Disciples Church

A Firm Foundation –Creator-Creature Distinction

Week of June 13th, 2018

**TEACHING NOTES**

Introduction & Recap

Good evening and welcome to midweek. Before we dive in to tonight’s topic, I’d like to briefly recap last week.

Last week we talked about our ultimate standard as our foundation for apologetics. As Christians, we have a presupposition, a lens through which we see the world. What is that lens or presupposition? It’s the word of God. We see all things through this lens.

We also talked about the futility of living in this world as a nonbeliever. Remember what Romans 1:18 says? *For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth.* The nonbeliever suppresses the truth of God. They know He exists, but they deny it. It’s no different than us denying the existence of the sun on a hot day. They live in utter futility and thus they cannot make true sense of the world in which they live. They claim to have Ultimate standards by which they see the world, but in reality, they are simply their own standard of truth. Though they would likely reject this characterization, they see themselves as a god.

We discussed what our job is as the apologist or as the person making a defense of the Christian faith. Our job is to not argue the evidence, but rather we are to point out that the very foundation upon which they are even making arguments is flawed and proclaim God’s truth, His gospel. Remember, you cannot have “facts” without a God that has created a stable and predictable world in which there are physical laws that govern the universe. The atheist has no such facts as he ultimately has no guarantee that his view of the universe is not a messy and chaotic falsehood. He does not possess all the knowledge in the world to adequately know if his fact is in fact a fact. He is not God. Thus, he cannot possibly have any knowledge without God as revealed through His word.

It is common at this point to object if you’re not standing on the Ultimate standard as truth. But, let me remind you - we know that the word of God is the Ultimate standard because God has given us new life and brought us from blindness to sight. We know the word of God is His word. This is not proof to the unbelieving world, but it does not have to be. We are committed to relying upon the Scriptures because they testify of God and God is real because God has revealed Himself to us. We are not committed to independent knowledge apart from God. Any nonbeliever that claims to have independent knowledge apart from Scripture will ultimately in the end be their own standard of truth.

If as Christians we experience something that runs contrary to the word of God, then we must side with the word over our own experience. It is our standard.

For the nonbeliever to state that they are their own standard of truth will always terminate on the nonbeliever choosing to ignore what is made clear to them by God.

***Creator-creature distinction***

So where does that leave us tonight? The bulk of tonight’s lesson is going to be about the Creator-creature distinction. Please open your Bibles with me to Genesis 1 verse 1.

Genesis 1:1 In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.

It should not be understated the importance of the first words in our Bible. It was not, in the beginning, the heavens and the earth were there and then God showed up. No, there is an order. In the beginning – God. God was. He is. He did not come into being at a temporal time in history, rather He has always been.

Rev 1:8 “I am the Alpha and the Omega,” says the Lord God, “who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty.”

God is uncreated and does not need the creation. The mere fact that He existed prior to creation proves that He was in no need of creation to exist.

So, what did God do “in the beginning?” He created the heavens and the earth. We see this in John 1:3 speaking of the unique work of the Son in creation, (1:3) All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made.

Now, when we read these verses, we’re immediately hit with a distinction. There is God, who we refer to as the almighty Creator, Sustainer, and Ruler of everything. And then there is the creation, the things that He makes and rules over. These two things are not the same. One precedes the other. God precedes His creation. Everything that is has come from Him. This is no small thing. It should overwhelm us!

What we’re referring to here is commonly called the Creator-creature distinction. We must start here because in our study of apologetics it is extremely crucial for us to understand.

***The Creator***

It’s common in our modern context to think that God is simply a genie by which He exists to bless us with material good, physical health, or fill in the blank. This teaching has become popular in culture as well as in many other false beliefs. This thinking is not biblical. These sorts of ideas commonly expose our desperate need to understand theology proper. We need to understand the attributes of God!

God is pre-existent, self-existent, independent and immutable. He existed in tri-unity before He created. He exists without the help of any other thing. He exists apart from anything and His existence is unchanging. He is not bound to the creation in any form. We see this in Genesis 1:1. In the beginning…God. He was already present to create. He didn’t arrive from another creation to create our creation. God contains within Himself the ability to exist as God.

Because God is self-existent, independent, and immutable – our world reflects His nature. We do not live in a chaotic world where laws of physics randomly change. There is order and reliability. We would expect that from an immutable creator. A changing god would not have an ordered and logical universe. Some atheists even concede that the best evidences for the concept of a creator is the reality that it seems likely that someone created our universe with logical consistency.

In regard to His independence, God is not a grumpy grandfather who sits in the clouds helplessly witnessing the destruction of mankind. With many in our culture, God is apparently absent from our world until they need something. He is simply the means to an end. A butler for humanity. But God is not our cosmic sugar daddy!

God is sovereign. He is Lord of all. He ordains all that comes to pass. Nothing is capable of usurping His divine power. God is able to regenerate hearts, our “great” creaturely wisdom or self-will cannot do that.

***The Creation***

And then we have the creation. The earth, the universe, humanity, and all things everywhere—anything that is not God. These things are the stuff that God created. It is not God, it is distinct from God.

When thinking through the Creator-creature distinction, we must see the beauty of our creator as more than just a tool for humanity to harness and use. God does not submit to man. Man & the creation is wholly dependent on God.

***Creation testifies of God***

We talked about this last week and today in our recap, but I think it is relevant at this point in the lecture. I said that trying to prove the existence of God to an atheist is a bit like trying to prove the existence of the sun to an atheist on a hot day while they’re putting sunscreen on. There is actually a very powerful point in this.

Romans 1:20 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.

Ps 97:6 The heavens proclaim his righteousness, and all the peoples see his glory.

The Bible clearly teaches that through creation, God has revealed himself to man.

“We cannot know one aspect of creation without being turned toward its Creator.”RP Jr

We can meditate on the sheer vastness of the universe and be reminded of the majesty and power of our God. The more we see God’s handiwork behind all of creation, the more we will see how all of creation testifies of Him.

The Scriptures say in Psalm 8:3-4 When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, ​what is man that you are mindful of him, and the son of man that you care for him?

And Jeremiah 32:17 ‘Ah, Lord GOD! It is you who have made the heavens and the earth by your great power and by your outstretched arm! Nothing is too hard for you.

Take note that the creation testifies to the Creator-creature distinction. It shows us that there is a creator and that the creator is distinct from the creation.

Let’s think about this for a moment. Currently, mankind cannot travel to the nearest star. We don’t possess the amount of resources (fuel, food, etc.) to make the journey.

We don’t know what the exact speed of light is. It is faster than any of the current instruments that have attempted to record it. But, even if we take the accepted speed of light in a vacuum, it is 186,282 miles per second. That works out to a little over 670 million miles per hour. (670,616,629 mph.) A jet, by comparison, can reach speeds of 575 mph. If you flew around the world, in a straight line, it would take 43-44 hours. In contrast, light can circumnavigate our world 7.5 times in a single second.

A light year is the distance light travels in a single year. The Alpha Centauri system has the closest stars to our sun. Those stars are currently 4.3 light years away. That is about 25 trillion miles. That would take an aircraft 4.7 million years to fly to our closest neighboring star. It would take a spacecraft, going at about 17,600 mph, about 162,152 years.

And this is only concerning the closest star. The universe is estimated to extend 13.8 billion light years outward, and that is only what we can observe.

So, why would God place stars 13.8 billion light years away from us? We can never travel to those stars, but God put them in place with his decree and creative power.

The reality of vast spaces manages to humble us and make us realize that we’re not *that* big. The creation testifies of God just as the sun lights up our day. It is an inescapable reality.

***Creation, Dependent on God***

Not only does the creation testify of God, the creation itself is wholly dependent upon God.

Acts 17:25 nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything.

Col 1:17 And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together.

The Scriptures teach us that God gives life to all of everything and upholds it. From the largest universe to the smallest molecule, God is binding these things together and upholding them.

Romans 11:36 says For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen.

All things are from Him, all things are through Him, and all things are to Him. That is testifying to the active holding up of the universe. He is The Sustainer.

Let’s take a moment to get outside of the normalcy of our world and really think about things from a different perspective.

We dig up minerals and rocks from the ground. We melt them with fire and transform them into metal tubes, which we fill with flammable liquid which we’ve somehow created from ancient dead giant lizards and plants that were flattened on the ground from a giant flood. And then, we light it on fire and launch these metal tubes with people in them across vast areas of the earth. This happens thousands of times a day without any problem. Yet, many people remark on God’s so-called absence when an aircraft crashes to the ground. They fail to marvel at the sustaining power of a truly omnipotent God who is upholding and sustaining every single law of physics for those planes to fly as they do. The question should not be ‘where is God?’, rather, the statement ought to be, look at how great our God is!

We are not like children who grow less and less dependent on parents for their care. We have a wholly different relationship to the creator. We are dependent on Him for all life. Think of the intricate systems that are in your body. They work in tandem with each other. Think of the cells in your body. They perform as they should. They are built from the genetic instructions from DNA. It is simply amazing.

It is a fundamental truth that we grasp the Creator-creature distinction. Indeed, this is what sets us apart from all nonbelievers.

“Christians strive to see everything in light of creation’s dependence on God while the non-Christian tries to deny creation’s dependence…Every person who has not trusted in Christ for salvation fails to account for the Creator-creature distinction and somehow puts God and His creation in mutual dependence on each other and ascribes to creation a degree of independence.” RP Jr

Thus, creation is entirely dependent upon God.

***God revealed to Man***

It is crucial at this point to understand that although the creation is wholly dependent upon the creator, God has chosen to reveal himself to us in various ways.

How has God revealed himself to us?

God has revealed himself to us through nature, through our consciences, through Jesus Christ and through the Scriptures. Each of His revelations are different in scope and purpose.

For our time, God has revealed Himself to us through the Scriptures.

2 Tim 3:16-17 All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, (3:17) that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.

The revelation of God is given to us to direct us to true knowledge.

1. ***Man’s dependent Knowledge***

Because man is totally dependent upon God, it follows that man’s knowledge is dependent upon God. This is not knowledge that is apart from God.

God’s understanding of Himself and the creation is independent, but man’s knowledge is dependent.

We will unpack this more in future lessons, but in reality, what this means is that because man’s knowledge is dependent on God, the only way to know true knowledge is through what God has revealed to us. The Scriptures are that revelation of truth.

Even those who deny the existence of God are fully dependent upon God in their knowledge. The unbelieving man thinks, and is capable of reason, but true spiritual knowledge, that is – knowledge that leads to life, is only from the revelation of Scripture.

John 14:6 Jesus said to him, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.

Some may say in protest that what is revealed in Scripture is great for Christians, but it doesn’t apply to the non-believer. And, we must see that special revelation does not remove any single person from being fully dependent on God for all life, knowledge and judgment. Our Lord is not just Lord of Christians, He is Lord of all.

God is truth. All truth emanates from Him.

1. Man’s dependent Morality

Just as man is dependent upon God for knowledge, he is also dependent upon God for morality. How do you know what is right?

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. (2:15) 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

Men and women everywhere have the law written on our hearts. They know that murder is wrong, lying is wrong, stealing is wrong, etc. God has given us a conscience to reflect his moral law. But, in sin, man suppresses this moral law.

Creation also reveals God to man. Both creation and the law being written on our heart make us without excuse before God. But, this is not enough to give us saving knowledge of God!

The Baptist Confession of 1689 says “the Lord was pleased at different times and in various ways to reveal himself and to declare his will to his church. To preserve and propagate the truth better and to establish and comfort the church with greater certainty against the corruption of the flesh and the malice of Satan and the world, the Lord put this revelation completely in writing. Therefore, the Holy Scriptures are absolutely necessary.”

God has proclaimed through creation that He is the arbiter of what is good and what is evil. He tells Adam that he must not eat of the tree, He tells Moses to have no other God’s before Him, and He testifies that we should listen to His beloved Son, Jesus Christ. So while we have some knowledge of right and wrong because the law is written on our hearts, we can know the full revelation of morality through the testimony of Scripture.

God is the one who decided these things. Man, apart from God and the Ultimate standard of Morality has gone astray.

***Morality***

I want to spend some time demonstrating this because this is indeed an area of monumental importance.

It’s not uncommon for many in our culture and even many in the Christian church to demonstrate some ignorance in several of these areas because they are claiming a moral standard which is opposed to the Ultimate standard of Morality found so clearly in Scripture.

For instance, is it morally wrong to eat animals? Is it morally wrong to use animal byproducts? To answer these sorts of questions, we must look to our Ultimate standard. God’s Word is not silent on this issue.

The following verses and others give us some of what our Ultimate standard teaches us. I will not venture into a definitive teaching on this topic, I’m merely highlighting a few verses to make my point.

Gen 1:26 Then God said, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.”

Genesis 9:3 Every moving thing that lives shall be food for you. And as I gave you the green plants, I give you everything.

No, there is nothing morally wrong with killing an animal for food or using an animal byproduct. This has been granted to us by God through His decree as revealed to us in the Word of God.

I want to make a clear distinction here, we’re not saying that Christians must eat meat. I know of Christians that have adopted vegan and vegetarian diets for health or weight loss reasons. It is permissible to adopt these diets, but it is not permissible to adopt these diets as idols, or adopt many of the trappings that come with these classifications. It’s important to see that seeking identity in anything other than God and His truths is an unbiblical mindset. Any identity outside of Christ that man may claim fails to adequately reveal the truth. The truth is that we are either in Christ or we’re spiritually dead in our sin. Our identity is one of those two realties. As a Christian, to embrace the worldview of vegan or vegetarian ignores this truth. 2 Corinthians 5:17 Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.

As Christians, we have no loyalty toward any created thing. Christian – do not bow to the idol of veganism and vegetarianism. You may adopt these things for health reasons, but we must be careful about our allegiance. We must be careful not to let any levels of an unbiblical worldview that comes with claiming certain things creep into our mindsets.

I’m not saying you can’t claim the label of vegan or vegetarian. These sorts of short hand categorizations/labels can be helpful for us. I am saying that when we adopt veganism and vegetarianism as idols, we often embrace additional trappings and beliefs from those worldviews. That is the warning that we ought to heed. Therefore, when people submit to the full worldview of veganism or vegetarianism, it’s common for many to state that they do not eat meat for moral reasons.

To which the Christian ought to respond by simply stating that according to the Ultimate standard, Scripture, there is nothing morally wrong with killing animals for food and using animal by-products. Why? Because Scripture simply says so.

There is more to this, so let’s look deeper. It’s not just that we can see the futility of the other person’s position. But we must ask the question: by what standard is the other person even able to make an argument for their moral position?

Let’s deconstruct this for a moment.

A common secular objection to eating meat and/or using animal products is that it’s cruel, or that it causes unnecessary suffering.

If we remove the Ultimate standard (Scripture) from the scenario, how is this person able to make these claims?

Do they possess the absolute knowledge of all things everywhere to know if the suffering imposed upon animals is necessary or unnecessary? We may ask them: How do you know if suffering is morally wrong? Or, how do you know if animals can even experience suffering? Perhaps suffering is morally right, how can you discern the difference?

Perhaps this is a bit heady, but I’m trying to make an important point. The responses to my questions will inevitably lead the individual to a few places.

For the other person to adequately attempt to defend their position, they must state unequivocally that they have a standard that informs their claim. The reality is that they do not have the other standard they claim because God is real and has decreed the truth through His revelation.

Remember, our job as the apologist is to poke holes in their false standard and show them that the standard they are standing on is complete foolishness.

Let’s play a scenario out:

***I say to the person claiming to be a vegan due to a desire to protect animals:*** You say you’re a vegan because you don’t want the animals to suffer. Perhaps suffering is morally right, how can you discern the difference—how can you know that suffering is in fact wrong?

*I know that suffering is wrong. Don’t all humans believe that suffering is wrong?*

But how do you know suffering is wrong? You just appealed to yourself as the standard. According to your worldview, you hold to independent thinking. Do you have all of the knowledge in the world in order to know that suffering is morally wrong and make that claim?

*No, I don’t have all of the knowledge in the world, that’s ridiculous. But, we know that suffering causes pain.*

Some people think pain is a good thing or exists for good reasons. So why is your belief correct and other’s wrong? What has given you this authority? Do you claim to be a god?

*I’m not a god. There is no God. I believe in evolution, I believe that we humans evolved from something, like star dust as one 20th century scientist claimed.*

According to your evolutionary worldview, you are nothing more than evolved star dust. How can star-dust make a moral claim of right and wrong?

*It’s a commonly held belief between a large group of people that suffering is bad, therefor suffering is bad. I believe it’s a consensus.*

Making an argument that many people agree with your position is not proof of your position. ~~It’s a truth claim to say that your position is a consensus because you think a consensus is authoritative and you’re assuming that you know all knowledge and can adequately make the claim. Again, you’re not adequately proving to me that you’re able to make your claim in a consistent or authoritative way from your worldview.~~ (Consider removing since I deal with this below)

*I know that suffering is wrong, and therefore I don’t want animals to suffer, so using animal by-products and eating meat is wrong.*

So, you are the Ultimate standard for what is right and wrong?

*Yes.*

Well, I need to tell you that the Scriptures are the Ultimate standard. At this point, you do not submit to my Ultimate standard as the standard of truth. Since you reject this standard, how can you say that you know anything?

(And from here an apologist needs to hold up Scripture and proclaim God’s truths to them.)

Now, many times the conversation will go in circles because the other person will typically not admit that they are their own Ultimate standard, but that is what it comes down to.

You’ll notice in the mock conversation that the other person mentioned consensus. It’s common for people to hold to a belief because that belief is mostly agreed upon by a large group of people. The question to ask is this: why is consensus wrong when it comes to truth?

When we’re dealing with God, we understand that God is our Ultimate standard *because* he is perfect, all knowing, immutable, etc. We cannot claim truth apart from our Ultimate standard. Many people who have rejected God can possibly agree on many things, but that does not demonstrate truth. You can only have truth when you have the all-knowing triune God who is. If you reject Him, then you yourself have to understand that in order to truly know anything at all – you must know everything. Why is that? Because if you do not know everything, then there exists the possibility that something exists that can disprove your claim of truth. Since man does not know everything, and can never know everything, he cannot rely upon his own thoughts on the matter. That is why we must reject consensus. People who claim to know truth apart from God utilize consensus as a way to assume a position without really dealing with their own presuppositions. Their presupposition is that they themselves are the Ultimate standard.

And because they themselves are the Ultimate standard, they have no moral position because there is NO moral position apart from God writing the law on our hearts and revealing the fullness of his truth in Scripture. Thus, they cannot assert a moral position.

Let me be clear, this is a small snippet of an example of how to engage someone in regards to apologetics. We will get into the fullness of this method later in our series. We will spend a large portion of our time helping you guys see that it’s not just about winning arguments, but it’s really about lovingly engaging people with compassion in the hopes that they would see Christ as their savior.

Let’s look at another topic. What about or murder or homicide?

From the evolutionary stand-point consistently worked out (which many evolutionists haven’t done), there is nothing morally wrong with murder. Why is that? Because the evolutionary worldview rejects the Ultimate standard of Scripture and thus makes independent truth claims or no truth claims (which is a truth claim) about what is right and wrong.

Let me read to you a quote from a secular cultural anthropologist on this topic:

*We might suppose that in the matter of taking life all peoples would agree on condemnation. On the contrary, in the matter of homicide, it may be held that one kills by custom his two children, or that a husband has a right of life and death over his wife or that it is the duty of the child to kill his parents before they are old. It may be the case that those are killed who steal fowl, or who cut their upper teeth first, or who are born on Wednesday. Among some peoples, a person suffers torment at having caused an accidental death, among others, it is a matter of no consequence. Suicide may also be a light matter, the recourse of anyone who has suffered some slight rebuff, an act that constantly occurs in a tribe. It may be the highest and noblest act a wise man can perform. The very tale of it, on the other hand, may be a matter for incredulous mirth, and the act itself, impossible to conceive as human possibility. Or it may be a crime punishable by law, or regarded as a sin against the gods. (pp.45-46) – Ruth Benedict*

[*https://www.scu.edu/ethics/ethics-resources/ethical-decision-making/ethical-relativism/*](https://www.scu.edu/ethics/ethics-resources/ethical-decision-making/ethical-relativism/)

Did you catch that? She is highlighting perfectly what I’m aiming to show you. When you remove our Ultimate standard, you are left to figure things out on your own.

It’s very interesting to note that one of the darkest moments in the history of Israel is Judges 21:25 In those days there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes.

We should see that independent thinking is nothing to be celebrated, it is the essence and birth of evil. The Scriptures never regard independent thinking (as if that was a thing) to be a good phenomenon. It’s literally blind thinking. It’s seeing the truth of God, knowing he exists, denying it and then going about your life.

Part of the post-modern world we live in is riddled with relativism. This view promotes the idea that all things are simply relative. There is no right or wrong. What’s right for me is right for me and what’s right for you is right for you. This is the air we breathe in this land.

What’s the problem with it? Scripture makes it clear we cannot trust ourselves:

Isaiah 5:21 Woe to those who are wise in their own eyes,  and shrewd in their own sight!

We need to fear God. We need to look to Him as Ruler and the authority.

Proverbs 3:7 Be not wise in your own eyes; fear the Lord, and turn away from evil.

So, Scripture makes it clear we cannot trust ourselves, or a consensus of ourselves even. You cannot discern what is right or wrong given a framework of relativism. It is impossible. And what we need to see is that relativism is a truth claim. To claim that nothing is right or wrong is a claim of truth. Any truth claim must be backed by a standard which upholds the truth claim. Since the secularist has no such standard to uphold the truth claim, we ought to reject their claim outright.

Because God has created us, because God is God and Creator, because we are the creature, he has decreed that all knowledge of moral right and wrong come from general revelation, and ultimately from the revelation in Scripture. Thus, any revelation that is apart or against what is taught in Scripture is not truth and must be discarded.

So why is murder wrong?

Exodus 20:13 You shall not murder.

Genesis 9:6 “Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed, for God made man in his own image.”

It’s wrong because Scripture says it is. It’s wrong because God says that man is created in his image and that any killing of man shall be returned by the shedding of that man’s blood.

You see in order for the atheist to say murder is wrong they must borrow from our worldview. There is no such thing as right or wrong in a random evolving chance universe. It’s vitally important for us to point out these inconsistencies.

***Conclusion / Closing***

In conclusion. Tonight, we looked at the Creator-creature distinction. We saw that God is distinct from the creation. We are dependent upon Him for all life, sustenance, knowledge and morality.

I pray that these truths would set deep within your soul and that you would praise our God more because of the beauty of this apologetic.

Next week we will venture into the state of man pre-fall, post-fall and at redemption.

Please continue to write questions as you go as at the end of our series, we will do a Q&A to talk through some of these things.

Let’s pray.