

SESSION 3

# Maker of Heaven and Earth

## The *Study Catechism*: Questions 15–27

**Question 15.** *What do you believe when you say that God is “Maker of heaven and earth”?*

First, that God called heaven and earth, with all that is in them, into being out of nothing simply by the power of God’s Word. Second, that by that same power all things are upheld and governed in perfect wisdom, according to God’s eternal purpose.

*Rev. 4:11* “You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they existed and were created.”

*Gen. 1:1* “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.”

*Heb. 11:3* “By faith we understand that the worlds were prepared by the word of God, so that what is seen was made from things that are not visible.”

**Question 16.** *What does it mean to say that we human beings are created in the image of God?*

That God created us to live together in love and freedom—with God, with one another, and with the world. Our distinctive capacities—reason, imagination, volition, and so on—are given primarily for this purpose. We are created to be loving companions of others so that something of God’s goodness may be reflected in our lives.

*Gen. 1:26* “Then God said, ‘Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish

of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.”

*Gen. 1:27* “So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.”

***Question 17. What does our creation in God’s image reflect about God’s reality?***

Our being created in and for relationship is a reflection of the Holy Trinity. In the mystery of the one God, the three divine persons—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—live in, with, and for one another eternally in perfect love and freedom.

*Luke 3:21–22* “Now when all the people were baptized, and when Jesus also had been baptized and was praying, the heaven was opened, and the Holy Spirit descended upon him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven, ‘You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.’”

*John 1:18* “No one has ever seen God. It is God the only Son, who is close to the Father’s heart, who has made him known.”

*John 5:19* “Jesus said to them, ‘Very truly, I tell you, the Son can do nothing on his own, but only what he sees the Father doing; for whatever the Father does, the Son does likewise.’”

*John 17:21–22* “As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. The glory that you have given me I have given them, so that they may be one, as we are one.”

***Question 18. What does our creation in God’s image reflect about God’s love for us?***

We are created to live wholeheartedly for God. When we honor our Creator as the source of all good things, we are like mirrors reflecting back the great beam of love that God shines on us. We are also created to honor God by showing love toward other human beings.

*Ps. 9:1* “I will give thanks to the LORD with my whole heart; I will tell of all your wonderful deeds.”

*1 John 4:7* “Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God.”

*1 John 4:11* “Beloved, since God loved us so much, we also ought to love one another.”

*Matt. 5:14–16* “You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hid. No one after lighting a lamp puts it under the bushel basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.”

**Question 19.** *As creatures made in God’s image, what responsibility do we have for the earth?*

God commands us to care for the earth in ways that reflect God’s loving care for us. We are responsible for ensuring that earth’s gifts be used fairly and wisely, that no creature suffers from the abuse of what we are given, and that future generations may continue to enjoy the abundance and goodness of the earth in praise to God.

*Ps. 24:1* “The earth is the LORD’s and all that is in it, the world, and those who live in it.”

*Ps. 89:11* “The heavens are yours, the earth also is yours; the world and all that is in it—you have founded them.”

*Gen. 2:15* “The LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it.”

*Gen. 1:26* “Then God said, ‘Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.’”

*Isa. 24:5* “The earth lies polluted under its inhabitants; for they have transgressed laws, violated the statutes, broken the everlasting covenant.”

*Rom. 12:2* “Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect.”

**Question 20.** *Was the image of God lost when we turned from God by falling into sin?*

Yes and no. Sin means that all our relations with others have become distorted and confused. Although we did not cease to be *with* God, our fellow human beings, and other creatures, we did cease to be *for* them; and although we did not lose our distinctive human capacities *completely*, we did lose the ability to use

them *rightly*, especially in relation to God. Having ruined our connection with God by disobeying God's will, we are persons with hearts curved in upon ourselves. We have become slaves to the sin of which we are guilty, helpless to save ourselves, and are free, so far as freedom remains, only within the bounds of sin.

*John 8:34* "Jesus answered them, 'Very truly, I tell you, everyone who commits sin is a slave to sin.'"

*Rom. 3:23* "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God."

*Rom. 3:10* "There is no one who is righteous, not even one."

*Rom. 1:21* "Though they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their senseless minds were darkened."

*Isa. 59:1–3* "See, the LORD's hand is not too short to save, nor his ear too dull to hear. Rather, your iniquities have been barriers between you and your God, and your sins have hidden his face from you so that he does not hear. For your hands are defiled with blood, and your fingers with iniquity; your lips have spoken lies, your tongue mutters wickedness."

***Question 21. What does it mean to say that Jesus Christ is the image of God?***

Despite our turning from God, God did not turn from us, but instead sent Jesus Christ in the fullness of time to restore our broken humanity. Jesus lived completely for God, by giving himself completely for us, even to the point of dying for us. By living so completely for others, he manifested what he was—the perfect image of God. When by grace we are conformed to him through faith, our humanity is renewed according to the divine image that we lost.

*Isa. 65:2* "I held out my hands all day long to a rebellious people, who walk in a way that is not good, following their own devices."

*Phil. 2:8* "He humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross."

*Col. 1:15* "He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation."

*Rom. 8:29* "For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn within a large family."

**Question 22. What do you understand by God's providence?**

That God not only preserves the world, but also continually attends to it, ruling and sustaining it with wise and benevolent care. God is concerned for every creature: "The eyes of all look to you, and you give them their food in due season. You open your hand, you satisfy the desire of every living thing" (Ps. 145:15). In particular, God provides for the world by bringing good out of evil, so that nothing evil is permitted to occur that God does not bend finally to the good. Scripture tells us, for example, how Joseph said to his brothers: "As for you, you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today" (Gen. 50:20).

*Rom. 8:28* "We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose."

*Ps. 103:19* "The LORD has established his throne in the heavens, and his kingdom rules over all."

*Ps. 145:17* "The LORD is just in all his ways, and kind in all his doings."

**Question 23. What comfort do you receive by trusting in God's providence?**

The eternal Father of our Lord Jesus Christ watches over me each day of my life, blessing and guiding me wherever I may be. God strengthens me when I am faithful, comforts me when discouraged or sorrowful, raises me up if I fall, and brings me at last to eternal life. Entrusting myself wholly to God's care, I receive the grace to be patient in adversity, thankful in the midst of blessing, courageous against injustice, and confident that no evil afflicts me that God will not turn to my good.

*Ps. 146:9* "The LORD watches over the strangers; he upholds the orphan and the widow, but the way of the wicked he brings to ruin."

*Isa. 58:11* "The LORD will guide you continually, and satisfy your needs in parched places, and make your bones strong; and you shall be like a watered garden, like a spring of water, whose waters never fail."

*Isa. 41:10* "Do not fear, for I am with you, do not be afraid, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my victorious right hand."

2 Cor. 1:3–5 “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and the God of all consolation, who consoles us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to console those who are in any affliction with the consolation with which we ourselves are consoled by God. For just as the sufferings of Christ are abundant for us, so also our consolation is abundant through Christ.”

Ps. 30:5 “For his anger is but for a moment; his favor is for a lifetime. Weeping may linger for the night, but joy comes with the morning.”

***Question 24. What difference does your faith in God’s providence make when you struggle against bitterness and despair?***

When I suffer harm or adversity, my faith in God’s providence upholds me against bitterness and despair. It reminds me when hope disappears that my heartache and pain are contained by a larger purpose and a higher power than I can presently discern. Even in grief, shame and loss, I can still cry out to God in lament, waiting on God to supply my needs, and to bring me healing and comfort.

Ps. 42:11 “Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you disquieted within me? Hope in God; for I shall again praise him, my help and my God.”

2 Cor. 4:8–10 “We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be made visible in our bodies.”

Ps. 13:1–2 “How long, O LORD? Will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me? How long must I bear pain in my soul, and have sorrow in my heart all day long? How long shall my enemy be exalted over me?”

Job 7:11 “Therefore I will not restrain my mouth; I will speak in the anguish of my spirit; I will complain in the bitterness of my soul.”

***Question 25. Did God need the world in order to be God?***

No. God would still be God, eternally perfect and inexhaustibly rich, even if no creatures had ever been made. Yet without God, all created beings would simply fail to exist. Creatures can neither come into existence, nor continue, nor find fulfillment apart from God. God, however, is self-existent and self-sufficient.

Acts 17:24–25 “The God who made the world and everything in it, he who is Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in shrines

made by human hands, nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mortals life and breath and all things.”

*John 1:16* “From his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace.”

*John 5:26* “For just as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself.”

*Eph. 1:22* “And he has put all things under his feet and has made him the head over all things for the church.”

### ***Question 26. Why then did God create the world?***

God’s decision to create the world was an act of grace. In this decision God chose to grant existence to the world simply in order to bless it. God created the world to reveal God’s glory, to share the love and freedom at the heart of God’s triune being, and to give us eternal life in fellowship with God.

*Ps. 19:1* “The heavens are telling the glory of God; and the firmament proclaims his handiwork.”

*2 Cor. 3:17* “Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom.”

*Ps. 67:6–7* “The earth has yielded its increase; God, our God, has blessed us. May God continue to bless us; let all the ends of the earth revere him.”

*Eph. 1:3–4* “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, just as he chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless before him in love.”

*John 3:36* “Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life.”

### ***Question 27. Does your confession of God as Creator contradict the findings of modern science?***

No. My confession of God as Creator answers three questions: Who? How? and Why? It affirms that (a) the triune God, who is self-sufficient, (b) called the world into being out of nothing by the creative power of God’s Word (c) for the sake of sharing love and freedom. Natural science has much to teach us about the particular mechanisms and processes of nature, but it is not in a position to answer these questions about ultimate reality, which point to mysteries that science as such is not equipped to explore. Nothing basic to the Christian faith contradicts the

findings of modern science, nor does anything essential to modern science contradict the Christian faith.

*John 1:1–3* “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 came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being.”

## Reflections

In our last session we discussed the first part of the description of God as “God the Father Almighty.” God is the God of loving power and powerful love. We see God’s loving power every day as we look around us. For it is in God’s creation of all things, including human beings, that God sought to bring life and love to God’s world. We know God as “maker of heaven and earth.” Scripture begins with the story of creation for in God’s act of creation, we become part of God’s plan.

### GOD’S CREATION

God created by the power of God’s Word. God said, “Let there be light.” And there was light. God had a plan from the beginning of time, and through the power of God’s Word, God created all things out of nothing. God’s creation culminated in the creation of human beings in God’s image. The catechism explains that “we are created to be loving companions of others so that something of God’s goodness may be reflected in our lives.” What does this mean? It means we have a lot to live up to if we are to reflect God’s love in our lives. At a very early age we begin to look into a mirror and see what God created. Sometimes we like what we see and sometimes we don’t. But we need to remember that we are created in God’s image and are called to reflect God’s love to others.

With the gift of being created in God’s image comes responsibility. We are to show God’s love to all of creation. In our world today this carries a big weight. We do not always respond to the earth’s gifts with care and love. We are often wasteful and careless with God’s creation. We have a responsibility to ensure that the earth and all its goodness lasts for future generations. What are ways you can show more responsibility for God’s creation? In what areas do you need to rethink your use of the earth’s resources? We are to become stewards of God’s creation. A steward on a ship or a plane is the person who takes care of everyone—the one who serves. This image can help us as we think

about our care of all of God's creation. We are to be taking care of every need of creation.

## OUR SIN

We are created in God's image to reflect God's goodness, wisdom, and love and to care for creation. And yet we have each and every one turned away from God and fallen into sin. We were created to relate to God and others with goodness and love, but our sin distorts and confuses our relationships. The catechism explains, "Having ruined our connection with God by disobeying God's will, we are persons with hearts curved in upon ourselves" (question 20). We cannot fix this situation by trying harder, cancelling out our sin with good works, or being better than our neighbors. "We have become slaves to the sin of which we are guilty, helpless to save ourselves" (question 20).

We are helpless in the face of sin, but through Christ we are given hope and salvation. "Despite our turning from God, God did not turn from us, but instead sent Jesus Christ in the fullness of time to restore our broken humanity" (question 21). Jesus lived for others. He was the *perfect* image of God. "When by grace we are conformed to him through faith, our humanity is renewed according to the divine image that we lost" (question 21).

## GOD'S PROVIDENCE

God created all things and therefore cares for all things. God's intention for God's creation is good. God takes care of the world with wise and benevolent care and brings good out of the evil that happens. Paul states it like this: "We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose" (Rom. 8:28). This is what we mean by God's providence. Trusting in God's providence means we believe God watches over us, comforts us, strengthens us, carries us when necessary, and will finally lead us to life with God in eternity. We believe God alone is in control. Believing in God's providence means we can cry out to God when we hurt and know God hears us and will bring comfort.

Sometimes we see God's providence clearest in our darkest moments. For when we have nothing else to cling to, God is always there. Sometimes, however, despair and bitterness threaten to overwhelm us and take away all hope. At such times faith in God's providence reminds us that "my heartache and pain are contained by a larger purpose and a higher power than I can presently discern" (question 24). We do not always have to "put on a happy face" before God. The Psalms

are full of expressions of doubt, grief, anger, and shame. God's providence allows us to "cry out to God in lament, waiting on God to supply my needs" (question 24).

Several years ago my life was changed forever by AIDS. Within the span of two years I lost my mother and only brother to this horrible disease. My mother had undergone a blood transfusion and had contracted the disease from tainted blood. Her diagnosis came in the late 1980s when many misconceptions of this disease still existed. Being a strong woman of faith, my mother chose to keep her illness a secret, afraid of people's response. Her decision was hard for me, but I lived with it. Still, I spent many hours crying out to God. Why my mother? Why now? Why does she not trust her Christian friends to love and care for her? Finally, in the last few months of her life she took a step of faith. She had come to a point where she had once again put herself in God's loving arms. She shared with her community of faith her diagnosis. She had decided she wanted to help bring good out of this dreadful diagnosis. In God's providential care the church embraced her and walked the last few months of her life with her. Today they have an active AIDS care group and continue to minister to others in her memory. Less than two years later my brother shared his diagnosis of AIDS with us. Because God had seen us through our mother's illness and taught us so much, we were able to walk with him in his last days as well. In my life I have seen God take evil and transform it into good. Have you seen God do the same? If you haven't, be ready. For one day God will surely show you God's love and care when you least expect it.

### GOD'S GRACE

God's creation and God's providence point us directly to God's grace. The very act of creation was a gift of grace. God stays with God's creation. God does not abandon us. God is always seeking us even when we are not seeking God. Life itself is a gift from God; the ultimate gift of God's grace is the promise of eternal life. God cares so much for all of creation that nothing will ever separate us from God's love—not even death. God is with us in life and in death. That is the message of God's grace.

## Keeping a Journal

Reread the catechism questions and answers for this session. Choose one sentence or phrase to reflect on for the week. Here are some ideas:



