

HEBREWS 11:3. (EHV)

By faith we know that the universe was created by God's word, so that what is seen did not come from visible things.

The very first words of Scripture are: "In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth." The first two chapters of Scripture detail that and the rest of God's creating activity.

So why is this sermon on creation and preservation number 14 in our series on Christian doctrine, when it is on page number 1 in the Bible?

The answer is here in Hebrews 11:3: "*By faith* we know that the universe was created by God's word." By "faith" the writer means saving faith, faith in Christ. Without knowledge of Christ, the account of creation makes no sense. As Paul said elsewhere, "the person without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to that person, and such a person cannot understand those things because they are discerned spiritually" (1 Corinthians 2:14). We first need to know about our sin and God's grace in Christ before we can know, believe, and understand how God created and preserves the world.

But we have now covered both mankind's sin and God's grace. I pray that we do know and believe in Christ, so we are also ready to know, believe, and understand how God created and preserves the world. Let's consult God's word in order to do so.

Genesis 1 and 2 tell us that God created the universe out of nothing in six consecutive days of ordinary length, by the power of his word. On Day 1 he created time, his heavenly dwelling where he wanted all humans to eventually dwell with him, the water and raw materials of the earth, light, which he simply spoke into existence, and the division of the day into a period of darkness and a period of light.

On Day 2 he separated the water into waters above and waters below, with the sky or heavens in between.

On Day 3 he organized the waters below the sky into seas and had dry ground appear. He also had the land produce seed-bearing plants and vegetation, according to their kinds.

On Day 4 he created the sun, moon, stars, and all the heavenly bodies to serve as signs, to regulate the time, and to give light on the earth at various times.

On Day 5 he created the sea creatures and winged creatures, according to their kinds, and commanded them to be fruitful and multiply.

On Day 6 he created the land creatures, according to their kinds, and then he created the crown of his creation—mankind. He formed Adam from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, so that he became a living being. After Adam had named all the animals, God caused him to fall into a deep sleep and he took a rib from Adam and used it to build Eve from the dust of the ground. He also commanded them to be fruitful and multiply.

And on Day 7 God rested from all the work of creating, with which he was now finished.

Of course that perfect creation has changed tremendously since God made it. The devil, a fallen angel, tempted Adam and Eve to sin. They let themselves succumb to his temptation and fell into sin, and with sin came corruption, suffering, and death. Every human conceived by a human father and mother since the fall into sin is conceived and born sinful. In fact, well over 4,000 years ago, humans had so corrupted their ways that God punished and destroyed all of

them except for one family, with a worldwide flood. And even though afterward God promised never again to destroy the world with a flood like that, humans have continued their corruption and God's creation has continued to decay.

We still get to enjoy many of the beauties of God's creation, but it's definitely not like it was in the Garden of Eden. Yes, it's possible to stand beside a sparkling stream running through the majestic mountains and be away from it all, but even then the sin in your own heart has accompanied you. Plus, in the back of your mind, you still know there's a whole wicked world out there waiting for you when you return home.

So if the world has changed so much and we have become corrupt, then how do we know and understand what God says about creation? And why do we believe it and care about it?

Of course, many don't understand it. Many think the account is as foolish as a book of nursery rhymes. Some people think that the Bible perhaps preserves a kernel of truth but they mostly trust the theories of the world's scholars. So they will argue that the days in the creation account were not days of ordinary length, but perhaps each day represents hundreds, thousands, or millions of years. But the creation account clearly defines what a day was—evening and morning, an ordinary day.

Others will argue that these were not consecutive days, but perhaps there were hundreds, thousands, or millions of years between each day. But the creation account presents the days consecutively, and in our First Lesson earlier we heard God tell the Israelites how they should spend their week based on how he himself spent the very first week.

But the biggest argument against the creation account of course comes from those who discount it altogether. Those people typically hold to the theory of evolution. A commonly accepted version of the theory of evolution goes like this: At the beginning of time, about 13.7 billion years ago, a very small point rapidly expanded, producing time, space, and energy. This rapid expansion is called "The Big Bang." Over thousands of years the resulting energy cooled, becoming the lightest element of matter, hydrogen. Some of that hydrogen gas was pulled into balls, under its own gravity, to form stars. Some of these first generation stars were large enough to produce heavier elements like iron, which they scattered across the universe when they imploded in supernovas. The matter these imploding stars dispersed pulled together to form new stars, and planets formed around them from the remaining matter. Our planet, earth, was formed 4.5 billion years ago. Living things came about naturally from non-living chemicals. The first one-celled life forms gradually changed into all the various plants and animals. Through a process of scarcity of resources, competition, and suffering and death, driven by mutations, less complex animals gradually evolved into new, more complex kinds of animals. Ape-like creatures gradually evolved into humans through this same process of competition, suffering, and death, driven by mutations. God is not in the picture.

By the way, there are some Christians who hold to what is called theistic evolution. They think that God could have used evolution to bring the present world into being. But they fail to come to terms not only with the fact that the story of evolution does not match the story of creation, but also the fact that accepting evolution means contradiction other fundamental teachings of Scripture. To cite just one example, in evolution, scarcity, competition, suffering, and death are not the result of sin. They predate humans and thus predate sin. And they are good

things that bring about advancement. Evolution and the Bible's account of creation simply are not compatible.

Now there are not just biblical arguments, but also a number of rational arguments that one can make against evolution. But let's start with an argument we should not make. One of the most common arguments against evolution that creationists like to make is that scientists put so much stock in evolution, even though it is *only* a theory. This is not a good argument, because in science, *theory* is an end stage. If additional evidence is found that confirms a theory, a theory does not eventually become fact; it will always remain a theory. It is basically the same as a scientific "law." For instance, gravity is a theory or scientific law. The sun at the center of our solar system is a theory. Germs are a theory. We do not dispute those. Scientific theories and laws are *never* proven with absolute certainty. Any one of them may be discarded and replaced tomorrow on the basis of new evidence, and of course that has happened many times over the course of human history.

But there are legitimate ways to get people to question the theory of evolution. For instance, it is a rule of science that all matter must come from pre-existing matter. So where did that very small point rapidly expanding and resulting in the Big Bang come from? The theory of evolution has no answer to that question. Also, if everything has been gradually evolving over billions of years, then it is highly unlikely that we would be able to precisely classify all life into different kinds. We would rather expect one long continuum ranging from less complex life to more complex life, with every possible combination and variation in between. At the very least, we would expect tons of evidence for these in-between life forms. But there is not.

Perhaps the safest argument is simply to note that the theory of evolution assumes purely natural development, with no intervention from an outside agent, such as God. Presuppositions affect conclusions. For instance, if you discover a star that is 28 billion light years away from earth, your presuppositions matter. If you assume everything came about naturally, you would assume that that star is at least 28 billion years old, and that the universe is therefore at least 28 billion years old. But if you're a Christian who assumes the existence of God and his intervention at creation, you will remember that his word says that he created light before he created the light-bearers like the stars. So he could have created a star that far away and then simply applied the light that already existed to that star, so that its light was already hitting the earth immediately. Presuppositions affect conclusions.

However, even though we can cite these rational arguments, we ultimately can't scientifically prove the creation account in the Bible either.

So how do we know and understand what God says about creation? And why do we believe it and care about it? The writer to the Hebrews says, "*By faith* we know that the universe was created by God's word, so that what is seen did not come from visible things." We believe that God sent his Son to save us from our sinful corruption and from death. We believe that God's Son paid the full price for our corruption and conquered death for us. We believe that God's Son proved this by rising from the dead on the third day and appearing to hundreds of witnesses. We believe that God's Son is in heaven right now preparing a place for us. And we believe that a God who has loved us like this and a God who conquered death is more trustworthy than any mortal scientist and would not lie to us.

If Bill Nye the Science Guy would die for my sins and rise from the dead, then I would believe in the theory of evolution. But he has not and he cannot. Only Christ could and did, and he does not teach me the theory of evolution, but the account of creation inspired by the Holy Spirit. So that is what you and I believe.

We should also note that it isn't as though God the Father is no longer active today, since he's all done creating. No, he still sustains the processes he himself put in place at creation. If he withdrew his hand at any time, the universe would fall apart. We heard Paul say he gives all people life and breath and everything else. The psalms say he makes grass grow for the cattle and plants for man to cultivate, bringing forth food from the earth (104:14). We might be tempted to attribute those things to the sun and the rain, but who created the sun and controls its light and heat? Who regulates the water cycle? God does. The psalms also say that he reigns over the nations (47:8). Paul tells us in Romans all things are working together for those who love God, who have been called according to his purpose (8:28).

One of the awesome ways God guards, protects, and rules us is through the powerful beings we know as angels. We do not know when exactly in the first six days God created the angels, but we know that they are powerful spirit beings who are sent to serve those who will inherit salvation, namely us believers (Hebrews 1:14). The angels collectively are often called "armies" because of their strength and because they are constantly battling evil (e.g. 2 Kings 6:17). There are at least three classes of angels—archangel; cherubim, which surround God's throne in heaven and which are described as having animal-like features;¹ and seraphim, which have six wings and seem to have a burning or fiery appearance—and there may be many more. What a comfort to know that not only is Jesus always with us, but that his powerful, holy angels are also watching over us!

What is our response to all of this? David wrote in Psalm 8, "When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, what is man that you are mindful of him, the son of man that you care for him? You made him a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned him with glory and honor." Our response is one of awe and wonder that the God of all the universe should send his Son for us and for our salvation from sin and death. Our response is to thank and praise him for all the beauties we see and enjoy. Our response is to realize that nothing is really ours, but everything is the Lord's and should be used to his glory. Our response is to not worry but to remain calm and to trust in his loving care and protection. In short, our response is to mean it when we confess, "I believe in God the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth." Amen.

¹ The new blue Advent paraments we are in the process of ordering will, God willing, feature two cherubim with animal-like features on each side of the altar superfrontal. These four cherubim will remind us, among other things, of God's presence in the Lord's Supper.