

Foundations: In The Beginning, God...
By Jason Huff
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John 1:1-5; Colossians 1:13-20; Genesis 1:1-19

Friends, our final reading today is from Genesis 1:1-19. May God add His blessing to the reading of His holy, sacred, and perfect Word. "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters. And God said, "Let there be light," and there was light. God saw that the light was good, and he separated the light from the darkness. God called the light "day," and the darkness he called "night." And there was evening, and there was morning – the first day. And God said, "Let there be an expanse between the waters to separate water from water." So God made the expanse and separated the water under the expanse from the water above it. And it was so. God called the expanse "sky." And there was evening, and there was morning – the second day. And God said, "Let the water under the sky be gathered to one place, and let dry ground appear." And it was so. God called the dry ground "land," and the gathered waters he called "seas." And God saw that it was good. Then God said, "Let the land produce vegetation: seed-bearing plants and trees on the land that bear fruit with seed in it, according to their various kinds." And it was so. The land produced vegetation: plants bearing seed according to their kinds and trees bearing fruit with seed in it according to their kinds. And God saw that it was good. And there was evening, and there was morning – the third day. And God said, "Let there be lights in the expanse of the sky to separate the day from the night, and let them serve as signs to mark seasons and days and years, and let them be lights in the expanse of the sky to give light on the earth." And it was so. God made two great lights – the greater light to govern the day and the lesser light to govern the night. He also made the stars. God set them in the expanse of the sky to give light on the earth, to govern the day and the night, and to separate light from darkness. And God saw that it was good. And there was evening, and there was morning – the fourth day."

We've had a rocky start to 2021, haven't we? Coming off 2020, we had hoped for better. We've been reminded in the last ten months that we live in a topsy-turvy world. It's been easy to get anxious about our world situation when the world seems to be spinning off its axis. It's a time when we need to be well-grounded in our faith, when we need to rely on Jesus, the cornerstone of our faith.

We also need to be well-rooted in the foundations of our faith. While our faith and trust is in our Lord Jesus, His story and the story of our faith in the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit doesn't start with Jesus' incarnation 2,000 years ago. It starts before the beginning of creation itself. It starts in the stories of Genesis, which lay the groundwork for all that is to come.

Genesis tells the origins of humanity and the origins of sin. It's where we first learn of God's grace and love and judgment and become aware of the need for a messiah. Genesis contains the first promises of God to His people; it establishes God as a covenant-maker and covenant-keeper. And it's where we find out that the heroes of the faith aren't particularly moral or good people but flawed human beings just like we are who are changed by the grace of God and their subsequent faith in Him. Without Genesis, you don't have the Christian faith.

That's while we'll be studying the book of Genesis this year in a series I'm calling Foundations. It's my prayer that as we work through Genesis, our faith will grow and mature, that we'll learn a lot along the way, and we will see that even in the pages of the Old Testament, the Father is pointing toward His Son who will come to rescue all people throughout all time who put their faith in God and not in themselves.

So let's turn to today's text. It's the first part of the creation narrative in Genesis 1. We're only looking at the first half today because we don't want to rush things. Because of all of what the Bible teaches us, God being the creator of the universe is among the most important. There are constant reminders throughout Scripture that YHWH, our God, the God of the Hebrews, the one true God, is the creator, and that His status as our creator gives Him authority and dominion over us. It's worth spending time to understand what Genesis 1 establishes about God and about this universe He created.

As we look at the text, there's one thing we're going to do first. We're going to get out of the way the issue surrounding the days. Modern church culture has obsessed with the days of creation. Some people get nervous because the modern scientific view believes in a universe whose age is in the billions, and they say, "The Bible can't possibly be right about creation and evolution is true." Other people say, "Genesis 1 teaches creation in seven literal 24-hour days, and if you don't believe that, then you are a theological liberal and you don't believe the Bible."

I want to tell you that neither of these views is correct. And more importantly, we learn what is important in the Bible by watching to see what is emphasized elsewhere. Anything God wants us to find important, He repeats for us – He knows that we need a lot of repetition to understand anything. The only other times that the seven days of creation are mentioned in Scripture are when the seventh day, the Sabbath day, is established as a day of rest for God's people. God created all things in six days and rested on the seventh; thus we work six days and rest on the seventh. That's literally the only time this comes up. And the days of God's creation are not ever explicitly mentioned to be 24-hour days.

In fact, take a look with me at verse 14, 16, and 19: "And God said, "Let there be lights in the expanse of the sky to separate the day from the night, and let them serve as signs to mark seasons and days and years... God made two great lights -- the greater light to govern the day and the lesser light to govern the night. He also made the stars...and there was evening, and there was morning -- the fourth day." What this means is that the markers we have for time as we think of it, the sun and the moon that run in 24-hour days, don't even exist until the fourth day. The constructs of time as we know them don't apply to at least three days of creation.

Let's also look at how the early church dealt with the issues of the days. The early church fathers had a different problem with the days. Many believed that because God is infinitely powerful, God created the universe instantaneously. Others saw each day representing an "age" of unclear time. Almost all of them saw the days in Genesis 1 as a literary device, a way of easily explaining and remembering what God has done, helping fallen humanity that could not grasp the mystery and majesty and wonder of creation to grasp it. In any case, there has always been an enormous amount of speculation, not certainty, about the days of creation.

Does this mean we should believe in Darwinian evolution? Absolutely not! Does it mean we should compromise what we believe about the perfection and infallibility of Scripture? Absolutely not! What's most important, and what I would write down as a big bullet point for the day is this: *Genesis 1 is about our Creator far more than it is about the creation.* Genesis 1 is not so interested in the what or how or when so much as it is interested in the Who.

The consistent part of Genesis 1 is God. The different parts of creation get their turn in due time, but they are completed and their story is finished. But each new day, each new section, begins with, "And God said," and it was so. As fascinating as the start of everything may be, the focus is always on God's creative power and His will being done.

We must always remember the Creator before the creation. When Paul describes the fall of humanity into deeper and deeper sin in Romans 1:25, he characterizes it by saying, "They exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator, who is forever praised." Many people today say, "I don't need to go to church – I just need to walk in nature and I see God there better." While the glory of God is on display in nature, while it can lead us to praise God, the worship of God must be based on God's self-revelation through Scripture. Otherwise, we can do harm to our relationship with God by mistaking one for the other.

That's another key point we see in today's passage that's very important: *God exists before creation, and He is completely distinct from His creation.* God is not a created being. Before anything we know came to be, God is. He is unmade. Neither the Father nor the Son nor the Spirit is created. They eternally exist outside of creation. While the hand of God is on all of creation, while God's handiwork is on display within creation, God is not *in* creation itself.

That's so important for us to understand. So many religions do not understand the divide between our Creator and us as created beings. Many religions teach pantheism – that everything *is* God, or that the universe as a whole *is* God – or panentheism – that everything is *in* God. Judaism and Christianity teach that God is separate from His creation, and we see this in Genesis 1. Because God is separate from creation, He isn't reliant on creation; He doesn't need creation. It is not a part of Him. He can interact with it however He pleases; He can make Himself known in various ways and various times *through* His creation, but He always remains unique, distinct, and separate from it.

Because God stands alone, He cannot be unduly influenced by His creation. He cares for it, loves it, sustains it, but His creation cannot do Him harm, unduly influence, or change Him. This is eventually proven clearly in the death and resurrection of Jesus, that when the Son comes in the flesh, becoming the God-man, truly God and truly human, even when humanity does kill Him, He returns. Even death has no power over God. We have complete confidence that because God is separate from creation, nothing in all of creation can separate us from His love through Christ Jesus our Lord (Romans 8:39).

What else do we learn about God our Creator here in Genesis 1? The next key point: *Our God is a God who brings order and stability.* God takes the formless and void and brings form and meaning. He divides waters and seas, skies and land. He brings light and separates light from darkness. By the halfway point, there is even order to time through the sun, moon, and stars. When God brings about vegetation on the earth, each one is “according to its kind.” From its initial chaotic state, God provides balance and harmony and symmetry.

We notice too that nothing in creation is initially opposed to God. Darkness has no negative connotations that will eventually come about. Everything obeys the sound of His voice and His direction and command. Contrast this to the ancient mythologies of other religions, many long since abandoned, where the gods struggled against the primordial forces they didn’t actually create and shaped them to their will by force, but were fighting against the chaos. In comparison, God speaks and creation bends to His decree.

Even today, as followers of Jesus, we see God taking the tangled strands of our lives and putting them in order. Where once we were trapped by sin and broken by our rebellion against God, through Christ God re-orders our lives, changes our priorities and our hearts, and makes us fit for His Kingdom. While God doesn’t save us *from* every mess and trial we encounter, He sees us *through* them.

Next concept layered into Genesis 1: *God has no rival or equal.* There is no duality here. There is no opposing force. There is no trickster god, no Loki, waiting in the wings to thwart God’s plan. When we come across the serpent in Genesis 3, which the Bible later names as the first appearance of Satan, we’re still dealing with a creature – a sinister, spiritually devious one, but just a creature. There is no pantheon of gods looking upon YHWH’s work.

And God does not give honor or attention to those things that men would eventually worship. It’s weird that God calls the sun and the moon “the greater light” and “the lesser light.” The stars get named in an aside; they are mentioned as an afterthought. But again, that’s a de-emphasis on the creation and an emphasis on the Creator. God doesn’t name them like He names light, darkness, or even heaven and land and sky. They have use and purpose in God’s creation as part of keeping order, but they are merely functional. For the first portion of creation, God Himself creates light which allows for plants to grow. It’s not the sun’s light or heat that sustains them but God.

Ultimately, God is shown to be the sole Being in control of all the systems of the universe. Even from the beginning, the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of God, is said to be hovering over the waters, sustaining the creation. Who controls the rain? God. Who controls the sun and moon and stars? God. Who is responsible for the crops, the tides and the oceans, the whole of the heavens and the whole of the earth? God. He alone creates, controls, and sustains. Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, one God, is in charge of the entire production. Everything else is part of the created order made to serve God’s purposes and God’s will.

What else do we see in this first half of Genesis 1? Here’s a point that we’ll see directly continue into the second half next week: *the creation is good.* There is nothing bad in creation. The creation is pristine, beautiful, orderly, enjoyable, functioning perfectly. It is good.

In most other religions and philosophies, pure good is hard to find. In the far east, you have the yin and yang, the idea that even in great good there is a little evil and in great evil there is a little good; there is no purity. The Hindu religion incorporates millions of gods, both fair and foul, all as representations of the nature of the unknowable god. Mythologies typically present flawed gods who have flawed creations, hence why the world is the way it is. Greek philosophers argued that matter itself was evil; Eastern philosophers debated that the material world that caused so much suffering simply wasn't real at all.

Not so with our God and His creation. He is good and perfect from the start, and so is His creation. He isn't flawed, and neither is His craftsmanship. We stand in a different part of history than Genesis 1, a history marred and flawed and scarred by the effects of sin that have battered the whole creation. But what God made is good. We as Christians believe not in an escape from this world and our bodies and the material world but the remaking and resurrection of our bodies into a perfect goodness, and the eventual coming of the new heaven and new earth, a new world that is still material and perfectly good forever.

When we have faith in Christ and live as faithful believers, we can still enjoy creation as God intended it to be. In different places and times, the church has misunderstood the goodness of creation and tried to stifle it. Drinking was bad; eating was bad; dancing was bad; sex was bad. Sometimes the church has been seen as a buzzkill, and sometimes it was.

That's not supposed to be the case! God created an ordered universe that was good. Our sin has thrown disorder into the mix and allowed for the abuse of good things, but it doesn't mean that things cannot be rightly ordered again. Drinking without excess was blessed. Jesus turned water into wine at a wedding. In fact, the Israelites were commanded to bring their tithes (including their new wine) to God's tabernacle or temple and to enjoy them in God's presence.

Sexuality rightly ordered within the context of traditional marriage is blessed. King David, the man after God's own heart, danced before the Lord in a great triumphal celebration. Because creation rightly ordered by God is good, we can enjoy that creation when it is rightly ordered even after the fall.

There's a lot to take in here, which is why we're looking at the story of creation in Genesis 1 over two weeks. But one last thought that arises from the parallel passages we heard today from John 1 and Colossians 1 – *Jesus is our creator just as much as the Father and the Spirit*. Jesus is the one through whom all things were made. When we read Genesis 1, when we think about the creator, know that Jesus was there and actively involved step-by-step with the Father. When we think about the incarnation and the cross and the resurrection, we also think of creation, because the Savior who died for you also made you. He is worthy of all glory and honor and worship.

I'm looking forward to next week and continuing this discussion. For now, friends, let us contemplate the wonder of our Creator God, and give Him all the devotion He deserves.