to love each other, lift us to the joy divine.

So we've seen that fatherhood is part and parcel of who God is. Goodness and love flow out of him continually. as the father chooses to beget and take delight in the son and the son takes delight in the father.

While we question whether a single barren deity would even wish to create a world, there are no such doubts about the triune God whose love is always seeking expression.

Exodus 34 calls Yahweh, actually God calls himself, a God abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness. When Moses begged God, Lord, show me your glory, how did God respond?

[22 : 43] I will cause all my goodness to pass before you. It's God's outshining of goodness that makes him so glorious.

We see this outpouring of love and goodness in the character of our creator everywhere we look in the Old Testament. That's because his very nature is to be good and loving eternally toward his own son, finding delight in expressing that love inwardly within the Trinity.

It's no surprise that this same God would wish to turn outward and multiply that pleasure by creating others who would share that delight in creating the universe, creating angelic and human creatures.

The Father and the Son now have multiple outlets for their mutual love to overflow the bonds of the Trinity. And that's the second main idea of this chapter, the triune God's decision to create the universe can be traced to an overflowing fellowship of love between the Father and the Son.

Michael Reeves quotes from a lengthy and technical quote from Carl Barth, a famous theologian, and he reminds us that God is a being who dwells and loves in freedom.

[24 : 21] There's a freedom of expression in the love of God that chooses to eternally beget and delight in his Son. And that divine freedom is turned, that's turned inward between Father and Son.

God and the Word, the Speaker and the Logos, is free to be turned outward to a world of created beings. So there's no rivalry, there's no jealous grasping within the Godhead.

The Father's very love for his Son becomes the model, as it were, for his loving act of creation. His eternal begetting of the Son becomes the model for his physical begetting of the universe.

He makes an entire cosmos out of his word and out of his overflowing love, and he sustains that cosmos by the enduring power of that love.

So, when we think about God the Father, when his love overflowed, when he created, what was he after?

[25 : 38] What was his overarching goal in creating? meaning? Well, point number three, the Father's ultimate purpose was that his eternal fellowship with the Son would be expanded to include many created sons and daughters to delight in his love.

Romans 8, 29 tells us, those God foreknew, or loved beforehand, he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he, his Son, might be the firstborn among many brothers.

And we find out in passages like Hebrews 1 and verse 2, that not only was Jesus Christ the model for creation, but he's also the primary aim and ultimate recipient of creation.

All things were created through him or by him and for him, for the Son's benefit. So, we are an expression of the Father's love for the Son.

Let's look at another passage together. Turn to Colossians chapter 1. make you do a little flipping here.

[27 : 04] in Colossians chapter 1, we read in verses 15 and 16, he is the image, this is talking about Jesus, he is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation.

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.

So, it's fascinating that Jesus Christ is referred to as the firstborn of all creation, or the head of the household. This is combined with Paul's description of Jesus as the image of the invisible God.

God. The writer of Hebrews calls God's Son the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being. And think about all those truths that the word gives us about the Son.

They're given to us creatures in written form to express the amazing fact that God wants us to radiate the glory of his loving nature.

[28 : 30] He wants to radiate his glory to us so that we respond in love back to him and to others. God isn't out to get primarily, but he's out to radiate the glory of his love for the Son to us and through us.

So, the triune God doesn't just love his universe and you and me, as beloved pets or beings to use as playthings for his own amusement.

In the film Superman 2, General Zod comments to his cohort the evil Ursa, I have found Superman's weakness, he says.

He really cares for these little human beings that he protects. And Ursa says, like pets, do you suppose? do you suppose? And Zod says, I suppose so.

See, they couldn't imagine any super being could love mere human beings for their own sake, with a genuine love. But think about the triune God.

[29 : 45] The Father gave a genuine human nature to his eternally begotten one in order to model his love, to prove his love and to make that love available to you and me.

Isn't that fantastic? And this is Jesus' own testimony. It's his own, the very desire he talks about in his high priestly prayer.

Turn to that in John 17. John 17 verse 24.

Jesus prays, Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am and to see my glory, the glory you have given me because you loved me before the creation of the world.

Righteous Father, though the world does not know you, I know you, and they know you, they know that you have sent me. I have made you known to them and will continue to make you known in order that the love you have for me may be in them and that I myself may be in them.

[31 : 03] And how does the son react to the love of the father? He reflects it back through his loving obedience. love of Jesus.

Just as the father chose to include us in his love for the son, what does the son turn around and do? Jesus includes us in his love back to the father.

I think that is so awesome. Christ shows us the ideal way to respond to the father's love. It's the perfect model for us, the second Adam.

by being loving, obedient children to our heavenly father, we can bask in the radiance of the divine fellowship, both on a physical plane and the eternal plane as well.

He calls us to live by the spirit to reflect that same radiance of love back to the Lord and to others.

[32 : 07] We found that our triune God in his very being is loving, outgoing, and life giving. He gives life to the son.

He begets the son. The father continually gives life to the son. The son continually receives life from the father and they both respond in love and delight to one another through the Holy Spirit.

and it's amazing that Jesus shares his life with us because of the son's sacrifice, his obedience, his ascension, he can image the father by sharing his life with redeemed humanity through the spirit.

By the new birth and the process of sanctification, we come to receive that love and divine life in the spirit and more and more we reflect the image of the son back to our heavenly father through our joyful obedience.

If we read the passage in John 15 about the vine and the branches, we find that abiding in Christ, the vine, makes it possible for us to bear the fruit of obedient love.

[33 : 32] back to the father. The whole history of redemption, as we read it in the Bible, is a history of God giving. He's always giving and giving, grace upon grace.

He gives first and then we respond. God gave mankind, in Genesis chapter 2, gave mankind this garden, this beautiful garden, not because they earned it, but because he's generous, he's gracious.

He gave man and woman a warning about the tree. He didn't have to do that. He let them know that they were being tested. He wanted their love to be honest and informed, so he told them they were being tested.

We'll talk some more about that in our next lesson, but let's keep it in mind that God's, with God, grace and goodness always comes first.

He's no stingy, hungry, grasping being, the way other gods are described. Rather, the Trinity is super abundant. He's generous, he's radiant, he's a self-giving God.

[34 : 51] It's his joy to share himself and his nature with others. That's what defines him. It's what his holiness is shot through with. He's not just good in himself, but he wants his goodness to shine to others and be reflected everywhere.

That's how God is. Quoting from C.S. Lewis' book, *The Screwtape Letters*, Reeves comments on this explanation by Screwtape, the senior demon, to his nephew Wormwood.

Screwtape says, One must face the fact that all the talk about his love for men and his service being perfect freedom is not, as one would gladly believe, mere propaganda, but an appalling truth.

He really does want to fill the universe with a lot of loathsome little replicas of himself, creatures whose life on its miniature scale, will be qualitatively like his own, not because he's absorbed them, but because their wills freely conform to his.

We, the demons, we want cattle who can finally become food. He wants servants who can finally become sons.

[36 : 20] We want to suck in. He wants to give out. We are empty and would be filled. He is full and flows over.

Love that quote. In Acts 19, the silversmith Demetrius complains to the magistrate that if Paul continues talking about Artemis in a way that lets people believe that she's no goddess at all, then she'll somehow be discredited and robbed of her divine majesty.

Well, obviously, the Greek and Roman deities needed to be worshipped and adorned by their human worshippers in order to stay in business. But our God is nothing like that.

Jesus told the Samaritan woman in John 4, first he asked her to give him a drink, and then he said, you ask me, and I'll give you living water.

And what does living water represent? Represents life. Represents eternal life. And God is looking for people to worship him in spirit and in truth, not as a grudging means to a selfish end, but a free expression in response to a generous, loving creator.

[37 : 47] So this lesson, we've tried to cover the question of why God would choose to create both the universe and mankind. We've seen that a singular one-person God would have no good reason to create other than to use it for selfish ends.

We've seen that God is three persons who have eternally enjoyed loving fellowship, and they certainly have a desire to create and expand the magnitude of their love into a physical universe.

And finally, we've discovered and observed the way the Bible reveals Jesus as the ultimate image and representation of the Father and his outflowing love with which he seeks to fill us and express himself through us.

And next week, we'll be taking a closer and deeper look at how the Trinity created the universe and what that reveals about the delightfulness of our triune God.

Let's pray. Again, Lord, we thank you for your word. We thank you for how delightful it reveals you, and delightful even in yourself, in a delight that overflows to share your love with this universe and with those you've created in your image.

[39 : 20] We thank you, Lord, for that image, for the image of the Father that we see in the Son, and that likeness that he shares with us as we are drawn more and more into that love and into that faith.

We thank you, Lord, for this time to come. We pray your blessing on our worship time, and be with us as we continue to fellowship together. In Jesus' name we pray.

Amen.