

God's Creation

The Old Testament Scripture for today is Genesis 1:1-5:

In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, ²the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters. ³Then God said, "Let there be light"; and there was light. ⁴And God saw that the light was good; and God separated the light from the darkness. ⁵God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, the first day.

The opening line of the Apostles' Creed declares our belief in a heavenly Father as the Creator of heaven and earth and all that is within it. The first verse of Genesis has been called "the most profound statement in the Bible." It tells us the answer we need for developing a Christian worldview, a perspective on life, "where we come from, why we're here, where we're going." These verses are far deeper and much more significant than we typically realize, revealing indispensable truths about God the Almighty Father, the creator.

The late Presbyterian pastor and theologian, James M. Boice, says that this verse in Genesis precludes atheism (which says there is no God), pantheism (which says God is everything and in everything), and materialism (the material is all there is or all that is important). It tells us that God *is*, and that he's standing over his creation and is apart from his creation.

God created "in the beginning/at first." There was a time when nothing existed except the Triune God himself, not even the heavenly hosts. We read in several New Testament verses (e.g. John 1:3, Colossians 1:16, Hebrews 1:2) that God the Son was active in Creation as the Co-Creator with the Father, who worked through his "wind/Spirit." John's gospel clearly reflects our verses from Genesis when it announces Jesus Christ as the creative, active and eternal light, who came into the world in his incarnation (1:1-5). Thus these verses are fitting for the Epiphany Season.

God is the First Cause of all else that exists. Random evolution and naturalism are inadequate explanations both for the origin and complexity of creation. However God created, his imprint is clearly seen in the universe. He willed his creation into being at a moment in eternity, before there was time, which is a part of creation. In verses 3 and following we see days of creation. We don't know the meaning of "yom," which can refer to 24-hour periods or epochs of time, like we use the word "day" when we talk about "The modern day," or "in an earlier day." Bishop Usher conjectured the earth was created in the year 4004 BC. Not that God couldn't create in six 24-hour days. As someone says, the fossil record could mislead, and God could have created the world to look like it's billions of years old. But I doubt if God would deliberately mislead us.

Astrophysicists and astronomers speak of stars and quasars that are billions of light years away from our telescopes. What our text tells us, I believe, is that God created and ordered his creation through his determined epochs of creation. Naturalistic evolution is theoretical and has many unproved assumptions. We don't have to choose between naturalism and Scripture. The choice is not between the Bible and science. It's between the Bible and bad science. The Bible is not a science book. Truth in science will accord with biblical truth that is not confined to a narrow, rigid interpretation, but that is the truth of what God is saying to us in Scripture.

"In the beginning when *God* created...." This first verse takes us back to the beginning of time itself. It's impossible for us mortals to even imagine eternity, when there was no time, and then, with the New Heaven and Earth, when there will be no more time. Because God existed before the Creation, he's independent of it. Before anything of matter, space and the material, God was complete in himself. There is nothing in all of creation that could make God more complete than he's been for all eternity.

There are two different words in the Hebrew that appear in the creation account, and the one used here in this first verse in the word, *bara*, which is used to express the bringing into existence something that didn't exist before. In Scripture *bara* is used exclusively of God. The Latin is *creatio ex nihilo*, or "creation out of nothing." The artist creates with canvas and brush and oil, but God called into existence out of absolute nothingness.

The naturalistic world view of the scientist who denies the work of a creator is at a loss to explain the origin of even the first elements and energy that might have caused the Big Bang billions of years ago. Our text says God created out of nothing, and called those first physical elements into being, simply by the power of his word. He is the "uncaused cause."

The universe God created is separate from him, but shows his power and wisdom. He created a universe that would declare his glory. This is what David says in the Nineteenth Psalm:

"The heavens are telling the glory of God;
And the firmament proclaims his handiwork."

"The heavens" could simply refer to the entire universe, but also would include the spiritual realm of the heavenly places, including heaven, the realm where Christ Jesus rules in his glorified body. The heavenly realms include the angelic beings and all who worship around the throne, and even those fallen angels. The heavens and the earth certainly include the entire universe. God created an orderly world, over which he gave humankind dominion (Genesis 2:28). The general dependability, consistency and orderliness of his creation have made possible the progress of modern science, and God is sovereign over his creation, which is derived from him.

Our physical existence is due to the will of God, whose desire is that we have life, which in itself is incredible. The fact that we owe life itself to God is

reason to stop our complaining against him, according to the prophets Jeremiah and Isaiah, as quoted by Paul (Jeremiah 18:6; Isaiah 29:16; Romans 9:20). Life and every goodness is not our deserving, but is due to the mercy of God, who has the right and the power to both redeem and destroy. James reminds us that God is the source of every good and perfect gift (1:17).

Even more incredible is the will of God the Creator to rescue us, following our rebellion against him. God purposed, even before the creation, to redeem the fallen (Ephesians 1:11). And his redeeming purposes include all of his creation (Romans 8:19-22).

Horrible natural disasters and world-wide epidemics bewilder us. All we can say is that God is perfect love, wisdom and power, and he created the world to act in perfect harmony and as a paradise for his children. But with humankind's fall, sin and suffering entered the world. Without suffering, man would continue unabated and unchecked in his sin. Disasters and suffering can be a wake-up call (Luke 13:1-5). God doesn't cause suffering, but he allows it, and just as the cross of Christ provided for our personal redemption, so God is at work redemptively through suffering. Pain, in the words of CS Lewis, becomes God's megaphone, or his amplifier, to call us back to him.

The universe God called into existence by his word was at first formless and empty. But the Spirit of God was hovering over this chaos, ready to shape creation according to God's purpose. When the Angel Gabriel appeared to the young Virgin Mary, he explained to her how the Messiah would be formed in her womb: "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God" (Luke 1:35).

The Apostle Peter writes about God's life-giving word which called creation into being (2 Peter 3:5). He says also that we have been born again "through the living and enduring word of God" (1 Peter 1:23).

God's creation, in during this period of fallenness, as we await the final redemption of creation, is being sustained by his will and word. Paul writes about Christ Jesus that "all things were created by him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together" (Colossians 1:16-17). Hebrews says that the Son sustains "all things by his powerful word" (Hebrews 1:3). Imagine the thoughts racing through the minds of the disciples when the awakened Jesus simply spoke a word and the stormy winds and waves were stilled (Matthew 8:23-27)! He created the wind and waves, and demonstrated his power over the elements. Jesus Christ the Co-creator is also the one we trust for all things.

These first verses in Genesis frame the story of the Bible with the closing verses in Revelation, the last book, which promises the redeemed, fulfilled creation called the New Heaven and Earth (Rev. 21-22). God, the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End, will bring all things to their fulfillment (22:13). God will finish what he started "in the

beginning.” The sovereign, saving God will finish his creation in you and in all the redeemed people of God (Philippians 1:6), as well as his creation of the heavens and the earth.

Jesus Christ, the Eternal Son, is the Alpha and the Omega of creation. His purpose for his creation will be fulfilled. When the last of those chosen from before the creation of the world are gathered into his kingdom, then Jesus will come again to bring the consummation of his rule.

Paul, in, says that through his creation God has revealed his invisible qualities—“his eternal power and divine nature” (Romans 1:20). His self-revelation in creation is so conclusive and complete, mankind is “without excuse” for unbelief. We are shown enough in God’s creation to be accountable to him.

John RW Stott says, as St. Paul’s cathedral is a monument to architect Sir Christopher Wren, so creation is a monument to our Creator God. “Wren,” notes Stott, “died before it was completed. His body is buried in the crypt but he has no memorial in the cathedral. Instead, a plaque on his tomb bears a Latin inscription which means, ‘If you seek his monument, look around you.’ In St. Paul’s Sir Christopher Wren needs no monument. His memorial is the cathedral itself, which bears eloquent witness to the architect’s existence and consummate skill. Can we not say the same of Almighty God, the great architect of the whole universe?” asks Stott. “As St. Paul wrote, ‘ever since the creation of the world his [God’s] invisible nature, his eternal power and deity, has been clearly perceived in the things that have been made’ (Romans 1:20). This argument from the fact of the universe and from the evidence of the design within it still has power today,” says Stott.

God has spoken to us through his creation, enough to get our attention. He has spoken to us to show us his salvation through Jesus Christ (Hebrews 1: 2 and John 1: 1-18). In John 1:18, we read that “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.”

Jesus Christ is the word, telling us about God, and also showing us the way to God. We see in Jesus, the Co-creator the power of almighty God, as he calmed the seas, healed the sick and raised the dead. Jesus revealed the love of the Father. In his death on the cross we understand the enormity of our sin. In his resurrection we see the power of God to save and forgive, as we follow the risen Christ as Lord. Grace is the initiative and activity of God that enables us to see the saving truth as it is in Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit enables God’s light to shine in our hearts (2 Corinthians 4:6).

John also says in his first letter something that parallels what he says in his gospel (John 1:18). “No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God lives in us, and his love is perfected in us” (1John 4:12). What an amazing connection and parallel John makes! Jesus Christ made known the Creator. And we, who are being saved by grace and transformed by the Holy Spirit,

also are to make him known to our world, our sphere of influence, to those around us.”

And we who've been created new creatures in Christ (2 Corinthians 5:17) are re-created for the purposes of God. Paul writes, “For we are what he has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life” (Ephesians 2:10)

The word that translates “what he has made us” (or “workmanship”) is the Greek “*poema*,” which gave rise to the English word, “poem.” In other words, we are God’s poems, his works of art, to convey his truth and beauty. God created and rescued you and me to make us reflect him in this world. What could be more important than for you and me to submit to his creative purposes?

One of our faithful congregants in our international church in Belgium was a good Scotsman, a retired science teacher named Ian Russell. His Polish wife, Zosia, was a good and godly lady who faithfully loved and prayed for her unbelieving husband. Although he professed to be agnostic, Ian was a kind gentleman who enjoyed the company of the people in our church.

But Ian had been led to believe, through the misled and misleading arguments of a few Fundamentalists, that he could not believe in evolution *and* God. Soon Ian and I became friends, and we met for several discussions in his home about science and the Bible. I assured him that it was quite possible to believe in theistic evolution, that God initiated a process of natural selection and has overseen his developing creation over billions of years. Ian came to believe in God and was baptized in our church a few months later. He succumbed to Parkinson’s disease the following year, and as he planned for his funeral, he asked his wife to have sung at his memorial service the chorus, “I Have Decided to Follow Jesus.” Ian believed, not only in God’s creation of the universe, but that God had through Christ the living word, created him a new creation, to reflect his glory in the world.

I pray we will submit to the Creator’s work in us, that he will make something new in you and of me, for his glory.