

God Is My Strong Salvation*James Montgomery (1771–1854)*

God is my strong Salvation;
 What foe have I to fear?
 In darkness and temptation
 My Light, my Help is near.

Though hosts encamp around me,
 Firm to the fight I stand;
 What terror can confound me,
 With God at my right hand?

Place on the Lord reliance,
 My soul, with courage wait;
 His truth be thine affiance,
 When faint and desolate.

His might thy heart shall strengthen,
 His love thy joy increase;
 Mercy thy days shall lengthen;
 The Lord will give thee peace.

ΤΩ ΚΡΟΝΟΥ ΚΑΙΡΩ*In the Nick of Time***God, Creation, and Humanity, Part 2: The God of Creation***Kevin T. Bauder*

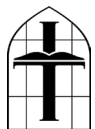
Nothing is more fundamental to right thinking than the first sentence of the Bible: “In the beginning, God created the heaven and the earth.” These words, supplemented by the following description, claim that God made the entire created order from the furthest galaxy to the tiniest subatomic particle. This order is what people call the *world*. The Bible draws a distinction between God, who is outside the world and who exists before it, and the world, which God brings into existence at a point in time (arguably, the point that begins time).

God made the world, but no one made God. He simply is, and there was never a time when He was not. He is the world’s past, present, future, but He is altogether outside of time. He is, and He is what He is. He exists in the fulness of His being, owing His existence to nothing outside Himself. His existence flows necessarily from His own being: He could not not be.

Just as God exists outside of time, He also exists outside limitations of space. He is infinite and immense. He is everywhere present in all that He has made, and wherever He is, He is present in the fulness of His being. God is all that He is in all places where He is, and He is everywhere.

God’s power is such that He brought the universe into being by the mere exertion of His will. His power is without limit. Like all His attributes, His power is His own. He never receives power from anyone or anything else, never depends on anything outside Himself, never grows tired. While He does nothing that contradicts His nature, and while He never engages in absurdities (such as willing Himself not to exist), He will never fail to be able to do anything that can be done.

Importantly, the maker of the world is God, and not the gods. Jehovah alone is God, and no one else is like Him. He alone has power to create. He alone has exercised this power. He alone is worthy of worship by His creatures. Thus, the *Shema* (Deut 6:4) also stands as a fundamental assumption in all correct thinking: “Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God *is* one LORD.” This key verse leads directly to another, the Greatest Commandment, “And thou shalt love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and



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with all thy might," (Deut 6:5). There is one and only one true and living God, and His creatures owe Him absolute devotion.

This true and living God is profoundly personal. We cannot quite affirm that He is *a* person, for He is *three* persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Each of these three is true God, possessing the entire divine nature and all the divine perfections. Yet the Father is not the Son, the Son is not the Spirit, and the Spirit is not the Father. Each of these three communes with the others, and each delights in the others. These three persons in one God are eternally satisfied in each other, such that God never was nor ever could be lonely or in need of companionship.

For this reason, God did not create the world out of any necessity. He did not need the world so that He could somehow become more than He is. He was not and could not be compelled to create. His making of the world was done freely. He has never explained His reason for creating, except for that recurring phrase in Ephesians 1: according to the good pleasure of His will.

Because all that is in the world is God's creation, and because matter came to be as part of that creation, God cannot be a material being. He cannot even be of the same substance as created spirits such as angels or the human soul. God is entirely incorporeal. He possesses no bodily parts. He is driven by no passions.

His impassibility does not mean that God is unfeeling. For example, He is good, and He is good in two senses. First, He is infinitely benevolent, purposing the wellbeing of His creatures. Second, He is infinitely holy, righteous and just, a moral lawgiver to His creatures and a moral judge over them. He is faithful to reward the righteous, and He always responds to injustice with wrath (Rom 2:5–10).

This vision of God stands in contrast to at least three great errors. The first error is polytheism, the belief in multiple gods. Polytheistic systems cannot account for the existence of the world. Just as importantly, they cannot account for the existence of the gods. Furthermore, polytheists invariably depict their gods as larger versions of humans, with all the weaknesses, idiosyncrasies, and blunders that humans are prone to commit. In polytheism, some form of the world must exist before the gods can be brought forth. The gods are the creation of the world process, not the other way around. The Old Testament prophets repeatedly mocked polytheism, and the apostle Paul challenged it directly in his address to the Areopagus (Acts 17).

The second error is dualism, which posits two eternal principles or gods of more-or-less equal ultimacy. The most notorious dualism to plague the Christian church was Gnosticism, which combined an ethical and metaphysical dualism with a version of polytheism. In Gnosticism, the world is the creation of an obtuse, malevolent offspring of the offspring of the gods, and the material world is intractably evil. Gnostic ideas did not mature until

after the end of the New Testament era, but they were present and growing during the lives of the apostles. The New Testament writers challenge incipient Gnostic teachings in several places.

The third great error is pantheism, which sees the divine as immanent within all creation while it denies God's transcendence. In pantheism, God is not a person but a personification of the world. It (for in pantheism God can only be *it* and not *he*) is identical with the great world process itself. Personhood is simply an illusion that emerges from that process and that eventually is reabsorbed into it. The word *God* is kept for its evocative power, but "God" is really nothing but whatever is and whatever happens. Pantheism is represented in most Eastern religions and in some Western philosophies. The biblical writers rarely address it directly, but everything they say about God contradicts it.

If we want to understand the world, ourselves, and our sin rightly, then we must begin with a right vision of God. Accepting this vision is not a purely intellectual decision. We are not allowed simply to presuppose God. We must trust Him, the God of the Bible, the personal-infinite Spirit who made us, loves us, and judges us. We must trust Him, and we must fear Him. We can offer Him our trust and fear because He is not only our maker and judge but also our redeemer. A discussion of redemption, however, must follow the discussions of creation, humanity, and sin.



This essay is by Kevin T. Bauder, Research Professor of Historical and Systematic Theology at Central Baptist Theological Seminary. Not every one of the professors, students, or alumni of Central Seminary necessarily agrees with every opinion that it expresses.
