

©All Rights Reserved

Evolutionary Creationism 8/12/2012 First Presbyterian of Allegan

Psalm 104 : 1-9 Praise the LORD, my soul. LORD my God, you are very great; you are clothed with splendor and majesty.² The LORD wraps himself in light as with a garment; he stretches out the heavens like a tent and lays the beams of his upper chambers on their waters. He makes the clouds his chariot and rides on the wings of the wind.⁴ He makes winds his messengers,^{4a} flames of fire his servants.⁵ He set the earth on its foundations; it can never be moved.⁶ You covered it with the watery depths as with a garment; the waters stood above the mountains.⁷ But at your rebuke the waters fled, at the sound of your thunder they took to flight;⁸ they flowed over the mountains, they went down into the valleys, to the place you assigned for them.⁹ You set a boundary they cannot cross; never again will they cover the earth.

Genesis 1 In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.² Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.³ And God said, "Let there be light," and there was light.⁴ God saw that the light was good, and he separated the light from the darkness.⁵ God called the light "day," and the darkness he called "night." And there was evening, and there was morning —the first day.⁶ And God said, "Let there be a vault between the waters to separate water from water."⁷ So God made the vault and separated the water under the vault from the water above it. And it was so.⁸ God called the vault "sky." And there was evening, and there was morning —the second day.⁹ And God said, "Let the water under the sky be gathered to one place, and let dry ground appear." And it was so.¹⁰ God called the dry ground "land," and the gathered waters he called "seas." And God saw that it was good.¹¹ Then God said, "Let the land produce vegetation: seed-bearing plants and trees on the land that bear fruit with seed in it, according to their various kinds." And it was so.¹² The land produced vegetation: plants

©All Rights Reserved

bearing seed according to their kinds and trees bearing fruit with seed in it according to their kinds. And God saw that it was good.¹³ And there was evening, and there was morning —the third day.¹⁴ And God said, “Let there be lights in the vault of the sky to separate the day from the night, and let them serve as signs to mark sacred times, and days and years,¹⁵ and let them be lights in the vault of the sky to give light on the earth.” And it was so.¹⁶ God made two great lights—the greater light to govern the day and the lesser light to govern the night. He also made the stars.¹⁷ God set them in the vault of the sky to give light on the earth,¹⁸ to govern the day and the night, and to separate light from darkness. And God saw that it was good.¹⁹ And there was evening, and there was morning —the fourth day.²⁰ And God said, “Let the water teem with living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the vault of the sky.”²¹ So God created the great creatures of the sea and every living thing with which the water teems and that moves about in it, according to their kinds, and every winged bird according to its kind. And God saw that it was good.²² God blessed them and said, “Be fruitful and increase in number and fill the water in the seas, and let the birds increase on the earth.”²³ And there was evening, and there was morning —the fifth day.²⁴ And God said, “Let the land produce living creatures according to their kinds: the livestock, the creatures that move along the ground, and the wild animals, each

©All Rights Reserved

according to its kind.” And it was so.²⁵ God made the wild animals according to their kinds, the livestock according to their kinds, and all the creatures that move along the ground according to their kinds. And God saw that it was good.²⁶ Then God said, “Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals,^[a] and over all the creatures that move along the ground.”²⁷ So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.²⁸ God blessed them and said to them, “Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground.”²⁹ Then God said, “I give you every seed-bearing plant on the face of the whole earth and every tree that has fruit with seed in it. They will be yours for food.³⁰ And to all the beasts of the earth and all the birds in the sky and all the creatures that move along the ground—everything that has the breath of life in it—I give every green plant for food. ” And it was so.³¹ God saw all that he had made, and it was very good. And there was evening, and there was morning —the sixth day.

©All Rights Reserved

Within Christianity and within our world today, there are many issues on which Christians are divided. In our summer sermon series this year, we have covered many of those questions, including: Gender issues, End of life issues, Genetic selection, and Information verifiability. (Copies on Website.) But I would argue that the topic of the sermon today is one of the biggest issues that divides Christians around the world today. -- We engage in public fights about this topic. It effects our curriculum choices and schools. And it, more than any other issue effects how non Christians view Christians. Today our sermon subject is about creation and evolution.

At first glance you may think that there are only two sides to this debate. Christianity vs Science. You may have heard of Christians who advocate the teaching of creationism alongside evolution in public schools and non Christians who are against any form of religious instruction in public education. But actually the theology and the implications of these discussions that Christians are having around these issues are much more complex and complicated than is reported on the news. In the last 50 years, there has been A LOT of change and disagreement and discussion among Christians as to what is being described in our scripture today from Genesis 1. But you may be surprised to find that this discussion is older

©All Rights Reserved

and goes back much further than when Darwin published his 1859 book, *The Origin of Species*.

Way back in the third century after Christ, the church father Origen studied and wrote commentaries on the scriptures. Origen was the most influential scholar of his time, creating a parallel Bible with the text in different languages laid out right next to each other in columns. Origen was the first theologian to change the view of the early church by suggesting that not all passages of the Bible are meant to be literally interpreted but that many passages in the Bible are allegorical. His position on creation was to understand Genesis 1 as a symbolic description instead of an eyewitness literal and historical account of the truth of God's creative power day by day. This was a new way of thinking of Genesis 1. Part of Origen's interpretations comes from the Hebrew word used in the text. In Genesis 1, "Yom" can not only be translated as "day" but also can be used to indicate a generic period of time. Origen's interpretation that Genesis 1 was not literal, but was a symbolic or allegorical description of creation became the generally accepted theological theory.

Even two centuries after Origen, the well known church father St. Augustine accepted Origen's theology about Genesis and wrote a paper

©All Rights Reserved

called, *The Literal Meaning of Genesis*. In this 5th century work, Augustine argues that all scripture has been written to nourish our souls and not as a textbook on other matters. Augustine warns Christians against quoting scriptures to prove a non spiritual point to those who have studied the areas of astronomy and the physical sciences. He warns that by arguing non spiritual points with scripture that Christians will look like idiots to those who take their proofs only from the physical world, and thus a Christian's entire authority on spiritual matters will become suspect and undermined.

Augustine's point here is an extremely important one. For a moment, let's put it into our own practical context. Imagine for moment that you are a master gardener, and are discussing the options to treat a disease in your garden. The last person that you would trust would be an auto mechanic who believes that the instructions in his car's owner's manual are also good instructions as to how to deal with your garden fungus. You would certainly not listen to anything that he said about gardens, and consequently would probably not even trust him enough to go to him with a problem with your car! Augustine argued that the same thing holds true for Genesis 1. It is no use quoting a scripture as an authoritative source to an

©All Rights Reserved

astronomer whose data comes only from watching the sky. He will not be impressed or change his mind from his position in the slightest.

Instead of using the Genesis as a treatise on the physical world; Augustine's point in his 5th century work is that Genesis 1 was not written to clarify and explain to us exactly how the world began, (it is not at all a clear enough explanation for that!) But instead, Genesis 1 is designed to simply celebrate the glory and the majesty of a God who made and affirmed the world as good. This same perspective has been echoed by other theologians throughout the years. Thomas Aquinas wrote about how in Genesis, God was creating the potential for all things to become what they would be **over time**, and John Wesley reminded his readers that the scriptures were written for an ancient context and that what they always point to is not scientific fact, but the divine light of God and those underlying mysteries. ---Even when the fundamentalist movement began in Christianity in 1910 – 1915; (in order to support theological ideas such as the virgin birth and the reality of miracles), there was no rejection of the scientific research that indicated that the earth was much older than 10,000 years, and there was no unified rejection of evolution being a mechanism of God's creation. –The prominent conservative Biblical advocate, Dr. BB

©All Rights Reserved

Warfield from Princeton (the man who famously defended the inerrancy of the Bible), was also an evolutionist, and he saw no contradiction between believing both.

In his essay on why Charles Darwin lost his faith in God, Warfield laments that Darwin got so caught up with his “scalpel and laboratory” that Darwin could no longer believe other forms of truth. Warfield consistently believed that the hand of God was still working in the world through evolution, influencing natural selection and variation, even if Darwin couldn’t see it himself.

But at the same time that BB Warfield was advocating Biblical inerrancy along with evolution at Princeton, within the blossoming 7th Day Adventist movement, the prophetess Ellen White was writing down her visions and she was reimagining the stories from Genesis. Working only from the English translation of the Bible, Ellen envisioned a literal six days of creation and a global flood, instead of a smaller regional Biblical flood that was the accepted explanation of the flood in the year 1900. From her viewpoint, a literal six days of creation was necessary in order to support her conviction that all Christians should worship on Saturday as Sabbath and not on Sunday.

©All Rights Reserved

While Ellen was a prolific writer and a strong leader, her visions were mostly unknown outside of her 7th Day Adventist circles. Her work only started to gain some notoriety when another 7th day Adventist, the self taught geologist George McCready Price began to write about these visions and began to back them up with his new interpretations of the geological record. --Price's life work was advocating against the mainstream thinking of the church of the 1950's, which had no problem envisioning the earth as millions of years old and thinking about the "days" referenced in Genesis to be eons of time within which evolution was occurring. Price, like Ellen White, was committed to convincing people of a 6 literal days of creation theology.

Building on the work of Price, the 6 literal days of creation "Young Earth" movement was officially launched in 1961 by John Whitcomb and Henry Morris. John Whitcomb was a Fundamentalist Bible Teacher, and Morris was a Conservative Christian hydraulic engineer with a Ph.D from the University of Minnesota. Their book, *The Genesis Flood*, began with the twin assumptions of 6 literal days of creation less than 10,000 years ago and that the entire earth's geological record had been completely reorganized by a huge global flood. From that theological starting point,

©All Rights Reserved

Whitcomb and Morris took geologists and other scientist's writings out of context and even accepted some proven hoaxes as truth in order to argue their points.

Among the scientific population, their book about the Genesis Flood was mostly ignored or else it was ridiculed and not taken seriously. However, among the Fundamentalist Christian world and in certain Evangelical circles, *The Genesis Flood* became a best seller and it began to polarize opinions. The authors became popular Christian speakers and the Christian radio and Christian home school movement embraced the book and accepted it's arguments and evidence. It wasn't until 1969 that *The Genesis Flood* was disproven, point by point as "pseudo –science" by the *American Scientific Association*, but by then, the fundamentalist movement had long since broken away from trusting any "secular" institutions and their critiques.

Since 1961, *The Genesis Flood* has continued to inspire a new generation of "Young Earth" fundamentalist Christians, including Ken Ham, who with his 13 million dollar a year *Answers in Genesis* ministry has built the 27 million dollar –"Young Earth" advocating, *Creation Museum* in Petersburg, Kentucky. This museum has already attracted over a million

©All Rights Reserved

visitors and has gathered thousands of scientific critiques over the blatant scientific inaccuracies in its exhibits. A group of over 800 concerned scientists at colleges in Kentucky, Ohio and Indiana have signed a statement advocating that “students who believe in the information from the Creation Museum would be unlikely to succeed in their college science courses as well as would require remedial instruction in science” in order to pass. But while the scientific and the professional organizations are looking on with alarm, the belief in “Young Earth” Creationism (which is very well funded) has become much more wide spread and much more commonplace in America. A 2007 ABC News poll reported that 60 percent of Americans believed that, “*God Created the World in Six Days*”. And a 2007 Newsweek poll discovered that 48 percent of Americans agreed with the statement that, “*God created humans pretty much in the present form at one time within the last 10,000 years or so.*”

It is really hard to imagine, but in the very short time span of the last 50 years, the literal 6 day creation theology --which was conceived of to support the theology of worshipping God on Saturday --has completely eclipsed all of the prior centuries of thinking about Genesis which were much more allegorical and much more harmonious with the theory of

©All Rights Reserved

evolution. What this has done has created that situation where Christianity now is viewed by the average non believer as being adversarial position with the science of evolution.

By doing this, by advocating for faith to be held in spite of scientific reasoning and discovery, Christianity has lost great amounts of credibility in America. It may even be one of the reasons why so many Christian children, once they are sent away to college, fail to return to the church of their childhood as an adult. – By feeling forced to choose between the huge amounts of empirical evidence for the evolution of an old earth or to continue to believe the Bible stories of their childhood faith; faith slips away as something that is inessential and optional.

To sum all of this up, the historical theological interpretation of Genesis as not being a literal description of six days of creation, (the view of both Origen and St. Augustine as well as many other historical theologians), served the church very well for almost 2000 years. The Reformation and the lives of millions of Christians were lived out within this perspective with full and faithful service to Christ. Even once the theory of evolution became well known and accepted, conservative “literal interpretation” theologians such as BB Warfield did not hesitate to accept

©All Rights Reserved

the truths of evolution as a way in which God's creative hand could still be effecting and changing things in our world today.

The 6 literal days of creation "Young Earth" theology came into Fundamentalist Christianity from the 7th Day Adventist tradition, a denomination that defines itself on the importance of worshipping God and resting on the Saturday Sabbath, --the 7th day of the week. This Adventist theology was picked up and expanded on by Whitcomb and Morris in their *Genesis Flood* book, and in only the last 50 years has it become a widely accepted Christian interpretation of Genesis, but one that sets itself up against the findings of the physical sciences and pits faith against scientific discovery.

While my job is not to tell you what to believe today, I would like to invite you to think about the implications of both of these Christian positions. If you believe that the world was created in six literal days less than 10,000 years ago; you are essentially saying that all of the scientific evidence to the contrary has simply been researched and documented by idiots, or that God somehow has planted a multitude of false evidence in order to fool and to test humanity. The first assumption negates the God given intellectual gifts of thousands of researchers and is terribly insulting

©All Rights Reserved

to life work of the people in the scientific community, and the second idea that God is somehow trying to test us or fool us with false geological and genetic evidence gives us a very twisted view of the entity that we declare to be a loving and trustworthy God.

But if your view of Genesis 1 is that this hymn of praise was never meant to be taken as a literal description or as a modern science text, but simply as a beautiful and allegorical celebration of God's wonderful billions of years old creation that we live in; then suddenly the entire science of geology, and the entire theory of evolution can become living testaments to the ongoing work of God's creation within this world. Science can then, once again, function as an amazing descriptor of the "How" questions of God's creation, and faith can continue to answer the "Why" questions about the purpose for all of creation and the meaning of our human existence. ---
May we all prayerfully consider the implications of what we believe about Creation and Evolution and how our belief will affect our witness to the world as disciples of Jesus Christ. Amen.