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Genesis 1 and 2  
2<sup>nd</sup> in a series on “Rescuing the Bible from Fundamentalism”

### **“Creation and Evolution: Incompatible or Not?”**

Henry’s been attending K-Life this past year. For those of you not familiar with KLife, it’s a community-wide, interdenominational Christian ministry of discipleship and fellowship for youth and their families. KLIFE is a little more right of center than I care for in a youth group, but I figure if I’m going to be inclusive and all, my inclusivity needs to extend to all. So Henry goes, he likes it, they have fun, and so far it’s been fine. He knows that not everyone there would agree that his Mom should preach the gospel and serve as a pastor, but Henry knows better than to agree with them. No job for me would mean no food for him, and seeing as he’s a 17 year old growing boy, food trumps theology. Plus, he’s smarter than that.

A couple months ago I got a text from Henry. It read like this:

Henry: Small group: I told them we don’t have to take everything in the bible literally and some things we know probably didn’t happen exactly the way the bible says but that there can still be a lesson behind it. The response is how do we know what’s real and what’s not in the bible then.

Me: I guess I would wonder do they mean “real” as in factually true? Because there’s no way to know if something is factually true. That is where the faith part comes into play.

Henry: He said if you start to believe “okay well that didn’t happen” then you start to believe everything like okay well that didn’t happen as well. So then what did happen and what did not. He believes that the bible is the word of god and everything there is true.

Me: I believe the bible is the Word of God, and I don’t pick and choose what to believe in the Bible. I believe it’s all authoritative, but not literal. I look at when it was written, for whom, what the context was, etc. For

example the Bible condones slavery – a common practice then. But we don't. We now know it's wrong.

Henry: Idk how to tell him that exactly but "God doesn't explain things he declares things. He doesn't explain who he is. He declares who he is."

Me: I don't know what to say to that either. You're engaged in a good debate. It's good to have the dialogue. And important to form your own beliefs. Questions are good – they help you grow in your faith.

The texts ended there. I don't know if Henry passed that message along to the small group leader or not, and if he did I don't know what the small group leader said. But based on the little bit Henry shared with me, I'm guessing the questioning of scripture would not have sat well with him.

But I was brought up to believe asking questions is good and necessary. It was a hallmark of my Presbyterian confirmation class that I've never forgotten and will never let go (even 30 years later).

Sometimes we forget that a lot of the Bible was written to respond to peoples' questions, and while these questions sometimes came from outside the faith, more often than not they came from within. Why hasn't Jesus returned yet? Why are these people persecuting us? How are we all supposed to get along? Do I really need to believe that or not? What does this beautiful created world say about God, and what does that have to do with me?

People of faith have always asked questions. Questions are good, friends. Asking them is how we grow in our faith. They're not a sign of weakness.

But still, we get stumped on how to respond, especially when the questioner comes at us knowing what the right answer is. Yet sometimes the best answer you can give is the honest one, like I did with Henry when I said "I don't know what to say to that." Saying you don't know isn't a sign of weakness; it's a sign of strength. It shows you're willing to wrestle with uncertainty.

Because it's often the people who don't want to wrestle with uncertainty who "have" all the answers. On the one side you have the Christian fundamentalists who know all the answers, summed up with the bumper sticker theology of "God said it, I believe it, and that settles it", and on the other side you have the new

atheists who know with great certainty what the answers are not. Both camps are fundamentalists in their own ways because they think in black and white terms and ask black and white questions, **but** the questions they ask aren't the right questions. Faith rarely boils down to simple yes or no questions, and as I said last week, the Bible isn't as black and white as some would like to believe.

For example, Richard Dawkins, one of the new atheists, believes (much like the religious fundamentalist) that the Bible is a black and white book with black and white answers. He asks:

*Did Jesus have a human father, or was his mother a virgin at the time of his birth? Whether or not there is enough surviving evidence to decide it, this is still a strictly scientific question with a definite answer in principle: yes or no. Did Jesus raise Lazarus from the dead? Did he himself come alive again, three days after being crucified? There is an answer to every such question, whether or not we can discover it in practice, and it is a strictly scientific answer. (Dawkins, The God Delusion, page 59)*

The problem is that the Bible is not a science book. It's not a science book any more than it's a history book. It's a theology book. Say it with me now: it's a theology book. It's a book about God; it's a book about us and all the rest of creation, too; and the relationship we have with another.

This is why any talk of the story of creation being incompatible with evolution is, how do I put this, not the right argument to have. There's no way the writers of the creation stories (there are two, not just 1) could have foreseen the advances science would make, just like it's probably impossible for us to see the advances that will be made 3000 years from now.

But the writers of Genesis 1 and 2 (notice I said writers, not writer), weren't trying to tell the story of how the world was created, they were writing to bring comfort to people living in exile (Genesis 1) and a little bit of humility to people living at the height of their power and prestige (Genesis 2).

Genesis 1, the account of creation the creationists love to talk about as "Intelligent Design", was written during the period of the Babylonian exile, so we're talking 6<sup>th</sup> century BCE. It was, as someone commented, written for our fragile days, for our days when there's no order and nothing makes sense, and

you're living in in a metaphorical or literal prison cell and being held captive by people who worship other gods and keep a different calendar and you're wondering where is God and why is this happening to you and please God if you're there just give me a sign, just give me some hope. And your hope comes when you look out your prison cell window and see a sliver of light, daylight springing from the darkness of night – and you think maybe, just maybe there's reason to hope. If God can bring something out of nothing, something out of a deep formless void, maybe can do something for me, too. That's the person Genesis 1 was written for; not the parent who's soliciting their local public school board to teach creationism, because this isn't a science book, it's a theology book.

Genesis 2, the lesser known creation story, was written for our strong days. It was written earlier than Genesis 1, when Israel was a united monarchy. Think King David. Israel is strong and able to conquer her foes. They're at the height of their success. Everything is good. Very good. So good, in fact, the people may begin to think they don't really have need of God. But then along this comes story to remind us that we're formed from the dust of the ground. Dirt, really. And we know what we all think of dirt. It's all rather humbling, actually, to be reminded that we came from dirt and we'll go back to dirt. But sometimes we need the reminder, especially when we think we don't. That's who Genesis 2 was written for, not the person who's trying to prove or disprove the existence of God.

The theologian Karl Barth once wrote: The doctrine of creation . . . is an article of faith" because we believe God is the creator, and we the scriptures bear witness to God's purposes revealed in creation. This is different than the scientist, whose primary interest is the mechanics of creation . . . how does it work? The primary interest of the scriptures is the purpose of creation . . . what is it for?

We don't read Genesis to tell us how the world was created, any more than we read a science textbook to tell us about God. We read Genesis like we do all of scripture, to try and find meaning in it for us for today. What does this story have to tell me today, and what does it say about God? When I read the story of creation, either of them really, or more importantly when I'm outside with creation, maybe looking to see if my beans sprouted, or listening to frogs while camping at Mound Ridge, or seeing my dog greet me at the door like I'm the best

person who ever walked the face of the earth, I don't think about the science behind it all, even though I know the science is there. I can't help but marvel at the beauty of creation, and wonder why God would love me so much, or love you so much, as to create all of this for us. And when I'm at the zoo, and see the giraffes, even though I know there's science behind them, I can't help but have a sneaking suspicion that someone must have a really good sense of humor, because giraffes are just the craziest things ever.

Friends, the question isn't "Can I believe in both God as Creator and in evolution?" the question is "How can you not?"

Albert Einstein once said, "Science without religion is lame. Religion without science is blind."

Or Terry Eagleton, a British scholar in a lecture at Yale, wrote "God is not a mega manufacturer . . . not an engineer, but an artist who made the world simply for the love and delight of it."

To say I believe in God the Creator is to make an affirmation of faith, not a denial of science. Because the Bible isn't a science book, it's a theology book, and the creation stories assure us in our strongest days that we will return to God, and in our weakest days affirms that God is with us even in the tiniest sliver of light. And I don't know about you, but I need to hear that message, and for me that's a better message than one that reduces God to an architect of intelligent design, or a deity that left the world the minute it was created. After all, God is always much bigger than any mind can imagine God to be, no matter how big or small, open or closed the mind is.

To quote Psalm 8: When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars that you have established; what are human beings that you are mindful of them, mortals that you care for them?"

Amen.