

“WHERE FAITH AND SCIENCE MEET (#3): ADAM AND APES”

(Genesis 1:20-31)

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[PROPS NEEDED: (#1) “Mad Scientist” clip; (#2) Box of “Scrabble” game letters]

[East Cobb U.M.C.; 1-24-10]

–I–

1. [Traditional Service ONLY:] Read Text: Genesis 1:20-31 and Pray.
2. [VIDEO INTRODUCTION BY “MAD SCIENTIST” LUDWIG VON NEBUCHADNEZZAR:
“Where Did I Come From?” (Time:3:00)]

A–Well, today as we continue our series Where Faith and Science Meet, our attention turns to what is probably the most well-known and controversial of our topics – that is, to a discussion about Biology, Faith, and the Origins of Humanity.

1–Did we, indeed, evolve from Apes? Or was our ancestor “Adam” created suddenly out of nothing?

2–Does it really matter? ¹ And is there a way to reconcile what seems to be the competing claims of Evolution and Creation?

B–Well, let’s begin by talking about what these two things are, and what’s at stake in the relationship between them.

3. The idea of “**CREATION**,” of course, comes from today’s scripture in Genesis 1, where we find a beautiful, profoundly spiritual account of the origins of life on earth.
[Contemp. Service ONLY – Read Genesis 1:20-31 (MSG version)]

A–Here, of course, we read about God’s creation of all terrestrial life: plants, fish, birds, land animals, and finally... human beings themselves, created (as Vs. 27 says) “*in the image of God*” (NRSV) / “*reflecting his nature* (MSG).”

B–And for several thousand years, this (and other creation stories like it in other religions) were the *only* explanations for the origins of humanity.

4. But in 1859, Charles Darwin published On the Origin of Species, in which he elaborated a theory of the ancient Greeks which said that complex forms of life (like humans) evolved from simpler forms of life over long periods of time through a process of mutation, variation, and natural selection – in other words, through a process of “**EVOLUTION**.” ²

A–Now, since Darwin was a Christian (as you heard Ludwig say in the video), he didn’t believe his “*Theory of Evolution*” (as it came to be known) in any way precluded the existence or work of God.

B–But later, 20th-century biologists began interpreting Darwin that way, and even though he wouldn’t have agreed, it was *their work* that set the stage for the current conflict between Creation and Evolution. ³

5. And yet, regardless of how the conflict came about, we do need to recognize that today's understanding of Evolution *does* carry with it some implications that definitely make many Christians uneasy or upset (including, perhaps, some in this room).

A– For example, taken at face value, Evolution seems to stand in contrast to a literal reading of the Genesis account of creation.

1–E.G., according to Genesis, God created all life on earth in just two days (Day 5&6)

2–But evolution tells us that it took *millions of years* to happen – so which is it?

B–And not only does it seem to contradict the Bible, but in saying that we evolved through natural selection over many years, Evolution also seems to demote both the role of God and the place of humanity in the created order – not only does it appear to limit God's power, but humanity seems to be “just another” animal species.

C–Finally (perhaps most dangerous) is the tendency of *some* scientists (though not all) to view Evolution as an atheistic *life philosophy* – arguing that since we can now explain human origins without reference to God, either we don't need Him, or He doesn't exist, or both.⁴

D–You can see, then, why these implications bother a lot of Christians (I've struggled, too).

–II–

6. So, given the vast differences between Creation and Evolution, is there any way to reconcile these two seemingly incompatible explanations for the origins of humanity and of life?

A–Well, I think there is – and I'm guessing that many of you intuitively think so, as well.

B–So as we continue, I want to suggest at least three ways that people of faith have been able to reconcile them – three “Christian Views of Evolution,” if you will, that take seriously both the findings of science and the practice of biblical faith.

7. The first is called “**Creation Science**” (or “Scientific Creationism”), which makes the claim that the abrupt appearance of humans on earth (which is what a literal reading of the Bible seems to suggest) can be argued and defended on scientific grounds alone.⁵

A–So, for example, when we read the chronologies of the Bible literally and apply them to world history, we end up with an earth (and human life on it) that is somewhere between 6,000-10,000 years old, and in this view the scientific evidence of Evolution merely supports this claim.

B–Creation Science starts with a presumption about the correctness of literal biblical truth and then searches for (& often finds, I would add) empirical, scientific data to “prove” it.

C–And these aren't ignorant, uneducated people, either – they include Ph.D. scientists, professors at places like M.I.T. & Penn. State Univ., as well as respected theologians.⁶

8. Another Christian view of Evolution is something I mentioned last week called “**Intelligent Design**,” which says that the genetic codes of DNA are so complex, and the combinations necessary for life so rare, that there *must* be some kind of divine intelligence behind it all.

A—An analogy (similar to last week’s chocolate chip cookies) would be like me taking letters from a game of “Scrabble,” pouring them out onto a table [DEMONSTRATE...], and then asking how many times I’d have to do this before it spelled out my name (“Brian Edward Germano”) and my Social Security Number? Probably never, right?

B—So, the argument here is that if this would hardly ever happen for a fairly *simple* set of code (like a name and SSN), then why would we think that “random/natural selection” *by itself* could explain the existence of the extremely *complex* genetic codes of life itself?

C—Intelligent Design says that there *must* be a Creator (e.g, a divine “Designer”) behind it all.⁷

9. A third view (related to “Intelligent Design”) is called “**Theistic Evolution**” (or “Evolutionary Theism”), which argues that Evolution through natural selection actually *IS* God’s method not only for *creating* life, but also for its *continued development*.

A—An analogy here would be Henry Ford, who custom-made the very first “Model T” with his own bare hands (which was an amazing feat by itself!).

1—But let’s suppose that that’s *all* he ever did... made “Model T’s” all alone. If he had, there’d probably only be about 10-15 ever produced!

2—And yet, the genius of Henry Ford was not that he made all “Model T’s” with his own hands, but that he designed a *system* so his company could make 15 *million* of them over the course of 20 years – a system that even allowed for his occasional intervention along the way (as “creator”) to “improve” the product.

3—You see, his designing of an interactive *system* did *not* take away from the fact that in the end, HE was still the creator of all 15 million cars – in fact, every one of them had his name stamped on them: “*Ford*.”

B—So, this way of thinking says it’s the same with life on earth: whether God made each and every species *directly*, or whether He merely designed a *process* by which it all happened (and which science has only recently “discovered” and called “Evolution”), either way *GOD* is still the Creator, & the glory for that creation goes not to the *process*, but to *Him*.⁸

–III–

10. Now, I don’t know which of these views best fits your beliefs (if any).⁹ But I do hope you see that all three of them illustrate that even in this very controversial subject, faith and science are not rivals, but complements that *need* one another.

A—For example, I appreciate the wonderful way that Evolution helps explain “HOW” we humans came to be who and what we are today as a complex species.

1–But as a basis for how to *live* – for understanding *why* we’re here, and what it means to *be* human – I believe that Evolution *by itself* is completely bankrupt!

2–We saw this last century when dictators tried to apply the *philosophies* of Evolution (like “*survival of the fittest*”) to whole societies by breeding out “weak” people and races – think about what Hitler did to the Jews during the Holocaust, and what Saddam Hussein did to the Kurds after the First Gulf War.

3–You see, if we live out the implications of Evolutionary theory as a *philosophy of life and meaning* (as some scientists propose), we’ll more often end up with an oppressive society that exalts some people at the expense of others.

4–So yes, let’s listen intently to what Evolution has to teach us about the mechanics and biological processes at work in the development of human life.

B–But when it comes to understanding what it means to *be* human – to understand the “WHY” behind the meaning and purpose of our existence – then we turn to the Bible... for example, to the profound and sublime *theology* of today’s scripture (Genesis 1).¹⁰

11. ...Which brings us back to Prof. Ludwig’s question: “*Did we come from Adam? Or from Apes?*”

A–Well, first understand that Evolution *doesn’t* say humans came from apes, but merely that humans and apes share a common primate ancestor somewhere in the past.

B–More important, though, let’s remember that where the Bible says we originated is actually *less* flattering, because it says that every one of us (including Adam) didn’t come from apes, but from *dirt* – from the “stuff” of the earth like mud, clay, and slime.¹¹

C–And on *this point*, both science and the scripture totally agree!

1–Science says that *all forms of life* originally came from a pre-biotic, amino-acid “soup” of the earth.

2–And the Bible says “*from dust we came, and to dust we shall return.*”¹²

–IV–

12. So in the end, you see, the *biology* of Evolution is really no threat to faith, so long as we understand the *theology* of the Bible that helps make sense of it all,¹³ ...

A–...Telling us that there IS a God, who created all things, who wrote the genetic software and DNA codes that began the processes of life,...

B–...And who continues even today to “tweak” it like a divine orchestra conductor, continually calling forth new musical life & beauty from his “symphony” of Creation.¹⁴

C–...Because *THAT* is the *real* story of the origins of humanity!

13. [PRAYER: “God we give you thanks and praise that you created all that exists. We see your handiwork in the biology of our world all around us: in bacteria; in plants and animals; in the DNA codes by which life developed; and in our very loved ones and friends; and we give you thanks. We know, O God, that out of your goodness, love, mercy and grace, you brought forth the miracle of life on our planet, and we recognize that you entrusted to us as human creations pieces of image that give purpose and meaning to our existence: ...A **mind**, that we might ask questions about our existence, and even discover some of the answers through the wonders of science; ...A **heart**, that we know who we are and who we’re called to be by following the example of your Jesus in how we treat one another with love and justice and compassion;...And a **soul**, that we might know who you are, might seek you with all our being, and come to know you personally and intimately as our Creator and Redeemer. So, O Lord, we humbly bow before you as we pursue this calling, knowing we can’t do it on our own. Give us strength to live as your people, to know your love, and daily to walk in your ways. In Jesus name we pray, Amen.”]

ENDNOTES:

1. Well, I believe it does matter... a great deal. But not perhaps in the way popular culture often thinks. I believe that it matters *not* in having to choose *between* one or the other (evolution *or* creation), but (as I’ve argued the past two weeks) that both the biological *and* theological explanations have a place in life – that, in this case, they both have *complementary* (rather than rival/conflictual) purposes in teaching us about the origins of life on earth.
2. At an even more basic level, all life involves “evolution.” For example, according to Webster’s dictionary, “evolution” is merely “a process of continuous change from a lower, simpler, or worse to a higher, more complex, or better state” (www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/evolution). In other words, it’s a process of change from one state to another. If we think about it, evolution at its most basic definition is therefore all around us, because *everything* changes: our bodies, our communities, our culture, and our world itself.
3. It was actually ancient Greek *philosophers* were the ones who first suggested that humans developed from animal ancestors. Darwin merely elaborated and popularized this theory. The 20th-century scientific movement that took Darwin’s theory of evolution to the “next” level by eliminating the possibility of divine initiative behind it was known as “Neo-Darwinism” and we see examples of it in the famous “Scopes Monkey Trial” of 1925, where teacher John T. Scopes was tried for teaching evolution. The trial itself turning into a circus, pitting two well known lawyers (William Jennings Bryan and Clarence Darrow) against one another. We experience another example of it even today in the competition of car bumper-stickers between various “fish” symbols: plain fish (representing religious faith); the “Darwin” fish symbol with legs (representing evolutionary science); and another religious fish symbol showing a “TRUTH” fish swallowing the “Darwin” fish symbol. [For a brief overview of the development of Darwin’s theory of evolution, read Ian G. Barbour, When Science Meets Religion: Enemies, Strangers or Partners (New York: HarperCollins, 2000), pp. 90-94].
4. Those who hold to this view are often called “**Evolutionary Materialists**” because they understand evolution in a materialist (i.e., non-spiritual) fashion, seeing it as unsupervised, impersonal, unpredictable and totally natural process that excludes the possibility of anything supernatural.
For example, a 1995 National Association of Biology Teachers’ statement says “*The diversity of life on earth is the outcome of evolution, an unsupervised, impersonal, unpredictable and natural process of*

temporal descent with genetic modification that is affected by natural selection, change, historical contingencies, and changing environments” [Emphasis Mine. NABT statement cited in Judson Poling, Do Science and the Bible Conflict? (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2003), pp. 45-46]. Although a few years later the statement was amended to take out the words “unsupervised” and “impersonal,” what’s left is still a repudiation of any role God might have played in the process. Biologist and author Richard Dawkins argues something very similar in the sub-title of one of his books: The Blind Watchmaker: Why the Evidence of Evolution Reveals a Universe Without Design (New York: Norton, 1987). Here, he says that science is the only acceptable form of explanation for life in the universe; and if science does not discover purpose, then there *is no purpose* in the universe [Read about Dawkins’ view in Ian G. Barbour, When Science Meets Religion: Enemies, Strangers or Partners (New York: HarperCollins, 2000), p. 94].

And philosopher Daniel Dennett holds a similar view when he says that evolution “*is the product of a mindless, purposeless process,*” arguing that the only factors responsible for the direction of evolutionary changes are random mutations and natural selection. “*Even the laws of physics... could themselves be the outcome of a blind, uncaring shuffle through Chaos*” [Dennett, Darwin’s Dangerous Idea: Evolution and the Meanings of Life (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1995), pp. 185]. In the view of “Evolutionary Materialists,” in other words, God is not “behind” the processes and science of evolution, but instead the processes and science of evolution themselves *are God!*

5. This is known as the “Abrupt Appearance” theory. “Creation Science” is a movement that began in the 1980s. Find extensive information about this movement at the “Center for Scientific Creation” website, www.creationscience.com.

6. Another example of their position would be that Adam and Eve were actual individuals (not just figurative metaphors for the human race), and that everything that happened in the Bible happened literally. Therefore, science should eventually be able to empirically “prove” all the miracles and events of the Bible to be absolutely and literally true. This movement uses the language and tools of *science* to argue the truthfulness of religious *faith*. As an example, biochemist Michael Behe argues that the “irreducible complexity” of biochemical systems shows that they cannot be the product of gradual evolution, but instead are the work of a predetermined divine plan of intelligent design. Read more about variations of the “Creation Science” viewpoint in Ian G. Barbour, When Science Meets Religion: Enemies, Strangers or Partners (New York: HarperCollins, 2000), pp. 96-98.

7. Another analogy that could be used here is this: take a box full of silicon, copper wiring, metal and plastic; how many years would one have to shake up that box before a laptop computer came out? Intelligent Design proponents would say that the very existence of the laptop computer is “evidence” of some kind of “intelligence” behind its creation. As Intelligent Design theorist Howard Van Til believes “*God created a world pregnant with potentialities that will be actualized in due time*” [Van Til explained by Ian G. Barbour, When Science Meets Religion: Enemies, Strangers or Partners (New York: HarperCollins, 2000), p. 103].

In fact, this movement believes that even the existence and belief in “random chance” does not even necessarily negate the possibility of divine existence, purpose, and intervention. For example, “*chance and law are complementary rather than conflicting features of nature.... In evolution, variety is a source of flexibility and adaptability. ...Therefore, chance [can] be part of the design, and not incompatible with it.... A patient God could have endowed matter with diverse potentialities and let it create more complex forms on its own. In this interpretation God respects the integrity of the world and lets it be itself*” [Ian G. Barbour, explaining B.J. Bartholomew, When Science Meets Religion: Enemies, Strangers or Partners (New York: HarperCollins, 2000), p. 113].

8. Yet another example of this view is that of **an orchestra** where a conductor begins a piece of music, but every so often points to a certain section of instruments while everyone else is playing, and that particular section brings music that's unique for that point in the song. Evolutionary theists would say that that's one way to understand how God works through evolution: ...natural mutations usually occur on their own, but on occasion God calls forth a particular mutation here... a particular environment change there... all of which allow for the development of new and unique forms of life.

They would acknowledge that, yes, evolution can help us *understand* these mutations, but it doesn't in the least take away from the reality of God (the "conductor" Creator) being behind it all. In the words of Ian Barbour, "*God is like the choreographer of an ongoing dance or the composer of a still-unfinished symphony, experimenting, improvising, and expanding on a theme and variations.... God has endowed the stuff of the world with creative potentialities that are successively disclosed.... God is experimenting and improvising in an open-ended process of continuing creation*" [Ian G. Barbour, explaining Peacocke, When Science Meets Religion: Enemies, Strangers or Partners (New York: HarperCollins, 2000), p. 114].

This has sometimes been referred to as "**Progressive Creation.**" First suggested in his 1954 book The Christian View of Science and Scripture, Bernard Ramm proposed the idea that "*under the direction of the Holy Spirit, the laws of nature, over a long period of time and through a variety of processes, actualized the plan of God*" [Ramm, cited in John Jefferson Davis, The Frontiers of Science & Faith: Examining Questions from the Big Bang to the End of the Universe (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2002), pp. 113-114]. In explaining this, John Jefferson Davis says that "*Progressive creation... [means that] God's creative action has occurred over long periods of time through a variety of means... [and that] the biblical terminology of creation is on the results of God's action, and the relationship of those results to the divine purpose, rather than on the details of the processes God used to achieve these results.... [It means that] God is free to create through natural or supernatural means, and by rapid processes or over long periods of time; no single type of process can be identified a priori as uniquely suited to the divine purpose*" (Davis, p. 127).

Others have made similar arguments, such as Arthur Peacocke, "*God is at work continuously creating in and through the stuff of the world he had endowed with those very potentialities*" [Peacocke, Intimations of Reality (Notre Dame, IN: Univ. Of Notre Dame Press), p. 66]. And in what's called "Process Thought" views God as both the *source of order* and the *source of novelty* in saying that "*God is not an omnipotent ruler but the leader and inspirer of an interdependent community of beings*" (Ian G. Barbour explaining process thought at p. 117).

9. I myself find the arguments of both "intelligent design" and "evolutionary theism" to be compelling. All of these views, plus several additional secular evolutionary views, are summarized well in the following reading by John F. Haught:

*"Consider "the range of positions available on the question of God and evolution. There are at least four main parties involved in this important conversation (leaving the Creationists aside for now): (1) The first of these is made up of the evolutionary biologists themselves; (2) the second consists of those who believe that evolution requires a materialist, and hence atheistic, interpretation (evolutionary materialism); (3) the third group comprises the proponents of Intelligent Design Theory (IDT); (4) and the fourth is the evolutionary theists, those who consider Darwinian evolution not only compatible with biblical faith, but an illuminating framework for arriving at a deeper understanding of God than is implied in the notion of a designer. **Evolutionary biologists** (Group 1) are interested only in gathering and laying out the empirical evidence for evolution, using such notions as variation, adaptation and selection to make sense of the data from biology, geology, paleontology, comparative anatomy, biogeography, genetics, radiometric dating and so on. The **evolutionary materialists** (Group 2) go beyond pure science. They embed the evolutionary data, often unconsciously, in a purely physicalist worldview, taking Darwinian science to be the ultimate explanation of life's complexity They have no room for any theological "argument to design" since to them*

it is clearly blind physical processes alone, and not God, that account for what seems to us humans to be so design-like in finches' beaks and dinosaurs' plates. **Intelligent design theory** disciples (Group 3) reject the materialist claim that natural selection could conceivably be the ultimate explanation of adaptive complexity. But like their opponents in Group 2 they fuse their scientific observations with a metaphysics -- in their case a firm belief in the direct causal agency of "Intelligent Design" -- thus resorting to a kind of explanation normally excluded from scientific inquiry. Not surprisingly they draw hostile reactions not only from Group 2 but also from Group 1, which they sometimes fail to distinguish carefully from Group 2. And their opponents also include those in Group 4, the **evolutionary theists**. These are scientists, theologians and philosophers who consider Darwinian explanations to be appropriate to biology but who cannot take evolutionary processes to be the ultimate or final explanation of life and its complexity. Evolutionary theists would concur with the IDT advocates that at some point the search for adequate explanation must appeal to the notion of divine intelligence -- or better, divine wisdom -- if the idea of God is to have any relevance at all. However, they are not obsessed with the idea of design. And because they allow for many levels in the quest to understand the universe, they do not feel obliged to force theological explanation into what is more properly the sphere of purely scientific clarification. They are content to allow science to exclude methodologically any direct appeal to intelligence, intentionality, purpose or God. But by allowing for an extended hierarchy of explanations, they can accept Darwinian accounts as appropriate at one level, while still leaving ample room for theological understanding at a deeper one" ["Made by Design" book review by John F. Haught (professor of theology at Georgetown University) of Darwin and Design: Does Evolution Have a Purpose? by Michael Ruse. (Howard University Press), cited at www.religion-online.org/showarticle.asp?title=2926].

10. This theology, for instance, tells us that we humans are created in the **"image of God"** (the *imago dei*, as it's sometimes called in theological circles), which means that we are created to love God "with our heart, soul, mind and strength, and our neighbor as ourselves" (Luke 10:27), "to do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with God" (Micah 6:8), and to imitate our lives after the one (Jesus) who loved us enough to come down to earth, walk among us in human form, and model for us what it means to be *truly human* by illustrating God's love and showing us how to love one another (John 3:16).

In fact, to view the Genesis accounts of creation any way other than *theologically* is to miss its primary point and risk serious misunderstanding of its meaning. In illustrating this, John Jefferson Davis says that "*The agendas that modern interpreters have tended to bring to the text of the early chapters of Genesis – issues of 'science and scripture' – are at best secondary to the primary interests of the biblical writers.*" He illustrates that the first 11 chapters of Genesis "*challenge the ideas of the polytheistic religions of the ancient Near East... [They] are concerned with affirming the unity of God in the face of polytheism and the justice of God rather than caprice: 'scientific' issues in the modern sense of the word are related only indirectly to the purpose of the text.*" He then goes on to point out that in the Bible, the Hebrew word *bara* ("create") is used 49 times in the Old Testament, including ten times in Genesis, and that "*The focus of bara is not so much on the physical processes used by God as on the results of the divine action and the relationship of these results to God's redemptive purposes. Modern science is primarily concerned with physical processes; Scripture is primarily concerned with results and relationships*"[(John Jefferson Davis, The Frontiers of Science & Faith: Examining Questions from the Big Bang to the End of the Universe (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2002), pp. 115-116]. John Polkinghorne expresses a similar view when she says that "*The doctrine of creation is concerned with why the world exists, and continues to exist, rather than how it all began*" [Polkinghorne, Belief in God in an Age of Science (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1998), p. 88].

11. Read Genesis 2:7; Psalm 90:3; 103:14 & 29; and 1 Corinthians 15:47-49.

12. Read Genesis 3:19; and Ecclesiastes 3:20. So instead of being upset about the possibility of being related to apes, maybe we should just be thankful for the improbable “miracle” that *science* explains how we came forth from pure dirt – a “miracle” to which *theology* says only God could orchestrate and give meaning and purpose.

13. “*Christian faith and scientific method are understood to be complementary ways of knowing God’s creative work, each having its distinctive ways of knowing, methods and areas of validity*” [John Jefferson Davis, The Frontiers of Science & Faith: Examining Questions from the Big Bang to the End of the Universe (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2002), p. 7]; “*Theology [is] not a rival to science but... a discipline that complements the natural sciences in a search for understanding of the physical world*” [John Polkinghorne, cited in John Jefferson Davis, The Frontiers of Science & Faith: Examining Questions from the Big Bang to the End of the Universe (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2002), p. 15.

14. In other words, the discoveries and findings of biological science can actually help us better understand and claim a deep and profound faith in God, & how the *complementary* concepts of evolution & creation – rather than *competing against* each other – can instead actually interpret and inform each other. As John Jefferson Davis explains, “*Genesis 1:1 & modern cosmologies can be understood as complementary rather than competing accounts of the origin of the universe*” (Davis, The Frontiers of Science & Faith, p. 36).