

Series: "Questions About God and Life"
"Do the Bible and Modern Science Contradict Each Other?"

In May of 2007 a conservative Christian by the name of Ken Ham opened a 75,000 square foot facility in northern Kentucky called the Creation Museum. Its online site says, "The state-of-the-art Creation Museum allows you to venture through biblical history, stunning exhibits, botanical gardens, planetarium, zoo, zip line adventure course, and much more." It goes on to say, "The Creation Museum shows why God's infallible Word, rather than man's faulty assumptions, is the place to begin if we want to make sense of our world." Its presentations are designed to prove that the creation story in Genesis is literal history, that the earth is 6,000 years old (the "young earth" view), and that the theory of evolution is simply not true. Since opening in 2007, it has hosted more than 4 million visitors. (Maybe some of you have been there).

However, Creation Museum has its critics. Some say it represents pseudo-science. For instance, most scientists tell us that the universe is about 14 billion years old, and the earth is about 4½ billion years old, not 6,000 years old! Quite a difference! Within the mainstream scientific community, the theory of evolution is no longer regarded as just a theory, but fact. And as for Adam and Eve coming on the scene 6,000 years ago, scientists tell us that the first homo sapiens arrived about 195,000 years ago, and the counterpart to modern humans came on the scene about 100,000 years ago.

What I've said highlights the ongoing battle between science and religion. ***Many in the scientific community see religion as hindering scientific exploration.*** They see Christians as close-minded, anti-science, given to a narrow interpretation of the Bible. It's like: "God said it, I believe it, case closed." If you are a Christian, you either believe what the Bible says, or what scientists say. It can't be both.

This anti-science, anti-thinking approach was typified back in the 19th century when William Jennings Bryan, after solemnly stating that he was convinced the whale swallowed Jonah, went on to add that if the Bible had said Jonah swallowed the whale, he would have believed that too! This blind acceptance is alien to the *scientific method*, where you form a hypothesis, test that hypothesis, and verify that hypothesis before allowing for it to be true. So, a lot of scientifically minded people reject Christianity and the Bible because they see them standing in the way of human progress.

Richard Dawkins is a well-respected evolutionary biologist. He's an atheist. Among his numerous books is one called *The God Delusion*. He is quite zealous in his desire to convert the world to his atheistic viewpoint. Part of his reasoning to get rid of God and all religion is that time and again he's been attacked by Christians when he's presented what he believes are indisputable scientific facts. To him, religion and God stand in the way of scientific progress. He once wrote: "Faith is the great cop-out, the great excuse to evade the need to think and evaluate evidence."

On the other hand the scientific community has also done its part to create suspicion and bad blood between science and faith. Many scientists operate out of a closed worldview - where nothing can happen outside this circle. Everything has to be explained, and if it can't be reduced

to cause and effect, it can't *be*! For many who have this naturalistic, mechanistic view of reality, there is no room for a God, no room for the supernatural. A few years ago there was a newspaper report that the science department at Florida State University said that Jesus didn't really walk on water. They said some kind of event happened with the temperature of the water that caused a layer of ice to develop just below the surface of the water. So, for the disciples in the boat it would appear that Jesus was walking on water but He was really walking on ice. One could ask, how come when Peter stepped out of the boat, he sank in the water? Their answer: Jesus knew where the ice was and Peter didn't.

This denial of the miraculous becomes a huge issue when the *resurrection of Jesus* is dismissed as something that couldn't have happened!

The conflict between religion and science is not new. Around 1500 A.D. Polish mathematician Nicolaus Copernicus announced that the earth was not the center of the universe, that the earth moved around the sun. He was denounced by the church, which felt that this would mean humans are no longer at the center of God's attention.

Roughly 100 years later Dutch optician Galileo built a telescope, and as he viewed the planets he was convinced Copernicus was right, that the planets revolve around the sun. Galileo was brought before church authorities in 1633, and was forced to "abjure, curse and detest" his own work. He was put under house arrest the remainder of his life. His publications were banned. Only in 1992 – 359 years later – did Pope John Paul II issue an apology for the church's treatment of Galileo.

In spite of science and religion sometimes being in conflict, I believe ***religion and science, the Bible and science, are not opposed to each other.*** (I mentioned in the first sermon in this series a wonderful book, *The Language of God*, by Francis Collins, a brilliant scientist, and head of the Human Genome Project. Once an atheist, he is now a committed Christian. Much of what I am saying in this message has been influenced by Dr. Collins' book. I highly recommend it).

Let's look at evolution, for example. Can I be a Christian and believe in evolution? Does the Biblical account of the creation of humankind rule out the possibility of evolution? In 1859 Charles Darwin published a book, *The Origin of Species*. His premise in the book is that all living species evolved over a long period of time from a small set of common ancestors, by a process of natural selection. The theory that we humans evolved from lower life forms immediately caused a firestorm. The debate rages on even now – in the creationism vs. evolution saga!

Dr. Collins in his book writes: "No serious biologist today doubts the theory of evolution to explain the marvelous complexity and diversity of life." He maintains that Darwin's theory has proven itself to be accurate time and again. He opts for belief in "theistic evolution", and has his own term for it: BioLogos. He suggests that what *may appear to be* random selection to us is

most likely God behind it all, masterminding the whole process of evolution. *And, at some point in the evolutionary process, the human soul entered into the picture – and man became a living soul.*

Dr. Collins was by no mean the first Christian to accept the evolutionary process as God's way of creating us human! Back in 1996 Pope John Paul II in an address stated: "New findings lead us towards the recognition of evolution as more than a hypothesis." Noted Christian author C.S. Lewis wrote: "For long centuries, God perfected the animal form which was to become the vehicle of humanity and the image of Himself...then, in the fullness of time, God caused to descend upon this organism...a new kind of consciousness..." i.e. a soul was formed."

Can I be a Christian, can I believe the Bible, and still believe in evolution? Yes!

Some of you are perhaps thinking, "But if I believe in evolution, doesn't that mean I have to toss out Genesis 1, 2, and 3 - the story of creation, and of Adam and Eve as the first humans?" ***It depends on how we interpret Genesis 1, 2, and 3.***

The Bible says God created the world in 6 days, then rested on the 7th day. Does this mean creation took place over 6 twenty-four hour days? The Hebrew word for "day" is "yom", which can also mean a span of time. (Like, "Back in my grandpa's day" – which refers not just to 1 day in Grandpa's life, but a span of time). Perhaps we're talking aeons here in Genesis, not 6 twenty-four hour days!

Also, even the creation account(s) in Genesis show a progression from lower life forms to human life in Adam and Eve. And although the creation stories in Genesis were written in a pre-scientific era, it flows right in with what we're learning about creation: the Big Bang theory, God creating something out of nothing (ex nihilo).

What about Adam and Eve? Is the story of Adam and Eve *literal history*? Some Bible students and scholars say "yes". Other students and scholars say, "No, this is not literal history, but epic poetry, inspired theological truth". The Hebrew word for Adam means "man" (humankind). Adam is representative man. *He is us*, in our being made in the image of God, but also in our sin and rebellion of God. So a lot depends *on how we interpret* the Scriptures.

We should keep in mind that the Bible is not a scientific textbook.

If it were a science textbook, it would have been outdated long ago. For instance, all of the writers of Scripture believed the earth was flat, resting on pillars, with water above and water beneath. They were wrong! Does this mean they were stupid? Of course not. They just did not have access to current scientific knowledge.

The writers of Scripture weren't writing to promote science. They were writing to share divinely inspired truth about God and humanity. The Bible is a ***theological document***. Scripture wasn't written primarily to answer the questions ***how and when*** we humans and the world were created.

It was written to answer the questions *who and why*: who created us, and why? In the end, *who created us, and why*, are more profound questions than when and how everything was made. Science can't answer the who and why questions!

The Bible consists of a variety of literary forms: history, drama, poetry, short story, wisdom literature, apocalyptic writings. God conveys His truth through each form. For instance, Psalm 98:8-9 says, "Let the rivers clap their hands, let the mountains sing for joy; let them sing before the Lord." Did you ever see the Susquehanna River clapping its hands? Did you ever go to the Poconos just to hear the mountains sing? My wife Nancy grew up in the Poconos, I lived there for almost 9 years. In all that time, I never heard any of the mountains sing! Jesus once said if our eye causes us to sin, pluck it out. If our right hand leads us into wrongdoing, chop it off. Did Jesus literally mean this? I haven't met any Christians (even conservative ones) who have done this!

So, if the creation story is not interpreted as literal history, does this mean we don't believe in the Bible? No it doesn't. The first chapters of Genesis reveal profound Truth. God is telling us that **God** created everything, that this God **binds Himself to His creation**, that **creation is good**, that **we humans are the crowning glory of creation, made in God's image**.

What about the miracles in the Bible? I've already said that many with a scientific bent have a very biased view regarding miracles and the supernatural. If something can't be explained, or fit into their framework of reality, they dismiss it. I have no problem believing the miracles of the Bible! God can do what He pleases! He's not bound by our closed worldview! C. S. Lewis once wrote: "If we admit God, must we admit miracles? Indeed, indeed, you have no security against it!"

I realize this sermon may be upsetting for some, challenging your interpretation of Scripture. But I grieve that there are people who turn away from Christ and Christianity because they think you can't honor science and still believe the Bible.

Actually, in some instances, the Bible is remarkable for its scientific accuracy. For example, Psalm 102:25-27 says, "Long ago you laid the foundation of the earth, and the heavens are the work of your hands. They will perish, but you endure; they will all wear out like a garment. You change them like clothing, and they pass away; but you are the same, and your years have no end." This corresponds to the second law of thermodynamics. Like a dying flashlight, the universe is running out of useable energy. It will eventually "perish".

Honoring new scientific discoveries doesn't mean we have to get rid of our Bible, or quit reading it, because it's irrelevant. Believing the Bible is God's Word and Truth doesn't mean we have to put our brains on the shelf and discount what scientists are learning about God's glorious creation.

Truth is truth – whether that truth be found in the Scriptures or in the scientist's laboratory.

