Blessings to you in Christ Jesus!

*For the good that I want, I do not do, but I practice the very evil that I do not want.*

Romans 7:19

Here we have the great apostle Paul admitting that he has a constant war with his flesh. We would think that he would have little trouble with sin; yet, he does.

Paul has the same human condition we do. As a Christian, we are in Christ, but we are still also in this world. Our flesh, our very nature, is to rebel against God and gratify the lusts of our flesh.

There is a constant battle between our earthly desires and our God-given spiritual desires. We might as well realize: this battle will last until we leave this earth and are purified in the presence of Jesus. Don’t be discouraged; it is this way for all of us.

We are not excused from trying, from fighting. The more we resist the flesh and go along with the spirit, the more we bring glory to Christ who saved us. When the flesh loses, satan loses and is shamed before God. Keep up the good fight; persevere to the end. The difficulties will fade away and be nothing compared to what we receive.

In Christ’s love

John

11-7-21

Genesis 1:1-2

As we begin the process of studying the account of creation given in the first chapters of Genesis, I think we need to briefly consider some of the different views held by Christians regarding this account. The basic question comes down to this; “Is the creation account literal or symbolic?” While I think one’s position on this is very important, I don’t believe differences are a reason to break fellowship with other Christians.

Here is where we apply Paul’s instructions in Titus 3:9, “*But avoid foolish controversies and genealogies and strife and disputes about the Law, for they are unprofitable and worthless*.” While there is nothing wrong with discussing different opinions on creation with the goal of simply sharing ideas, we must be diligent in maintaining Christian unity, especially in a church body. Again, we never maintain unity at the expense of truth, but we also allow for members of Christ’s body who might have a different take on matters that are not of primary importance.

Let me begin by explaining my view and the way I will approach our study of Genesis. My view is the historic Christian view of the creation account. God created everything, beginning with nothing, in six days while setting aside the seventh day for the benefit of His creation. This is exactly what the Bible says. There is nothing in these verses to indicate that this is metaphor or parable. The rest of the Bible sustains a literal creation account. Also, by taking Genesis 1 and 2 literally, every other mention of creation in the Bible makes sense.

Additionally, it is a dangerous thing to turn away from the general rule that the Bible is to be taken literally. Yes, there are figures of speech, there are definitely metaphors and parables, there are those things that are to be taken symbolically; but there is usually some indication of these things in the context. To simply believe something is metaphorical because it is hard to believe or understand is to step onto a slippery slope. The question becomes, “Where do we stop taking the Bible non-literally?” This path leads to the position that so many have taken in this day: that the Bible is completely open to what ever we want to make it.

There are lots of other ways people have come up with to look at the creation story. Mostly, they are trying to accommodate scientific theory and discovery with the Bible; they are trying to reconcile scientific teaching with what the Bible says. Let me just mention a couple.

A popular idea is called the Gap Theory. It’s a way of making the Biblical account line up with the idea of an old earth. It says the between Genesis 1:1 and 1:2, there is a gap of millions or billions of years. The theory is that God created everything good at once, as it says in 1:1. Next, satan rebelled and over a long period of time, brought destruction to the earth; hence the earth being “*formless and void*”. At this time, God recreated everything as the rest of the chapter says.

This theory would indicate that evil was already existent during God’s recreation. If that were the case, He would not have been able to declare everything “good”. It would also indicate that God couldn’t save His first creation from satan; an impossible situation. The Bible is also clear that Adam’s sin is what brought death to mankind.

Another attempt to reconcile the Bible with an old earth belief is the day/age theory. This claims that each day in the Genesis account is representative of a long period of time, or an age in history. The word “day” in Genesis has no other meaning than a twenty-four-hour period. Additionally, it means that death would have been in the world before the sin of Adam. Animals couldn’t have been continually populating the earth for millions of years without filling it up.

The final idea I will look at is called “theistic evolution”. The basic claim is that evolution took place the way science says it did, but that it was not random or by chance. Theistic evolution says that God’s hand was involved at every point along the evolutionary path. In other words, God created by controlling how living things evolved.

This sounds like a nice compromise but it still runs into the problem of when sin began and also death. Besides, evolution theory doesn’t hold up. While a specific species may evolve within itself, for instance different dog breeds having a common ancestor, fish don’t become birds or people.

I have offered just a few of the main theories with very simplistic explanations so that we can be aware of them. Also, a few rebuttals of them to help show why I hold to a literal interpretation of Genesis 1 and 2. I don’t want to give the impression that science is bad; I think it is a gift from God. Science has done much to improve our lives. I think that’s why God made things so complex, to give us something to do, to study.

As mentioned before; the purpose of the Bible is to reveal God’s redemption of mankind. It is not to explain the formation of cells or how atoms work; He leaves that for us to discover. The creation account shows that God made something very good. It gives us an idea of His power. Because of this display of power, we can know that He is able to redeem us; He is the One who can save us from our sins. God is the One who can fix what we messed up in the Garden of Eden; in fact, He will make it better.

*In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.* We talked last week about how this was the beginning of all that God created; this was the beginning of time and the start of all crated things. God Himself already existed; He had no beginning point. This is beyond us, but one more indication that He is worthy to be called God.

The Hebrew word used here for God has some interesting considerations. The word translated God is “Elohim”. In the Hebrew, the word Elohim is both masculine and plural. Let’s consider masculine: throughout the Bible, God is referred to as a Him. Yes, God is spirit, but He consistently uses male pronouns and the title “Father”. He sometimes displays qualities that are generally considered to be maternal, but they are still within the bounds of how a dad might behave or feel.

For example, in Matthew 23:37 Jesus says, “*Jerusalem, Jerusalem, who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, the way a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were unwilling*.” We picture mothers protecting their young, but fathers do too.

Exodus 20:7 says “*You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain.”* Because it is clear that God expects to be referred to in the masculine, it is a violation of the third commandment to speak of Him in another way. It is not okay to pray to God as “mother”, nor to think of Him as a “force” or an “it”. This is important for our relationship with God.

The other thing I mentioned about Elohim is that it is plural; it is the plural form of “El”. Now, although this word is plural, the rest of the sentence in Hebrew grammar is singular. The Hebrews would sometimes use the plural form of a title to show extra honor. They might do this for a king or a magistrate. So, when referring to God this way, it was a way to give honor to Him; it placed Him far above any other gods.

The really neat thing to remember about this is that the Bible is the word of God. It was under God’s direction that Moses wrote the book of Genesis. Although God was using an honorific title for Himself according to acceptable Hebrew grammar, He was also giving a hint of the Trinity. Moses may not have understood this, but it would become clear as God gave further revelation of Himself.

The Bible is very clear that there is one God and that God is one. In the New Testament it is revealed that somehow this one God exists as three persons. After receiving the New Testament, we can look back at the Old Testament and see that the Trinity was brought out several times; but until Christ came, it remained a mystery. Here is the first instance of our triune God displayed in the first verse of the first book of the Bible.

God is the One who created the heavens and the earth. This is a Hebrew way of phrasing. It mentions the two extreme ends and this includes everything else in between. They didn’t actually have a word for the “universe”, so they spoke of the heavens and the earth. This was the beginning; God created the earth and the heavens out of nothing. He is almighty God who is able to speak things into existence.

Verse 2 focuses on the earth. God spoke it into existence in a chaotic state. This is what He chose to start with. The earth was without form; the land wasn’t shaped in a particular way and everything was covered with water.

It is known that most ancient cultures had their own creation story. They had their own accounts long before the Hebrew people came to be; and there are some similarities to the Genesis account. This shouldn’t surprise us. Creation was an actual event and some of the earliest people would have gotten to talk to God about it. They could have been told what happened. The story would have been passed down orally throughout generations and through different cultures. We all know that stories change as they are passed along by word of mouth.

Modern skeptics simply shrug off the Biblical account as a mixing together of some of these old myths. For example, the Babylonian myth has their god Marduk defeating the chaos god Tiamat, who is a dragon. Marduk then used the body of Tiamat to create the earth and the heavens. They will apply this same idea to the chaos of the water that covered the earth.

The thing is that in the Biblical account, God is the one who created the chaotic, formless world. He didn’t have to defeat it; He simply spoke and it obeyed. We also know that the story in the Bible is the right account because it was dictated to Moses by God. All other accounts involve multiple gods who have very human qualities: they have to fight, there is intrigue between them, they make mistakes, and humans can control them to some extent. The God of the Bible does not fit this mold. He is all-powerful and all His creation will answer to Him.

So here the LORD has created the earth. He begins with a glob that has no definite shape and no land is visible. Verse 2 refers to the “deep”. This indicates that the entire earth is covered in water. We don’t do it so much anymore but we used to refer to the ocean as “the deep”. That is the kind of language being used here. Recall from the story of Noah that there is plenty of water to cover the earth.

To add to the formlessness and emptiness of everything, there was complete darkness. Not only was the earth formless, you couldn’t see it even if it did have a form. This isn’t a darkness of evil, it just means that there isn’t any light. However, we can think along these lines for what was to come. Once sin entered the world, a certain darkness did cover it again. And that darkness persists today. The prince of this world is associated with darkness.

In Luke 22:53 Jesus said to those who had come against Him in the Garden of Gethsemane, “*While I was with you daily in the temple, you did not lay hands on Me; but this hour and the power of darkness are yours*.” In the perfect timing of God, Jesus was given over to the chief priests and religious leaders to be crucified. They were operating under the power of satan; under the power of evil. Now, even as back during creation, everything is waiting for God to chase out the darkness with light.

In the last section of this verse, we have a direct conformation of the Holy Spirit; the Spirit of God. Again, this wouldn’t be developed into the doctrine of the Trinity yet, but here He is, the third person of the Godhead. The Hebrew word for spirit can also mean wind or breath. It depends of the context for which meaning is used. But, as we will see later, this brings about some interesting ways of looking at what the Bible tells us.

Some will translate the word “Spirit” as “wind” here, but that doesn’t fit the overall mood of the creation story. Picture this formless waste-world, blanketed in darkness, but the Holy Spirit of God hovering over it. He is watching over it; He sees it is a waste-land but He knows what He is about to do. And He knows it will be good.

Prayer

All powerful creator God, You have made all things and made them good and You have created in perfect wisdom. We can see that Your creation has strayed from You, but You already knew this would happen and it is according to Your plan. We praise You God for Your great wisdom; it is beyond us how You can possibly work all this out; yet, we know that You will; and somehow bring it all together in Jesus Christ.

You have made a way for us to be a part of Your eternal Kingdom; again, through Your Son Jesus. Thank You for this mercy. We worship You for Your grace. We seek the coming of Your Kingdom so that righteousness and light will reign on this world.

By Your mighty word, the earth and the universe came into being. The chaos of the water and the nothingness of darkness were not beyond Your voice. They obeyed Your command by coming into being and continue to obey by existing where You want them for Your glory and according to Your desire.

We praise You in Jesus’ name

Amen