

# An Evangelical Divide

## *Young Earth & Old Earth Creationist Views*

**D**ebates over the age of the universe and earth and the duration of the Genesis creation days have for the past several decades deeply divided the Christian community. But instead of dissipating with each new discovery, the confusion and conflict increase. There are those within the body of Christ who suppose that the facts of nature cannot possibly line up with the truths of Scripture. Unfortunately, the study of both science and the scriptures has too often been clouded by some whose presuppositions have prevented honest research and appropriate conclusions. And yet, based on scriptural evidence, biblical truth has nothing to fear from honest science.

### *I. Defining the Differences*

Although there are several variations on the theme, the primary difference within the Christian community, one that often sparks heated debate and controversy, involves how one interprets the passages in Genesis chapter 1 as they relate to the age of the earth. On one side there are those sincere believers who contend that the bible specifically teaches that God's creation is about 6000 or 7000 years old. There are both theologians and Christian scientists in this camp and they seem to be able to muster scientific proof of their claims as well as evidence that, in their minds, refutes the findings of so-called secular science. On the other side are those who see in the great (and increasing) mass of data across almost all fields of physical and theoretical science, an overwhelming preponderance of evidence for a universe and earth that are billions of years old.

Romans chapter 1, in speaking about faith-less men who "suppress the truth", tells us that

*" . . . what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities – His eternal power and divine nature – have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made . . . "*

One new scientific discovery after another seems to confirm (contrary to the view popularized by Carl Sagan 30 years ago) that the universe, our galaxy, and planet Earth all had a finite beginning – and have not "always been." More importantly, there is more and more realization among the non-evangelical scientific world that there was intelligence behind creation and that this entire creation seems to have been finely tuned specifically for both the emergence and sustainment of human life.

The point here is that if the secular world is beginning to see the evidence of "*His eternal power and divine nature*" in creation, should not we, as Evangelical Christians, be willing to consider the natural scientific revelations of the past 20 years as confirmation of and witness to the Creator God of Genesis. Indeed, the entire biblical record is one of progressive revelation with truth building upon truth, understanding upon understanding. We affirm this in terms of the spiritual realms; should we not also acknowledge and embrace the concept that our Lord, through progressive natural revelation (a.k.a. scientific discovery) continues to teach His creatures more and more about Himself in those things that can increasingly be "*clearly seen.*"

As believers, we should never fear truth that emerges from scientific discoveries. We cannot return to the days when religious leaders condemned such developments as the manned space explorations or bar codes, basing their fear on a particular interpretation of the Scriptures. Rather, we must engage the world of science and search for compatibility (not compromise!) between the discoveries and conclusions of science and the Genesis account. In doing so we will resolve the disconnect within our hearts and minds between what is outlined in God's Word and what has been proven about His creation. This goes far beyond a mere reconciliation of these two great areas of truth, but provides their unification – in fact the unity taught in Romans 1. Fully grasping this unification greatly enhances our own faith, as well as provides a useful tool for us as we present the claims of Christ and the gospel to a lost world - a world increasingly looking for answers.

## **II. YOUNG EARTH ARGUMENTS**

Let us begin by considering the primary arguments made by the proponents of the Young Earth position. Essentially, Young Earth vs. Old Earth boils down to two small words: “*VERY GOOD.*” (Gen 1): What did the Creator mean when He pronounced His creation “very good?”

- A. The Old Earth View implies that hurricanes, hailstorms, famine, floods, and generations of animals lived and died before Adam was created. How could there be millions of years of suffering in the world before man came on the scene to mess up God’s perfect creation? God could not have allowed a world with animal suffering and death and called it “very good”. Animal immortality (before Adam’s sin) is central to the theology of “Young Earth” creationism.
- B. In terms of the Young Earth view, if one allows for death before Adam’s sin, then the basis of the gospel is destroyed. Christ died to pay the penalty for sin, but if death existed before sin, death is not a consequence of sin. You throw away the doctrine of atonement if you believe animals died before Adam sinned. The Old Earth View is inconsistent with the gospel”.

### III. THE AUTHORITY OF SCRIPTURE

One significant aspect of the sometimes heated nature of the debate has its roots in how we regard one another as Christians. In terms of Young Earth proponents, what one believes about animal suffering and death has, very often, become a litmus test for how one regards the entire Bible and even God as its author. To even give thought to the notion that the earth is older than 10,000 years is to show disrespect for the Authority of Scripture!

It is useful at this juncture to point out that Old Earth Creationists believe that a commitment to biblical authority, inerrancy and the historical accuracy of the Genesis creation account does NOT require a belief in a young earth. In fact, as has been outlined above, they believe that the most recent scientific body of knowledge concerning creation conforms to the biblical account found in Gen 1:1 through Gen 2:1

Further, Old Earth Creationists affirm the following foundational truths of scripture:.

- *Genesis 1:1 In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.*
- *Colossians 1: 16-17 For by Him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by Him and for Him. He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together.*
- *John 1:3 Through Him all things were made; without Him nothing was made that has been made.*
- *Psalms 8: 3-5 When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the star, 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.*
- *Psalms 19: 1-4 The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands. Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they display knowledge. There is no speech or language where their voice is not heard. Their voice goes out into all the earth, their words to the ends of the world.*
- *Romans 1: 19-20 . . . since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. For since the creation of the world God’s invisible qualities – his eternal power and divine nature – have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse.*
- *Colossians 1:23. . .if you continue in your faith, established and firm, not moved from the hope held out in the gospel. This is the gospel that you heard and that has been proclaimed to every creature under heaven, and of which I, Paul, have become a servant.*
- *Psalms 119:160 All your words are true; all your righteous laws are eternal.*
- *Isaiah 45:19 I have not spoken in secret, from somewhere in a land of darkness; I have not said to Jacob’s descendants, Seek me in vain. I the Lord, speak the truth; I declare what is right*

## IV. A TALE OF TWO PARADIGMS

Paradigms are human constructs – models that attempt to integrate distinct points of fact (the “data” of revelation) into a consistent system from which we can make sense of our world.

A. The Perfect **Paradise** paradigm (Young Earth Creationists) This model is the theological foundation of Young Earth creationism.

1. When God declared His finished creation “very good”, He meant that it was perfect in every conceivable way.
2. Eden was the embodiment of the Creator’s ideal intent for His creation.
3. Man’s sin thwarted God’s plan, shattered His ideal intent, and ruined all of His perfect creation.
4. God introduced the physical death of man and animals as a punishment for sin.
5. God instituted the plan of redemption to reverse the effect of Adam’s sin and restore all things back to their original ideal intent.

B. The Perfect **Purpose** paradigm (Old Earth Creationists)

1. The world was “very good” from the beginning in light of a specific end. IT WAS VERY GOOD because it was perfectly suited for the Creator’s eternal purpose.
2. God had a higher purpose than merely to fellowship with man in a pristine and blissful garden paradise. Rather than the perspective that God’s purpose was our enjoyment, the more cosmic scope of this paradigm focuses on the ultimate end of creation, which is the glory of God. This eternal perspective accounts for the fuller meaning of the cross where Christ’s death not only dealt with the sin of man but also with the rebellion of Satan.

## V. THE ETERNAL PURPOSE FOR CREATION

- A. The Creator’s appraisal of His creation was based on its fitness for its chosen function.
- B. The world was created for more than our enjoyment. All things were created for the purpose of the Creator – His will to bring Himself “pleasure” and to accomplish His Purpose – His Glory – His Eternal Purposes.
- C. The fall of man did not render His purpose irrelevant. His plan was NOT THWARTED.
- D. God’s plan is unchanging – neither Satan nor Adam can reverse it.
- E. God’s original perfect plan called for His patient forbearance of evil. At the fullness of time He would demonstrate His righteousness so that the Father and the Son would be glorified.
- F. More than only paying the penalty for our sin, the cross was the means by which Christ conquered Satan. We are redeemed here and now for a demonstration of God’s glory in the future.
- G. The eternal plan of God has always and unchangingly been to permit and use suffering for a time to accomplish His eternal goals. Suffering is an undeniable, though temporary, part of His “very good” creation through which He is bringing His plan to fruition.

## VI. LIFE WITH ADAM IN THE GARDEN

- A. God set aside a portion of the created world and filled it with bounty and beauty as a residence for His image-bearer. After creating Adam, God “put” him in the Garden He had planted. (Genesis 2: 6-8)
- B. Eden, with all its unparalleled excellence, stood in sharp contrast to the untamed world around it.

- C. Adam had a moral capacity and freedom to resist urges and the capacity for intimacy with his Creator. It is unwarranted to extend His immortality and moral accountability to the animal inhabitants in the garden paradise.
- D. There is nothing in the creation narrative to indicate that animals were not subject to injury and death.
- E. Adam walked with God, had a job, and a perfect wife. Life was “very good.”
- F. Eden characteristics did not apply to the entire earth, and not all the animals of the earth were in the garden.
- G. There is no biblical basis for assuming that Adam could not trip and fall, bump his head on a tree limb, scratch himself, or burn his hand on a fire. Neither Satan nor Adam had to ask what a “bruised heel” was. Physical pain was not a foreign concept invented after the fall.

## **VII. PROBLEMS WITH THE PERFECT PARADISE PARADIGM**

- A. For a world as described by the Perfect Paradise paradigm, God either prevented all suffering or suffering was not possible at all. When this concept is challenged, the response from Young Earth proponents is to invoke the “sustaining power” of God. However, His sustaining power was limited (by Him) in application. The Scripture in no way suggests this power was broadly applied to all creation before the fall. Further, in scripture we see that:
  1. God allows suffering for a time to teach us as we prepare to be with Him in a better future place, and to accomplish His perfect eternal purpose.
  2. Genesis does not describe a world sustained by the routine intervention of the Creator.
  3. If God were to routinely preempt the natural processes of our world, there would be no principle of cause and effect and there would be no foundation for rational thought. A world without causality is a world without free will.
- B. Young Earth Creationism asserts that all animals were herbivores until the degenerative effects of man’s sin made some of them into carnivores. The physical evidence suggests, however, that carnivores were created as carnivores. The entire anatomy, physiology and biochemical make-up of carnivores is designed for eating meat. Young Earth Creationism admits that this is a serious challenge to their creation paradigm.
- C. Immune systems would have no purpose if there were nothing harmful to defend against.
- D. For the choice between good and evil to be real, the real possibility for evil had to exist. If evil and suffering were not possible, then man would not truly be free to choose to love God.
- E. God has a higher purpose for this creation than the prevention of suffering and evil. Suffering and evil in this world must be understood from the perspective of God’s eternal purpose for creation.

## **VIII. A SUMMARY OF OLD EARTH CREATIONIST BIBLICAL CONCEPTS IN GENESIS**

- A. The curse was explicitly directed to the serpent, to the woman and finally to the man. It neither brought about animal death nor a wholesale physical change to the constitution of nature in general.
- B. The atoning death of Christ is not affected by the death of animals prior to the fall of Adam. God used the sacrificial death of animals as a picture to illustrate the Redeemer, the only Lamb of God who could take away the sin of the world. Christ’s death, not animal death, is the basis of the gospel.
- C. Today every field of science independently arrives at the same conclusion – a conclusion that conforms to an “Old Earth” view. Science makes it evident that God created the universe, prepared the earth for life and spoke life into existence exactly as described in Genesis.

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A list of publications and core material texts are available upon request.

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