

“Can I Believe in the book of Genesis and Science?”

Date: October 14, 2018

Place: Lakewood UMC

Texts: Genesis 2:1-9,15; Genesis 1:1-27

Occasion: Ask, series

Themes: Science, creationism,

“Do I have to choose between what I read in the Bible and what I learn in school?” Many young people are asking that question. And in some churches, they are teaching that what our children are being taught in school is ruining their faith making them disbelieve the Bible.

Some Christians believe the earth is only 6,000 years old, in spite of an overwhelming mountain of evidence to the contrary. Either God created the world in six days, or God has been creating the world for billions of years. Who’s right?

Scientists expect truth to be found in hard data that results from empirical evidence. People of faith, though, believe that trusting only the physical world is too limited a way to view existence. And in fact, many of our more important questions are outside the sphere of science, questions about why we are here and how we are supposed to live.

Science and religion are not by definition opposites, and yet that is often how scientists and Christians approach each other. So, are science and faith mutually exclusive? Or is it possible to accept both science and faith?

Over 300 years ago, a scientist by the name of Galileo proposed a brand new belief. For centuries the church had taught that the earth stood still and the sun revolved around the earth. The church supported its belief by a literal understanding of one verse in the Bible, 1 Chronicles 16:30. That verse reads, “Tremble before all the earth. Yes, he set the world firmly

in place;v it won't be shaken." That was great theology, but it turned out to be terrible science.

Galileo asked the right questions, gathered the data and determined that the earth's location was not fixed and in fact the earth moved around the sun. Because he followed the data rather than theology, Galileo was tried and convicted of heresy.

Galileo may have lost the battle, but he won the war. Today the movement of the earth is accepted and understood, even by persons of faith. In 1992, Pope John Paul II admitted the Roman Catholic Church made a mistake in condemning Galileo 300 years earlier.

Unfortunately, today, many people are following the same example of the Roman Catholic Church 300 years earlier – beginning with a literal belief in scripture and then searching for pseudo-science to back up their claims. The overwhelming evidence of the scientific community, in almost every area of science – biology, physics, geology, paleontology and so forth, support the evidence that the universe is billions of years old.

And yet, there is a growing body of Christians who are pulling their children from public schools to teach them at home, so they can teach them their own version of science, which supports the notion that the world is only 6,000 years old.

When people outside the church, and even inside the church, observe Christians believing the Bible literally instead of what the scientific community supports, they shake their heads and walk away. If asked to choose between what science teaches and what the Bible teaches, many people are walking away from the church.

But it's a false choice. Science and faith are asking very different questions. The Bible, written thousands of years ago, was not meant to be

a book of science. It's a book of faith. The Bible never intended to give a literal explanation of how the world came into being. The Bible wasn't asking the question of *how*; it was asking and answering the questions of *who* and *why*?

This is how the Bible starts: "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." The assumption, of course, is that before the heavens and the earth existed, there was God. This belief is outside the scope of scientific inquiry. Scientists cannot observe what existed before that single moment in time when there was nothing and then there was.

However, scientists are able to look at light from distant stars, analyze the elements, and work to recreate the first moments after the big bang. All the evidence that exists is from the moments after the big bang. That's why it's called the singularity: nothing, then everything, in a single moment.

Analyzing the evidence of the millisecond before that moment is impossible, because there is nothing to analyze. When Christians say God existed before the universe was created, and scientists say there is no evidence for it, they both could be telling the truth.

Science can explain when and how the world was created, but that explanation only leads to more questions. What caused the singularity and the big bang? If nothing existed before that moment, then how did it start? Is it possible that religion has access to a different truth?

How could it be that a singular moment billions of years ago could result in life, love, hope and family if nothing existed to shape it? As people of faith, we claim it was God. We don't have to take the Bible literally to believe that God created the world. But, that God did it is a statement of faith. We can't prove it, but the evidence leads to us to that moment where

we are asked to believe. And we say, by faith, “It was God who spoke, and then there was the big bang, and the evolution of the world as we know it began in that singularity: nothing and then Creation.”

My friends, there is wisdom in both science and faith, and we need them both. Science is all about asking questions to get data and find answers, but life is about more than the physical processes of the world.

Both science and faith are necessary for wisdom in this modern world. A religionless view denies a part of our identity and fails to answer questions of meaning and purpose. Science can't tell you why we're here, other than the survival of the fittest.

Science can help us understand the building blocks of the universe moments after it was created, but it cannot answer the question of why it was created or who might have created it. Science cannot provide many answers at all about some of the most important things in life: such as hope, sacrifice and love. These are the domain of religion.

Do we want to live in a world without religion? A religionless world would not hear that all human beings are made in the image of God, or that God loves us, or that we all have value. A religionless world would never hear the message to love our neighbor as ourselves. A religionless world would never be told the idea that life can exist after death, or that hope is always justified. Do we want that kind of a world?

On the other hand, do we want to live in a world without science? Do we want a world with no antibiotics or computers, no airplanes or cell phones? Do we want a world without progress or understanding of how things work? We are healthier and more knowledgeable people precisely

because we have science. Even religious people who will dismiss scientific thought when it contradicts Scripture will go to the doctor when they are sick. They trust science then.

A world without science would mean rejecting truths that are staring us in the face. When people of faith reject the obvious and well-tested and proven claims of science, many people outside the church have become wary of trusting religion, seeing it as the realm of the uneducated and ignorant.

Humanity needs both religion and science. The wise path is trusting both are needed and can work in harmony. Theologians and scientists are for the most part asking different questions. We need to hear the wisdom in both.

So, you're in a local coffee shop here in Erie with your non-Christian friend, who says, "Okay, I don't want a long complicated answer, but tell me this, How can you be a faithful Christian and still believe in modern science when the Bible teaches that the world was created 6,000 years ago?"

You might say, "The difference between science and the Bible is that they are asking different questions. The Bible doesn't teach that the world was created 6,000 years ago; it teaches that God created the heavens and the earth, and science by its nature has no means to test for that. The people who wrote the Bible were more interested in the fact of God creating the universe than in how God might have done it." Short answer.

Friends, you do not have to choose between believing what science teaches and believing the book of Genesis. Just know they are answering different questions. May God help us to know the difference. Amen.

This sermon borrows heavily from the book *Ask: Faith Questions in a Skeptical Age*, by Scott J. Jones and Arthur D. Jones, Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2015; pp. 43-54.