



SESSION 1

GENESIS

Creation through Water and the Word



OPENING DISCUSSION

✚ Christianity and culture always seem to collide. What else would we expect in a world corrupted by sin and death? The only culture that has ever existed without this collision had only two people, Adam and Eve. They lived in a world free from sin and death. They loved God, they loved each other, and they loved the world that had been created for them. But now, outside of Eden, things are very different. How should Christians engage with a world where everything—including science—is tainted by sin?

The following are various Christian approaches to the collision between culture and Christianity, faith and science. What are the pros and cons of each?

- *A Mennonite/Amish approach: Reject the culture. While on the surface this can seem pious and devout, it fails to use the blessings of this world for the benefit of our neighbor and tends to close us off from the world.*
- *A classic Roman Catholic approach: Humanity has been severed from true knowledge of the divine by sin. But the capacity to pursue truth remains. Science is one way that culture can discover truth. The church can help culture see how science fits with God's Word. While this would seem right, a second glance reveals a fatal flaw. Too easily the approach that see the church as the interpreter of how biblical truth and worldly ideas merge puts too much authority in the hands of mere men, who, no matter how faithful, are sinners. This approach has more often led to a synthesis of science and scripture that too closely ties the authority of God's word to fallible scientific theories, and when a particular scientific theory is proven wrong, it can then also cast doubt upon God's Word. Also more often than not, while Scripture is said to be the highest authority, it usually works out that God's Word is made to fit what Science says.*
- *A Reformed approach: Christianity must transform and redeem culture—always working toward Christianizing science, government and culture. Probably the most attractive of the options so far. It is easy for the church to think that if it comes up with the right argument or approaches the issue in the right way, it can win over people for Jesus. This is the overly apologetic approach of groups like Answers in Genesis. The idea is to use Science to prove the bible right. And if we can do that, then our science can be used to bring people to faith. But this attempts to use reason rather than faith to understand God.*
- *A distinctly Lutheran approach: Lutherans do believe that culture can be changed for the better as each Christian carries out his/her vocation in this world—loving neighbor as self for the sake of Christ. However, we know that such change is only temporary... There can never really be a truly "Christian culture" or "Christian government" or "Christian Science" because in all of these realms there is sin and error. Indeed even in the Apostle's Creed, though we confess faith in the "holy Christian Church" we know that we are only holy because we are forgiven. In Christ, forgiveness takes away our sin and makes us holy in God's eyes, even though we are still very much sinners in our daily living. To put one's hope in the possibility of a Christian government or a Christian culture somehow implies that salvation can be found here on earth through our institutions and actions rather than in Christ, alone. No matter how Christian our science might be, it cannot save the world! But good science can help us love our neighbor better. Consider how advances in technology and medicine have made the world a better place for all people. Rather than forsake science or fight against it, Christians should want to become scientists for these reasons. The truly Lutheran response to all science is one of dialogue. We may rightly criticize some aspects or applications of certain scientific theories—especially if they contradict God's Word—while accepting others as useful. Some theories or ideas might be ultimately false in their universal claims even if helpful in a more limited sense. Darwinian Evolution for example is wrong it's materialistic claim about the origin of life, but in a more limited sense it can help us understand*

some things that are obvious such as how bacteria build resistance to drugs. In medicine, while we can utilize and appreciate the value of medical treatments to help and to heal the body, at the same time, we can be skeptical of approaches that rely only on medicine only and that ignore a more holistic approach that sees the human body as more than just “a bunch of cells” and fails to see the image of God in man.

- ⊗ *We must remember that our faith begins in the middle of the Bible. It may seem counterintuitive, but Christians begin and end with Jesus, NOT the beginning of created time or from the eternal outside of time. Once we stand in the shade of the cross, we can confidently look back to the beginning and glimpse the eternal. From the dying, yet victorious cry from the cross, “It is finished,” we can confidently see Christ working to bring salvation into this world, through the Gospel. It’s because we stand in Christ, who is the “same yesterday, today and forever” (Hebrews 13:8), and therefore do not “lean on our own understanding” (Proverbs 3:5-6)—which includes science—as the source for all final answers. This actually frees the Christian to be both more skeptical and more open-minded toward the world’s ideas than the secularist.*

COLOSSIANS 2:8

See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the world, and not according to Christ.

COLOSSIANS 4:5-6

Walk in wisdom toward outsiders, making the best use of your time. Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person.

Read Genesis 1:1-5

1. Would you agree that in our thoroughly secular culture Genesis 1 is the most challenged and attacked passage in all the Bible? Why or why not?
Certainly, there are places in the bible that are vehemently attacked like Romans 1 being illegal in some countries. But no passage is challenged at its most basic premise as is Genesis 1.
2. The bible states so matter-of-factly, that God was before all things, and as an eternal God, He brought all things into existence. On the other hand, purely atheistic science rejects this basic premise of scripture. Science today has become almost exclusively materialistic (see note). Is this rational? Why do you think the materialism of science appeals so much?

Note: *Materialism is a philosophical worldview which holds matter to be the fundamental substance in nature including mental states and consciousness. An oft-quoted statement by the co-discoverer of the structure of the DNA molecule, Francis Crick (1955), captures the gist of the materialistic approach even in regards to consciousness and thought: “You’, your joys and your sorrows, your memories and your ambitions, your sense of personal identity and free will, are in fact no more than the behavior of a vast assembly of nerve cells and their associated molecules.”*

Philosophical materialism is not the same thing as ethical materialism or materialism used in the colloquial sense of obsession over material things or vices such as greed, lust, miserliness, profit/rent-seeking, etc. Materialism is the understanding that the material world is the ultimate root of what exists. Materialism is looking at humans primarily as products and part of their material conditions and surroundings. Mankind and all of the universe can only be understood from the parts and processes that comprise the whole.

Crick regarded the statement previously quoted as an 'astonishing hypothesis', which as such requires strong empirical corroboration. But the latter has remained elusive. Despite advances in understanding the workings of the brain, the question of how the unexceptional physical-chemical processes occurring within this organ can give rise to conscious mentation remains clothed in mystery. In other words,

science may understand the physical nature of the brain through and through but that doesn't bring them any closer to understanding where consciousness and thought and memory come from. This, of course, does not prevent materialistic thinkers from claiming that this mystery will eventually be solved

My favorite example is the the first law of thermodynamics (the law of conservation of energy) which states that energy cannot be created or destroyed. While this is not an absolute rule... it is interesting that for the most part, much of scientific thought rests on a law that teaches an equivalent to the religious idea of the "eternal." The idea is that a piece of wood can simply be converted by fire into ash and gas. Water can be evaporated or combined with other molecules to create something new. But the hydrogen and oxygen molecules that comprise water are never destroyed. The Big Bang theory claims that all the mass and matter of the universe came together to and caused a bang that set our current universe into motion. But which is more rational? The idea of eternal matter and mass bringing all things into existence or an eternal God bringing forth all things?

Too often we personify science (or on TV it's usually "the Universe" that someone will call out to for help—notice how materialistic that is to think that the Universe is responsible for all things) but science is just a set of tools... we can look at the world around us and use these tools to understand it or manipulate it.

Our culture today has pressured us all to think of our faith and religion as a purely private thing that has no place in the public square, much less in the science. Religion may concern how to get to heaven, but only Science can help us understand how the heavens go.

It provides a way to get around any moral or ethical absolute. It dismisses any absolute authority as in the bible. It does away with God.

Since the time of the Enlightenment, materialism has become the ONLY why that science will understand the universe. Few are educated to appreciate and understand science and how it relates and complements the study of the humanities—the study of human nature and the human condition. How does science intersect with broader moral, legal and theological considerations?

3. While Science and the Christian faith are by no means incompatible, should the Bible be read as a science textbook? Why or why not? No. The bible wouldn't be very useful in even the most Christian science class. This doesn't disparage the usefulness of the bible. But rather demonstrates it's purpose. The purpose of the bible isn't to tell us all the details of how the world around us works. The bible says next to nothing about cellular biology, for example. It's purpose is to establish how God brings salvation into the world through Jesus Christ. However, in telling the truth about salvation, the bible establishes several parameters for how we are to understand the world around us, some of the main parameters' being: (1) There is a God. (2) He created all things as described in Genesis 1. (3) Man was made in God's image as a special part of creation. (4) Sin entered the world through man and sin has corrupted all creation and brought death as a consequence. A Scientist could study cellular biology all day long for the rest of her life within those parameters and never encounter any essential conflict.

The first chapters of the bible are give primarily for this purpose—to the set the parameters. They don't always give us a lot of the detail we'd like to have. It's similar to how parents tell children about where babies come from. When a child asks "where do babies come from" a parent isn't going to go into the detail about sperm and egg and conception and embryonic development. The mom will probably just say something like "you grew inside my tummy and then after 9 months you came out." If the child persists, "How did I get into your tummy." The parent might say, "God put you there" ... and maybe reference psalm 139. All of this would fit perfectly with experience, reality and even

science. What wouldn't fit would be to say that the stork brings babies and drops them at the front door.

Genesis 1's rather terse account of how God brought forth all things in six, twenty-four-hour days may seem incredible, but the vast majority of science can operate just fine within those parameters. It is really only Evolutionary Biology (and Astrophysics in the sense that it studies the origin of the Universe) that is truly incompatible with the bible. In other words, objectively speaking, you could be a scientist in almost any field and never have any essential conflict with your Christian faith.

When it comes to the origin of the universe or of life, any answer that is given is an answer that is based on preconceived assumptions. The origin of the Universe is something that happened in the past. It can't be studied using the scientific method. You could no more prove the how Universe came into being with the scientific method than you could prove that George Washington was the First President of the United States. To understand things of the past we can only rely on the accounts and witness of others.

A Scientist cannot prove that the Universe came about through a big bang. All the Scientist can do is point to data and examples of how the Universe works today and try to read into that data to theorize how the Universe might have started. But that's not how the Scientific Method works. The Scientific Method begins with observation. There is no way to observe the conditions that might have brought about a Big Bang that happened Trillions of years ago. The scientist can look at data from today, but there is no way to know if that Scientist is reading the data correctly. She must assume that the way the universe works today is the same as it worked in the distant past.

The Biblical Christian faith is based on the assumption (given by faith) that the Bible is the Word of God given through man. We can't prove it but we can look at the world and find all kinds of data that is compatible with it.

Theistic evolution/Intelligent Design – problems. A Christian must compromise key tenets of faith to try to reconcile Material Science and Creation. What about Death? Resurrection? The Need for A Savior? Genesis isn't the first place to start... go to Romans 5... Adam is important not to prove a 6 day creation (which is true) but rather that through him has come death.

4. Is Genesis 1 a text that has been given to us to explain how the universe works? Is this our science book?

No... Science is how we can understand the world around us. Genesis is to set the framework for all things. Consider how Genesis is used... Story of how

The issue with Genesis 1 is not so much a literal versus figurative interpretation... it is a issue of the intended purpose of the text. To take Genesis literally then means to take it seriously. Genesis 1 presents itself as a straightforward account of the making of the heavens and earth. The only time we might depart from that is when there are clear contextual cues that lead us to believe that the author is not being serious or literal!

READ GENESIS 1:1-3

5. When we read the creation account in Genesis 1 we typically focus on what it says about us, that is, about the world of creation and our place in it. While these are important truths, they

are not the most important thing that Genesis 1 teaches. What does this text say about God?

We here the old argument that Genesis 1 is just like other creation myths from the ancient world. But contrary to what is said, what Genesis says about how God created the world shows us that the God revealed in the Bible is radically different from the gods worshiped in the Ancient Near East with respect to the relationship between the divine and the material. There is no such thing as creation *ex nihilo* (out of nothing) in any Ancient Near Eastern religion that we know of outside the Bible. For all other religions of the Ancient Near East both the gods and the material world are thought to be derived from a single fundamental but undifferentiated substance which is understood to be eternal.

While the gods of the Ancient Near East were not limited by what we call space and time, they were understood to be a part of the perpetual cycle of the cosmos. They are born, they age, they mate and produce offspring, they may become sick or injured, and they may die.

Finally, no god in the ancient world was truly supreme. None had absolute power. To be sure, polytheistic systems often had a chief god or top god (e.g., Zeus, Odin) who had *more* power than the other gods. But that “top god” did not have *all* power, that is to say, he was not *Almighty*. As a result, they were subject to the same “fates” that shaped the destinies of humankind, and even the most powerful of them could be thwarted by the combined efforts of the other gods.

The biblical creation account, indeed the whole of Scripture, reveals a radically different God. There is only one God. God is not a part of the continuum that includes the material world but brought into being even the unformed substance from which all things were made (the “empty and void” deep of Genesis 1:2). God is not subject to the cycle of the cosmos, but the distinctions that he introduced into the material world brought about time (Gn 1:3–4, resulting in the day as the fundamental natural cycle of time) and space (Gn 1:6–7). Since no part of the material cosmos is a manifestation of his being, he may not be worshiped using any image (Ex 20:4; Dt 4:11–12, 15–19). God and God alone, of all the things worshiped as gods, is all-powerful and can bring about whatever he wills. In this way, the creation account reveals that YHWH stands apart, and YHWH stands alone.

Hebrew word for “In the Beginning” indicates a “absolute beginning,” a “first thing.” Therefore God did not use some pre-existing material or matter. There was no Big Bang. God created *ex nihilo*. The Hebrew verb *bara'* (to create) is used only of God in the Bible. God creates man makes. We are like the middle men. The conjunction “and” between verses 1 & 2 eliminates the possibility of a gap theory... that vast amounts of time could have existed between God’s action in verse 1 and verse 2.

Hebrews 11:3

By faith we understand that the universe was created by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things that are visible.

Colossians 1:15-18

He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. ¹⁶ For by [♫] him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. ¹⁷ And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. ¹⁸ And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent.

6. When and with what activity did DAY 1 of creation begin?

God brings forth the raw material of the heavens and the earth. The Holy Spirit is hovering or “brooding” awaiting the Word. Consider how that connects to the work of the Trinity today.

7. What is significant about the Holy Spirit hovering over the waters?

Holy Spirit using the water and the word in Holy Baptism to recreate.

8. How is the beginning of Genesis in contradiction to the secular scientific theory of the Big Bang which claims that the universe began with a huge explosion? What similarities do some well-meaning, but misguided Christians try to point out between the two?

Gap Theory – gap of time between 1:1 and 1:2

Tohvuabohu – formless and void.

The “let there be light” is God initiating the big bang.

Einstein was against the idea of a Big Bang because of its theological implications.

9. God creates all things “good.” Notice how that one detail will be repeated on each day of the creation week—all that God makes is *good*. What does this say about the nature of God?

Philosophers debate the existence of Evil and how a good God can allow bad things to happen. But it isn't the existence of suffering that requires an explanation. It is the existence of goodness, beauty and love that require an explanation. A world without God cannot explain such things. And the persistence of goodness reminds only of what we have lost.

10. And God creates light. It is perhaps the most ethereal and mysterious thing in all the created order. Science still doesn't really understand it. What does the rest of Scripture have to say about light?

John 1

Revelation 21:23 & 22:5

How can light exist before the creation of light-bearers? How can the earth exist before a solar system in which it is located? These questions seem difficult only if you desire a naturalistic explanation. God is light and therefore God can create light... God can uphold the earth before the gravity of the Sun is made to swing the earth into an orbit.

11. When we consider the words, “in the beginning” we might be tempted to delve into speculative questions, such as, “What was God doing before He created all things?” What is the problem with this question?

Luther answers, “It is folly to argue much about God outside and before time, because this is an effort to understand the Godhead without a covering, or the uncovered divine essence. Because this is impossible, God envelops Himself in His works in certain forms, as today He wraps Himself up in Baptism, in absolution, etc. If you should depart from these, you will get into an area where there is no measure, no space, no time, and into the merest nothing, concerning which, according to the philosopher, there can be no knowledge. Therefore we justly pass over this question and are satisfied with the simple explanation of the phrase ‘in the beginning.’”¹⁴

Genesis 1 does not in any way teach a theology of evolution. Using the Bible alone, one could never deduce that evolution might have been how God brought about life.

Days 1-3 are the days of FORMING. Days 4-6 are the days of FILLING

Although God has not given answers to every speculative question, what has He given us? Where does God reveal Himself to us? How has He revealed Himself to us in Genesis 1?

