

JOHNS CREEK UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

The Bible and Science: Friends or Enemies?

Sunday, May 5, 2019

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Genesis 1:1-10

Do our scientific discoveries disprove God? Many atheists believe that since we know so much more about the universe and how it works that believing in God is not necessary. Everything can be explained scientifically. Today, my goal is to help you see that science and faith in God are not mutually exclusive. I want to show that you can appreciate science and still believe in God. I say this because many people have given up on faith because they have this impression that in order to be a Christian they have to check their brain at the door.

Martin Thielen writes about a PhD student named Mary who had a meeting with him when he was serving a church in Hawaii. She was a student at the University of Hawaii. She had been attending Thielen's church for over a year when she asked for the appointment. Mary felt drawn to Christianity but she also struggled with the issue of science and faith, especially evolution. She said, "I want to believe in God, but a literal reading of Genesis is impossible for me. I cannot accept that the world was created in six literal days and that the earth is less than 10,000 years old. As badly as I want to be a Christian, I can't forfeit my mind in the process." Mary wanted to know if she could reconcile her belief in evolution with her belief in the Bible. Her question to Thielen was, "Can I be a scientist and a Christian?"

Maybe you resonate with Mary's dilemma. Maybe you love the Bible and the teachings of Christianity, but you *also* appreciate science and reason, so you too can't accept a literal understanding of Genesis. You want to be a Christian, but you don't want to check your brain at the door! Maybe you wonder, "Can I be a Christian and believe in evolution? Can I believe in the Bible and still believe in evolution? Can I be a Christian and still believe in science? Can I be a Christian and still have a brain?"

Well, you want to know the answer to all those questions? YES! A thousand times: Yes! You don't have to believe that the earth is only 6,000 years old in order

to be a Christian. You can believe in evolution and still be a Christian. You don't have to interpret the first three chapters of Genesis literally in order to be a Christian. You don't have to believe that God created the world in six literal days in order to be a Christian. You can love and appreciate science and still believe in God. You don't have to choose between the two of them.

I remember being in college and getting a call from some parents of a friend of mine from high school. She was in a grade below me, just about to graduate from high school, and I was a freshman at Florida Southern. They wanted me to tour her around the college. I was happy to do it. I loved Florida Southern and was proud to show off the school to someone. Well, they came for a visit and I gave them a grand tour. It must have worked because she showed up at Florida Southern the next semester.

After the first semester, her parents yanked her out of school. They called me all upset and said, "We thought this was a United Methodist college. They teach evolution there, and the religion department does not have a problem with it, and you don't seem to have a problem with it either!"

I felt like Galileo. You may remember that Galileo was the one who confirmed what Copernicus always believed – that the Earth rotated around the Sun, the Sun did not rotate around the Earth. With his powerful telescope, he saw this with his own eyes. Well, the church had a field day! Galileo was brought before a tribunal of the Roman Catholic Church. This went against everything that the church taught because the Bible reads in Psalm 93:1 and 96:10 that the Earth is stationary – "It will not be moved."

Well, Galileo was charged with heresy and put on house arrest for the rest of his life. None of his findings could be published. It was over 70 years before his findings were published.

I believe all of us here in church today believe what Galileo believed and discovered. We believe that science rightly teaches that the Earth does indeed move

around the Sun. And yet, here we are, in church, still Christians. Why is that? Well, we have been able to reconcile that the psalmist was inspired to write about God creating the earth but did it with a limited understanding of science and cosmology. One day we will look back on our debates about evolution, like we do with Galileo, and laugh. Faith and science are not in conflict. God is not threatened by the theories of science. Science gets to pull back the curtain on God's creativity.

Some may wonder, "What about Genesis and the creation story?" The book of Genesis was not written as a book of science. And if you take it that way, you miss the point. When God inspired the writer of Genesis to write the creation story, God was not saying, "I want you to write down exactly how I did it." God knew that the writer did not know how, and God knew the writer had a limited understanding of science. God also knew that people would eventually understand more and discover more, and God would enjoy them discovering it. What was important was that the writer communicate that God created this wonderful world of ours. Genesis is a poetic book that expresses the meaning of life and the "who" of creation.

The Genesis account of creation is set in beautiful poetic language, language of faith, not science. This means that Genesis is meant to communicate to us the purposes of life. It is meant to communicate to us that Israel's God is not just another god among many, but is indeed THE LORD God who created the world. The Genesis account of creation was not meant to be read literally; it was meant to be read as a statement of faith in God. The original audience of Genesis could not have possibly understood protons and DNA structure. What they needed to know 32,000 years ago was that God created everything and that God has a plan and purpose for us and for all creation. So, today, God has gifted scientists to unravel the mysteries of the "how" of creation, and as they do, we continue to be amazed at what God has done and continues to do. You see, science is not a threat to faith; it is a friend to faith. As scientists make discoveries, our sense of awe is heightened over a God who designed everything. Science pulls back the curtain from God's handiwork. Albert Einstein said, "Science without religion is lame; religion without science is blind."

The more we discover in science, the more we marvel at God and His creation. We know scientifically why lightning strikes and where rain comes from. We know scientifically how babies grow in a mother's womb. We know the cellular components to a flower

and what makes the flower pink. We know how human beings process speech in their brains and the chemicals that are released when human beings get angry. We know scientifically why rainbows occur. Does this negate the existence of God? No! It just gives us a closer look at the brilliant handiwork of God.

Imagine after the service today you showed me what a gift you received from a friend – a new car! But it wasn't any car; it was a Lamborghini! Imagine you opened up the hood and showed me the powerful engine. You told me how fast the car goes and how quick it accelerates from 0 to 60. Imagine that we sat inside the car, and you pointed out the beautiful leather seats and the cool dashboard. Then, imagine that you took me for a ride around Johns Creek. Now, imagine we got back to the church exhilarated from the ride, and you said to me, "Don't those folks at Lamborghini know how to design an automobile?" I replied, "There was no designer! No one made this car. It just happened. You just went to the junkyard and slapped this together." You would think I was crazy! Well, it is the same way when we describe the mechanisms of the universe. Just because we understand the mechanisms does not mean there is no mechanic. Just because we know how something is designed does not mean there is no designer. And, believe me, the universe is more brilliantly designed than a Lamborghini!

This illustration reminds us that science, as good as it is, as wonderful as it is at revealing the handiwork of God, cannot answer all of our questions about the origin of life. G. K. Chesterton, a great Christian writer, said that "the real mystery is that anything exists at all." Things like the "Big Bang," and natural selection and evolution are great theories, and they might explain the science behind creation. But one thing they will never be able to explain is how creation came from nothing. It is one thing to change one thing into another thing. It is quite another thing to create something out of absolutely nothing.

I love the old story about the group of scientists who decided that human beings had come a long way and no longer needed God. They picked one scientist to go and tell God that they did not need Him anymore. The scientist goes to Him and says, "God, we can make it on our own. We know how life started. We know the secret. We know how to clone it. We know how to duplicate it. We can do it without You."

God listens patiently and says, "All right. What do you say we have a man-making contest?" The scientist says, "OK, great. We'll do it." God says, "Now

we're going to do it just the way I did back in the old days with Adam." The scientist says, "Sure, no problem." He reaches down and grabs a handful of dirt, and God says, "No, no, no, no, no. You go get your own dirt."

If you don't believe in God, if you think all of this happened by chance, then come up with your own dirt. If you don't believe in God, then try creating something from nothing. Only God can explain the existence of creation.

If you are not convinced, then try considering the probability of the world coming together by mere chance. According to what we know from science and biology, the world existing by chance would be as if a tornado had touched down in a junkyard, rearranged all of the parts, and left a fully operational Boeing 747 in its wake. This incomprehensible event wouldn't have to happen only *once*... it would have to happen *a million times*! Such an event is clearly impossible, and so is the creation of the world without a designer.

If you are still not convinced, look at it another way. The probability of the world coming together by chance would be as if you dumped out a warehouse filled with cans of alphabet soup, and the letters came together in such a way that they spelled out the Webster's dictionary perfectly! There is no way! And there is no way this world could've come together without a creator.

Some people who are still skeptical about whether God exists would do well to consider an illustration I heard from Adam Hamilton. Actually, I originally heard it when I was in elementary school. What if one of the cells in your body was talking to another cell in your body? One cell said, "I wonder if human beings exist. I mean we know a lot about ourselves and how we work. I would believe in human beings if one would show up!" That's kind of how God feels when we wonder if He exists. And remember: God *did* show up in Jesus Christ.

This God of ours is amazing. We know that the earth is finely tuned to create life and sustain life. There are laws to the universe that govern life. These laws are like a perfectly made software that contains an exact

mathematical formula for life to exist. If the combination of this formula was off by .1 percent, life could not exist. The chance of that happening is unthinkable. It would be as if a tornado entered a big junkyard, rearranged all the parts and left a Boeing 747 in its wake. Again, this unbelievable event would not have to happen *once*; it would have to happen *a million times*. This is impossible, and so is life in this world without God! We are God's handiwork! We marvel at what he has done when we look at science.

The real message today: you are no accident. The same God who created the heavens and the earth created you for a purpose. God created you out of his love for you to receive his love. God created you to enjoy his creation and for you to be in relationship with him. God created you to come to know the joy of life by doing his will and loving others as he loves you.

Over 4.5 billion years of life on this planet, God must have done a lot creating – enjoying all the different life forms he created. God must have worked through processes and experimentation, experiencing the joy of designing and creating all the complex and beautiful forms of life that have existed and continue to exist. But you want to know **God's** crowning act of creative work? You and me – human beings. We are different from any other life form God has created. God created us in his own image – we possess a soul and an ability to think, to understand, to love, and to worship. No, we are no accident! We were fashioned by a creator!

The Apostle Paul says it best for us. In Ephesians 2:10, he says we are God's *poema*. This is the Greek word for poem. You know what you are? You are God's poetry – God's work of art (Hamilton, 52). Now, let us live like it. Amen.

I am grateful to Adam Hamilton and his book, "Confronting the Controversies" (Abingdon). It was a helpful tool as I prepared this sermon. Of course, Martin Thielen's book, "What's the Least I Can Believe and Still Be a Christian" was a resource for me as well.



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