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CHRISTIAN BELIEFS

Week 3: What Is Creation?
Objectives are to show that:

1. God Created the Universe Out of Nothing
2. Creation is Distinct from God Yet Always Dependent on God
3. God Created the Universe to Show His Glory
4. The Universe God Created Was “Very Good”
5. The Relationship Between Scripture and the Findings of Modern Science

BFC Article 6: Creation

6-1 The triune God, according to His sovereign will, created out of nothing and out of things that He had made, by immediate and mediate action, the worlds and all that is in them. He is the Governor and Upholder of the creation by His wisdom and by the word of His mighty power.

God Created the Entire Universe Out of Nothing

• Biblical Evidence for Creation of the Entire Universe Out of Nothing

The Bible clearly requires us to believe that God created the universe out of nothing. (Sometimes the Latin phrase ex nihilo “out of nothing” is used; it is then said that the Bible teaches creation ex nihilo.) This means that before God began to create the universe, nothing else existed except God himself.

“In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.” (Gen 1:1 ESV)

“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.” (Heb 11:3 ESV)

Biblical references: Ps 33:6,9, 90:2, Jn 1:3, Acts 4:24, 14:15, 17:24-25, Rom 4:17, Col 1:16, Rev 4:11, 10:6

Ps 90:2 - “Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever you had formed th earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting you are God.”

Acts 4:24 - “the sovereign Lord who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and everything in them.”

Rev 4:11 - “You are worthy our Lord and God to receive glory and honor and power for you created all things, and by your will they existed and were created.”

Because God created the entire universe out of nothing there is no matter in the universe that is eternal.

• The Creation of the Spiritual Universe

This creation of the entire universe includes the creation of an unseen, spiritual realm of existence: God created the angels and other kinds of heavenly beings as well as animals and man. (rev 10:6, Acts 4:24, Ps 103:21, 148:2-5)

“You are the LORD, you alone. You have made heaven, the heaven of heavens, with all their host, the earth and all that is on it, the seas and all that is in them; and you preserve all of them; and the host of heaven worships you.” (Neh 9:6 ESV)

“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.” (Col 1:16 ESV)
• The Direct Creation of **Man**: Adam and Eve

The Bible also teaches that God created Adam and Eve in a special, personal way.

“Then the LORD God **formed the man of dust from the ground** and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living creature.” (Gen 2:7 ESV)

“So the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and while he slept took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh. And the rib that the LORD God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man.” (Gen 2:21-22 ESV)

It would be difficult to accept the complete truthfulness of Scripture and still hold that human beings were the result of a long evolutionary process. God “formed man out of the dust from the ground....not over a period of millions of years - at the random development into some complex organism.

And the woman was not some product of evolution from some other human being—but directly formed out of man.

We are created “in God’s image,” the pinnacle of God’s creation, more like God than any other creature, appointed to rule over the rest of creation.

• The Creation of Time

  o One other aspect of God’s creation is the creation of time (the succession of moments one after another)

  o God’s existence “before” the creation of the world, we should not think of God as existing in an unending extension of time. Rather, God’s eternity means that he has a different kind of existence, an existence without the passage of time. (Job 36:26, Ps 90:2-4, Jn 8:58, 2 Pet 3:8, Rev 1:8)

  o The fact that God created time reminds us of his lordship over it and our obligation to use it for his glory.

• The Work of the Son and of the Holy Spirit in Creation

  o God the Father was the primary agent in initiating the act of creation. But the Son and the Holy Spirit were also active.

    ▪ The Son is often described as the one “through” whom creation came about.

    “**All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. 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. But in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world.**” (John 1:3; Col 1:16; Heb 1:2 ESV)

    **Note:** These passages give a consistent picture of the Son as the active agent carrying out the plans and directions of the Father.
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- The Holy Spirit was also at work in creation. He is generally pictured as completing, filling, and giving life to God’s creation.

“The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters. The Spirit of God has made me, and the breath of the Almighty gives me life.” (Gen 1:2; Job 33:4 ESV)

Note: These passages are indicating a preserving, sustaining, governing function of the Holy Spirit.

Creation Is Distinct From God Yet Always Dependent On God

- Transcendent and Immanent

  - Transcendent: God is far “above” the creation in the sense that he is greater than the creation and he is independent of it.

  - Immanent: The technical term used to speak of God’s involvement in creation.

4 Worldly Philosophies:

1) Materialism: The most common philosophy of unbelievers today, which denies the existence of God altogether. Materialism would say that the material universe is all there is.

2) Pantheism: *Pan* means “all.” Pantheism is the idea that everything, the whole universe is God, or is part of God. Pantheism denies several essential aspects of God’s character. If the whole universe is God, then God has no distinct personality. God is no longer unchanging, because as the universe changes, God also changes. Moreover, God is no longer holy, because the evil in the universe is also part of God. Another difficulty is that ultimately most pantheistic systems (such as Buddhism and many other eastern religions) end up denying the importance of individual human personalities: since everything is God, the goal of an individual should be to blend in with the universe and become more and more united with it, thus losing his or her individual distinctiveness.

3) Dualism: Dualism is the idea that both God and the material universe have eternally existed side by side. Thus there are two ultimate forces in the universe, God and matter. The problem with dualism is that it indicates an eternal conflict between God and the evil aspects of the material universe. Will God ultimately triumph over evil in the universe? We cannot be sure, because both God and evil have apparently always existed side by side. This philosophy would deny both God’s ultimate lordship over creation and also that creation came about because of God’s will, that it is to be used solely for his purposes, and that it is to glorify him.

4) Deism: Deism holds that God is not now directly involved in the creation. Deism generally holds that God created the universe and is far greater than the universe (God is “transcendent”). Some deists also agree that God has moral standards and will ultimately hold people accountable on a day of judgment. But they deny God’s present involvement in the world, thus leaving no place for his immanence in the created order. Rather, God is
viewed as a divine clock maker who wound up the “clock” of creation at the beginning but then left it to run on its own.

God Created the Universe to Show His Glory

- Not only human beings did God created for this purpose, but also the entire creation is intended to show God’s glory. (Is 43:7)
  “The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork. Day to day pours out speech, and night to night reveals knowledge.” (Psa 19:1-2 ESV)
  “Worthy are you, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they existed and were created.” (Rev 4:11 ESV)
- God did not need to create because He is independent, but rather acted so based on His free will to demonstrate his excellence.

The Universe God Created Was “Very Good”

- This point follows from the previous point. If God created the universe to show his glory, then we would expect that the universe would fulfill the purpose for which he created it.
  “And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.” (Gen 1:31 ESV)
- Even though there is now sin in the world, the material creation is still good in God’s sight and should be seen as “good” by us as well. This knowledge will free of us from a false asceticism that sees the use and enjoyment of the material creation as wrong.
  “Now the Spirit expressly says that in later times some will depart from the faith by devoting themselves to deceitful spirits and teachings of demons, through the insincerity of liars whose consciences are seared, who forbid marriage and require abstinence from foods that God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth. For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving, for it is made holy by the word of God and prayer.” (1 Tim 4:1-5 ESV)

The Relationship Between Scripture and the Findings of Modern Science

- When all the facts are rightly understood, there will be “No Final Conflict” between Scripture and natural science.
  - There is a possibility that God created a “grown-up” universe.
  - There is a possibility of a break between Gen 1:1 & 1:2 or between 1:2 & 1:3.
  - There is a possibility of a long day in Genesis 1.
  - There is a possibility that the flood affected the geological data.
  - The use of the word “kinds” in Genesis 1 may be quite broad.
  - There is a possibility of the death of animals before the fall.
  - Where the Hebrew word bara (to create), is not used there is the possibility of sequence from previously existing things.
• Some Theories About Creation Seem Clearly Inconsistent With the Teachings of Scripture
  
  o Secular Theories: A “secular” theory is any theory of the origin of the universe that does not see an infinite-personal God as responsible for creating the universe by intelligent design. (e.g. Big Bang Theory)
  
  o Theistic Evolution: some Christians have proposed that living organisms came about by the process of evolution that Darwin proposed, but that God guided that process so that the result was just what he wanted it to be.

6 Arguments against Theistic Evolution:

1) The clear teaching of Scripture that there is purposefulness in God’s work of creation seems incompatible with the randomness demanded by evolutionary theory.

2) Scripture pictures God’s creative word as bringing immediate response. (Gen 1:11, Ps 33:6,9)

3) When Scripture tells us that God made plants and animals to reproduce “according to their kinds” it suggests that God created many different types of plants and animals and that though there would be some differentiation among them, nonetheless there would be some narrow limits to the kind of change that could come about through genetic mutations.

4) God’s present active role in creating or forming every living thing that now comes into being is hard to reconcile with the distant “hands off” kind of oversight of evolution that is proposed by theistic evolution. (Ps 139:13, Ps 104:14, Mt 6:30

5) The special creation of Adam, and Eve from him, is a strong reason to break with theistic evolution.

6) According to Louis Berkhof “theistic evolution is really a child of embarrassment, which calls God in at periodic intervals to help nature over the chasms that yawn at her feet. It is neither the biblical doctrine of creation, nor a consistent theory of evolution.”

  o Notes on the Darwinian Theory of Evolution:

  ▪ “micro-evolution”—small developments within one species, so that we see flies or mosquitoes becoming immune to insecticides, or human beings growing taller, or different colors and varieties of roses being developed. Innumerable examples of such “micro-evolution” are evident today, and no one denies that they exist.

  ▪ “macro-evolution”—that is, the “general theory of evolution” or the view that “nonliving substance gave rise to the first living material, which subsequently reproduced and diversified to produce all extinct and extant organisms.”

6 Current Challenges to Macro-Evolution:
1) After more than one hundred years of experimental breeding of various kinds of animals and plants, the amount of variation that can be produced (even with intentional, not random, breeding) is extremely limited, due to the limited range of genetic variation in each type of living thing.

2) In current evolutionary arguments, the idea of “survival of the fittest” (or “natural selection”) is popularly thought to mean that those animals whose different characteristics give them a comparative advantage will survive, and others will die out. But in actual practice almost any characteristic can be argued to be either an advantage or a disadvantage.

3) The vast and complex mutations required to produce complex organs such as an eye or a bird’s wing (or hundreds of other organs) could not have occurred in tiny mutations accumulating over thousands of generations, because the individual parts of the organ are useless (and give no “advantage”) unless the entire organ is functioning. But the mathematical probability of such random mutations happening together in one generation is effectively zero.

4) The fossil record was Darwin’s greatest problem in 1859, and it has simply become a greater problem since then. In Darwin’s time, hundreds of fossils were available showing the existence of many distinct kinds of animals and plants in the distant past. But Darwin was unable to find any fossils from “intermediate types” to fill in the gaps between distinct kinds of animals.

5) The molecular structures of living organisms do show relationships, but Darwinists simply assume that relationships imply common ancestry, a claim that certainly has not been proven. Moreover, there are amazing molecular differences between living things, and no satisfactory explanation for the origin of those differences has been given.

6) Probably the greatest difficulty of all for evolutionary theory is explaining how any life could have begun in the first place. The spontaneous generation of even the simplest living organism capable of independent life (the prokaryote bacterial cell) from inorganic materials on the earth could not happen by random mixing of chemicals: it requires intelligent design and craftsmanship so complex that no advanced scientific laboratory in the world has been able to do it.

3 Destructive Influences of Evolutionary Theory in Modern Thought:

1) If in fact life was not created by God, and if human beings in particular are not created by God or responsible to him, but are simply the result of random occurrences in the universe, then of what significance is human life?

2) If there is no God who created us (or at least if we cannot know anything about him with certainty), then there is no supreme Judge to hold us morally accountable.

3) If the inevitable processes of natural selection continue to bring about improvement in life forms on earth through the survival of the fittest, then why should we hinder this process by caring for those who are weak or less able to defend themselves? Should we not rather allow them to die without reproducing so that we might move toward a new,
higher form of humanity, even a “master race”? In fact, Marx, Nietzsche, and Hitler all justified war on these grounds.

- **The Theory of a “Gap” Between Genesis 1:1 and 1:2:**

Some evangelicals have proposed that there is a gap of millions of years between Genesis 1:1 (“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth”) and Genesis 1:2 (“The earth was without form and void, and darkness was upon the face of the deep”).

According to this theory, God made an earlier creation, but there was eventually a rebellion against God (probably in connection with Satan’s own rebellion), and God judged the earth so that “it became without form and void” (an alternative, but doubtful, translation proposed for Gen. 1:2). What we read of in Genesis 1:3–2:3 is really the second creation of God, in six literal twenty-four-hour days, which occurred only recently (perhaps 10,000 to 20,000 years ago). The ancient fossils found on the earth, many of which are said to be millions of years old, stem from the first creation (4,500,000,000 years ago), which is mentioned only in Genesis 1:1.

**Arguments against the Gap Theory**

1) There is no verse in Scripture that explicitly talks about an earlier creation.

2) In Gen 1:31 when God finished his work of creation, we read, “it was very good.” But according to the Gap Theory, God would be looking at an earth full of the results of rebellion, conflict and terrible divine judgment.

3) In a later description of God’s work of creation found in the Ten Commandments we read, ‘for in six days the Lord made heaven and earth…and all that is in them…” (Ex 20:11). It is implied that everything was made in the six days of creation. But Gap Theory advocates would have to say that there are many things in the earth (such as fossil remains, etc.) and in the heavens (stars) that God did not make in the six days specified in Ex 20:11.

4) The theory must assume that all of the fossils of animals from millions of years ago that resemble very closely animals from today indicate that God’s first creation of the animal and plant kingdom resulted in a failure.

**Questions for Review and Application**

1. Are there ways in which you could be more thankful to God for the excellence of his creation? Look around you and give some examples of the goodness of the creation that God has allowed you to enjoy. Are there ways in which you could be a better steward of parts of God’s creation of which he has entrusted to your care?

2. Might the goodness of all that God created encourage you to try to enjoy different kinds of foods than those you normally prefer? Can children be taught to thank God for variety
in the things God has given us to eat? Does the doctrine of creation provide an answer to some strict animal rights advocates who say we should not eat steak or chicken or other meat, or wear clothing made from animal skins, since we are simply another form of animal ourselves? (See Gen. 3:21.)

3. In order to understand something of the despair felt by contemporary non-Christians, just try to imagine for a moment that you believe that there is no God and that you are just a product of matter plus time plus chance, the spontaneous result of random variation in organisms over millions of years. How would you feel differently about yourself? About other people? About the future? About right and wrong?

4. Why do we feel joy when we are able to “subdue” even a part of the earth and make it useful for serving us—whether it be in growing vegetables, developing a better kind of plastic or metal, or using wool to knit a piece of clothing? Should we feel joy at the accomplishment of these and other tasks? What other attitudes of heart should we feel as we do them?

5. When you think about the immensity of the stars, and that God put them in place to show us his power and glory, how does it make you feel about your place in the universe? Is this different from the way a non-Christian would feel?

6. Before reading this chapter, what did you think about the theory of evolution? How has your view changed, if at all?

7. What are some things that Christians can learn about theological discussion in general from observing the current controversy over the age of the earth? What significance do you see in this controversy for your own Christian faith?