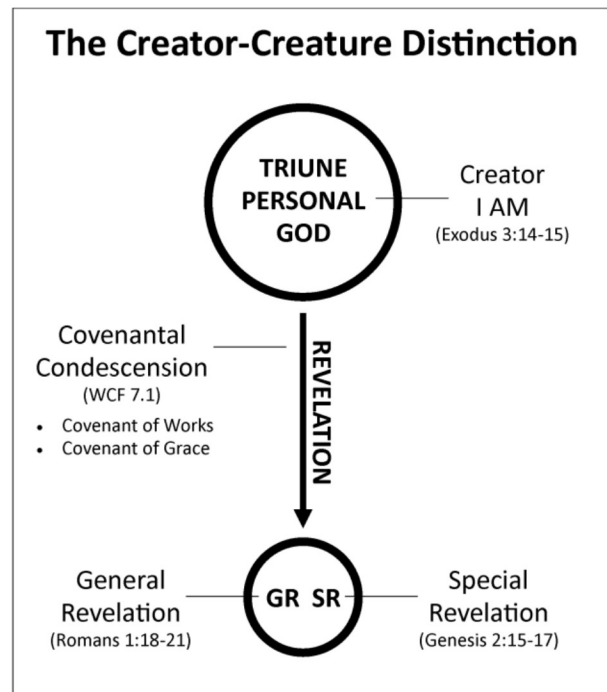


## Man and the Great Antithesis

### Lesson 6

#### The Creator-Creature Distinction

- The Triune Personal God is self-existent. He is never in need because he is satisfied in himself (Exodus 3:14-15).
- All things exist in dependence upon the living God, particularly his image-bearers. How then, do we understand this relationship image-bearers have with God that aids our apologetic efforts?
- *The Creator-Creature Distinction.* As dependent creatures, the chasm between God and man is impossible to bridge unless God willingly chooses to reveal himself. He does this by way of covenant. God condescends so that men are in relationship with him and know him. Scripture grounds our rationale by clearly teaching us that God reveals himself in two distinct ways: General Revelation and Special Revelation.



#### General Revelation

“...the light of nature, and the works of creation and providence do so far manifest the goodness, wisdom, and power of God, as to leave men unexcusable...” (Westminster Confession of Faith 1:1; cf. Romans 1:19-20).

General Revelation: The fixed and uninterruptable testimony to natural man of his Creator, both in him and around him.

*God communicates his presence through “the light of nature”*

- “The light of nature” refers to the doctrine of the image of God. Man is the image of God (Latin: *imago dei*) and by nature we live before the presence of God. Men and women are the pinnacle of God’s creation, made after his image, male and female (Genesis 1:26-27, cf. 5:3; 9:6).
- Humanity is set apart from the rest of creation. In this sense, God’s attribute of holiness gets through to us. Since God is holy (set apart), we reflect that set-apartness. It is self-revealing that we are set apart from the rest of creation. We have reasonable and immortal souls with knowledge: we rationalize with free consciences. We exercise preference, practice, patience, sacrifice, industry, authority, theorize, test, philosophize, theologize and consciously steward our surroundings by dominion (not exhaustive list).
- Natural Law: In addition to the fixed laws from the beginning of creation (cause and effect), God also imprinted his moral law when he created Adam and Eve (Covenant of Works/Life). The law of God is common to all men, even though it is ravaged by the fall. It remains inescapable. Men and women know instinctively that doing right leads to life and doing evil leads to death (Romans 1:32), and we are culpable and inexcusable before God.

- The Canons of Dordt, III/IV, Article 4 “There is, to be sure, a certain light of nature remaining in man after the fall, by virtue of which he retains some notions about God, natural things, and the difference between what is moral and immoral, and demonstrates a certain eagerness for virtue and for good outward behavior...”
- Romans 2:14-15, “For when Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do what the law requires, they are a law to themselves, even though they do not have the law. They show that the work of the law is written on their hearts, while their conscience also bears witness, and their conflicting thoughts accuse or even excuse them.”
- Examples: Plato’s use of “ideals” to prove that there must be absolutes in order to make sense of the particulars. The Bhagavad-Gita affirms that life and kindred are honorable and death must be confronted. Wayne the Atheist demands that the harsh and demeaning insults he received throughout his life were wrong.
- God gets through to us by natural law. Regardless of natural man’s “why”, the preceptive law of God is on the heart.
- Our knowledge of good and evil is a light to us. In the pre-Fall context, Adam and Eve held these laws perfectly. After the Fall, men and women still possess them but misappropriate them.

*God communicates his presence through “the works of creation and providence”*

- God communicates to humanity concerning his presence, namely his eternal power and divine nature, through the things that are created.
- Examples: Creation’s orderliness, history, complexity. We see beauty, goodness, design and usefulness in the world, and these reflect the attributes of God.
- Consider the providence of God when someone says, “Yes, I believe that things happen for a reason.” They acknowledge that providence exists.
- To see order, to see beauty, complexity, goodness, and eternity through the creation is to *analogously* see God. Contrary to pantheistic views, God is not his creation, but through creation he is showcasing his attributes of divine nature and eternal power.
- Since God is his attributes (Doctrine of God), the creation testifies that God is there. He reflects his presence in the creation, and God gets through to humanity.
- His general revelation **does not save us from sin**, but his creation witnesses to us so that we are responsible to acknowledge him.
- Psalm 19:1, “The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork”.
- Only a vain person would go to the edge of the Grand Canyon and then say, “I am awesome.”

A strong apologetic point: You will be pressed to prove God. But based on what I have just shared, *you don’t have to prove the existence of God. Men and women already know him.* Every unbeliever already knows that God exists and knows truths about him. Our job is reminding them of what they already know.

### **Special Revelation**

*[General Revelation]* Although the light of nature, and the works of creation and providence do so far manifest the goodness, wisdom, and power of God, as to leave men unexcusable; yet are they not sufficient to give that knowledge of God, and of his will, which is necessary unto salvation. *[Special Revelation]* Therefore it pleased the Lord, at sundry times, and in divers manners, to reveal himself, and to declare that his will unto his church; and afterwards, for the better preserving and propagating of the truth, and for the more sure establishment and comfort of the church against the corruption of the flesh, and the malice of Satan and of the world, to commit the same wholly unto writing: which

maketh the Holy Scripture to be most necessary; those former ways of God's revealing his will unto his people being now ceased (Westminster Confession of Faith 1:1) [*mine*].

Special Revelation: The spiritual testimony to natural man of his Creator that saves, equips and glories.

- This is the grace of God to us by his word and Spirit.  
For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them. (Ephesians 2:8-10 ESV)
- General Revelation will not save a person from their sin.
- Special Revelation will save those whom God has predestined to save by way of his word alone, applied by the Holy Spirit.
- Scripture then carries the full authority of God himself. And because God is infallible (incapable of error), the Holy Scriptures are inerrant (without error).
- Only his word alone gives us a right worldview.
- It is *the* objective standard for all of life. Believers understand this truth of Scripture only by the regenerative work of the Holy Spirit. We now see with the new lenses of faith, and through them we can rightly see everything else.

### The Effects of the Fall

- On account of the fall of Adam (Romans 5), there is a spiritual problem for natural man.
- All people are now born in sin and are spiritually dead. This deadness results in two realities – enmity and suppression of the truth.
- It is a moral problem and an epistemological problem. First, our moral problem is that we are enemies of God, alienated because of original sin which results in actual sin. We are at war with God.
- Secondly, our spiritual deadness effects our minds. Instead of embracing the truth, sinners suppress the truth that they ought to live obediently and dependently upon God (Romans 3:10-18). Their consciences are distorted by sin such that they have conflicting thoughts, calling bad good and excuse themselves from wrong behavior (1 Corinthians 8:7, 10; 10:29; 1 Timothy 4:2; Titus 1:15).

Romans 1:18-21, 32

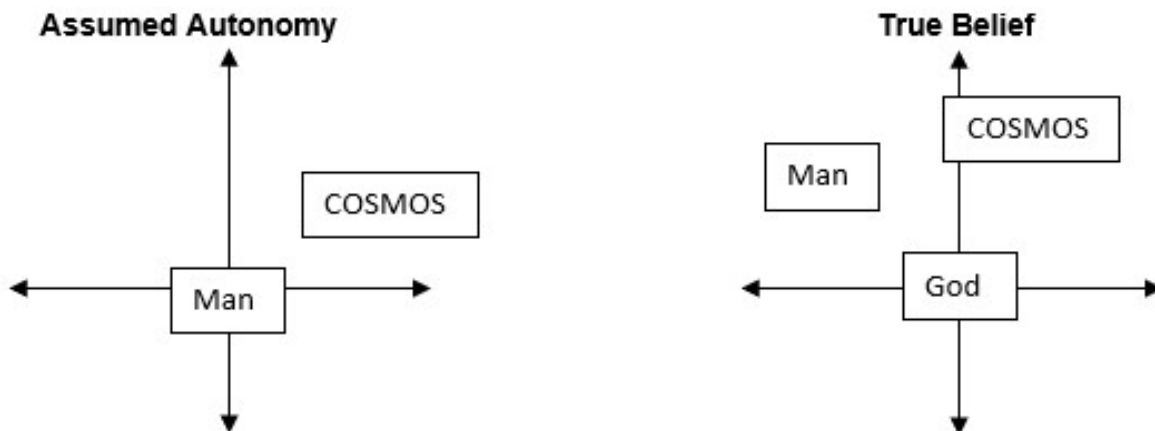
For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse. For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened...Though they know God's righteous decree that those who practice such things deserve to die, they not only do them but give approval to those who practice them.

- *Biblical Anthropology (for the non-Christian)*  
They know God (Romans 1:19-20, cf. Genesis 1:26-27)  
Moral law of God is in their hearts (Romans 2:14-15)  
Born in sin (John 9:34; Psalm 51:5)  
No one is righteous (Romans 1:18; 3:10)

Suppress the Truth (Romans 1:18)  
 Futile in thinking (Romans 1:22)  
 No one understands and does good (Romans 3:11-12)  
 Do not seek God (Romans 3:11)

### The Great Antithesis

- This natural man born in sin proves his inner tension. The unbeliever embraces what is truth and what is false at the same time.
- The unbeliever's worship actively rejects God and replaces him in the center of the world. But it ultimately doesn't work. It is self-defeating by creating a worldview that is bankrupt.
- Cornelius Van Til,  
 The central part of our witness to men is that, in the pride of their hearts, they worship and serve the creature -that is, themselves - more than the Creator. The natural man must be challenged in his assumed autonomy. He must be compelled to look into the face of God...All men know not merely that a God exists, but they know that God, the true God, the only God, exists. Yet these same men to whom we must testify that they know God, must also be told that they do not know God. Those whom God loved with an everlasting love, he at the same time regards as objects of wrath because of their sin. The Bible tells us that all men as they know God know the difference between good and evil. In this sense the law of God is written in his heart...At the same time the Bible says to these men that they do not have the law of God written in their hearts. According to the promise of God to Jeremiah he will write his law upon the hearts of his people ("Common Grace and Witness-Bearing, Grotenhuis, 1954)
- "Natural man's assumed autonomy" – people are self-governed law (a law unto themselves). Thus, *all* unbelief has a worldview that excludes the true God and puts themselves at the center.



- Van Til explains man's great and inner dichotomy.
  - They know God and they have the law of God on their hearts (Romans 1:18-20, 2:15-16; Genesis 1:26-27)
  - They don't know God and they don't have the law of God on their hearts (John 15:18-19, 21; Jeremiah 31:33).
- John 15:18-19, 21  
 If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the

world, therefore the world hates you...But all these things they will do to you on account of my name, because *they do not know him who sent me* (emphasis mine).

- Romans reads that everyone in the world does know God, and yet, Jesus says clearly here that the world does not know God. Yet they are not contradicting one another.
- Jeremiah 31:33
  - For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the LORD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people (see also Ezekiel 36:25-27).
- We just read in Romans that everyone in the world has the law of God on their hearts, but Jeremiah says that God's law is not on their hearts. Yet they are not contradicting one another.
- They know God in the Romans 1 way, and they don't know God in the John 15 way.
- This is the main point for today. The people you work with, the people you go to school with, the people who are your neighbors, are *walking contradictions*.
- Ultimately, they presuppose that the God who is truly there (The Triune God) is not there at all. It's the great lie of unbelief. They believe that they don't need God to make sense of their world. But in fact, they do need God to make sense of their world.
- In conclusion
  - There is a knowledge of God that leads to condemnation and also a law written on hearts that leads to condemnation.
  - There is a knowledge of God that leads to eternal life and also a law written on hearts that leads to eternal life.
- You are a Christian or you are not. There is no in-between. There is no middle "neutral" ground to stand on.