

# IF DARWIN WAS RIGHT

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## Why the Creation-Evolution Debate Won't Go Away

Text: John 1:1-14

### Christianity Is A Worldview

Christianity is much more than what many people have come to take it for in our time. Christianity is *more than a religion* – a set of rites and rituals. Christianity is *more than an ethical code* – a list of do's and don'ts. Christianity is *more than an organization* – a club of people gathered around common interests. Christianity in its fullest sense is *a worldview and the way of life that flows from that view*.

Christians believe that ideas have consequences. They believe that what we think about ourselves, about others, and about the nature of life profoundly influences our feelings and actions, and the culture and civilization that grows from the combined effect of those feelings and actions. In a sense, then, Christians are simply imperfect people in pursuit of perfect ideas, the best possible vision of life as it truly is and can be. They believe that Reality isn't something we have to simply guess at or are free to define as we feel like. They believe that Reality can be known and wants to be known.

The Bible teaches that there is a lot about reality that we will not fully know in this life,<sup>1</sup> but this does not stop us from seeking a greater vision. Along the way, all of us get caught up in lesser ones. We get bogged down in chasing after all the little “logos,” the “idol fascinations” that are on every street corner. We get sucked in by the pull of novelty or celebrity, power or leisure. We lose our minds for awhile.

But then we come to our senses again. We start hungering once more for a grand vision of life. We yearn to draw closer to what the Apostle John and the Greek philosophers before him called the great “Logos” – the divine Word, the supreme Reality at the root of the universe. We at least dimly know as John says, that this **“life is the light”** that we need, that all of humanity needs – that knowing God will help us put together the pieces of the puzzle of life.

This is why our reading from the Gospel of John today is such a significant one. How an ordinary, unschooled fisherman from the back woods of the world became possessed of the insights that he remains one of the great mysteries of history, unless I suppose you believe in the possibility that there is an even greater Mind in the Universe that acts to inspire ordinary people with extraordinary genius now and then. Read with me, if you would, these words as they are found in the Good News According to John... [*Responsive Reading of John 1:1-14*]

### The Ongoing Debate

There is a battle raging once again in America over how we will understand and teach the subject of human origins. It is the subject of a recent *Time* Magazine cover article, entitled *"The Evolution Wars."*<sup>2</sup> It is an increasingly frequent topic in the newspapers. It is being hotly discussed in school boards across the nation. Which brings me to the question for the morning.

Why in the face of all the evidence, will Christians not lighten up and accept that Darwin was right? As one member of this church put it in a letter to me: "Why can't Christians see that Evolution is about HOW things happened and the Bible is about WHY and because of WHOM these things happened?" *Why won't the Creation-Evolution Debate just go away?* There are three major reasons why, I think. They have to do with the issue of authority, the issue of honesty, and the issue of humanity. And, I'll touch briefly on each of these today.

### **The Issue of Authority**

Some Christians struggle with evolutionary theory because of the issue of AUTHORITY. To put it simply, they fear that if Darwin was right, then the Bible is proved wrong. These folks read the Genesis account of a six-day creation. They count out the generations described in the Old Testament and they do the math, concluding that, from a Biblical standpoint, the world as we know it is only about 6,000 years old. Very few of these "*Creationists*" (as they are often called) will go so far as to contend that all those dinosaur bones at the Museum must, therefore, be part of some vast left-wing conspiracy, but a lot of them are worried – and for an understandable reason.

They worry that if we abandon belief in a literal reading of the Bible, then civilization as we know it is up for grabs. If we lose confidence in a reliable authority above all earthly authorities, then people will define God and ethics as what feels good to them at the moment, what gives them power over other people, or what justifies their private agenda. Faced with the choice between the worldview of some biologist from Berkeley and the Book they believe stands between us and self-destruction, they exclaim: "The Bible says it. I believe it. That settles it."

But let me dare to say that this is an unnecessary choice. We do not need to make a choice between biblical authority and scientific inquiry. We simply need a better idea of how to read the Bible and – as I'll say in a minute – how to read science. Let me put my own cards on the table here. I believe the Bible is the highest source of authority we are blessed to take in our hands. No other book has proven so penetrating in its analysis of the subtleties, sin, and splendor of the human condition. No other book has so accurately foretold the detail of events to come. No other book has proven to speak to the heart and mind, to inspire the soul and strength, of human beings across so many centuries and cultures, across the generations and genders, across races and places as "THE Book" does.

I believe, as 2 Timothy 3:17 declares, that **“every part of Scripture is God-breathed and useful one way or another—showing us truth, exposing our rebellion, correcting our mistakes, training us to live God's way. Through the Word we are put together and shaped up for the tasks God has for us.”** We ought to take literally those very large portions where the Bible clearly intends itself to be taken at face value. But we also need to see that sometimes God chooses to convey truth to us instead in parables, in figures of speech, in poetic visions or allegory. These portions of Scripture are every bit as authoritative -- as packed with insight into the character, activity, and desires of God -- as those passages we are to read and apply literally.

The biblical account of Creation is an allegory. Of course, God could have given us a strict biological account if He'd wanted to. It would have been dull. We'd probably have missed the far more important message. So God cut to the bottom line: He tells us that He started it all, that He created progressively, that He set up certain key relationships and boundaries which if respected would make everything work perfectly but which, if violated, would create a campus like Berkeley or Yale – or like my basement playroom!

John's Gospel recaps the important part in similar poetry: **“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God... Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. In him was life, and that life was the light of humanity. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has [never been able to put it out.]”** As Francis Collins, the head of the Human Genome Project and a devout Christian believes, God's Word remains the greatest Authority through which pours the Light this world needs, and evolutionary science is not a threat to it<sup>3</sup> – *most* of the time.

### **The Issue of Honesty**

I say *most* of the time simply because there are moments when it begins to look as if Darwin was right, then at least some scientists are no longer being honest. Darwin himself, you see, was ruthlessly honest. In his book, *The Origin of Species*, Darwin wrote this: “If it could be demonstrated that any complex organ existed which could not possibly have been formed by numerous, successive, slight modifications, my theory would absolutely break down.”<sup>4</sup> And this issue is the second reason why the Creation-Evolution debate just won't go away.

Advocates of what has come to be called “Intelligent Design” theory are now wondering why some scientists will not at least admit the fact that there are places where evolutionary process seems to have had a boost from someplace. They point to many examples of the very kind of “irreducible complexity” that Darwin himself wondered about long before he had the tools to study life on the most microscopic level. From the movement of the flagellum that powers a sperm cell, to the tiny hairs we call cilia

that aid in digestion, to the magnificent working of a single eye, nature includes a staggering number of complex systems which could not work if any of the constituent parts were pulled out and whose individual parts have no apparent reason for coming into being by natural selection alone.

The mathematical improbability of these complex systems simply arising spontaneously has made theists out of an increasing number of mathematicians. The sudden appearance of advanced biological functions at various moments in history for which there is no fossil record even beginning to suggest their incremental development -- are taken by a reputable body of scientists as a compelling witness to the possibility that an outside intelligence has been at work in the design and progression of life.

As I said earlier, God could have, I suppose, done the whole thing through standard evolutionary process, but if you are interested in exploring why some scientists think otherwise, I commend for your reading the provocative articles contained in a book called *Signs of Intelligence*,<sup>5</sup> available through our bookstore. I found it hard to read this material and not walk away resonating more fully with the words of the Psalmist: **"I praise you God, because I am fearfully and wonderfully made."**<sup>6</sup>

### **The Issue of Humanity**

It is finally, I think, the issue of humanity – even more than the issue of biblical authority and intellectual honesty – that makes it important for a lively debate about evolution to continue in our time. You see, if Darwin was right, we are still left with the need to explain the wonder that is humanity.

It may interest you to know that Darwin himself was concerned about this. Darwin was the son of a minister and seriously considered entering the pastoral ministry himself. He saw his research as one means of explaining how a good God could have set up a system that would necessarily involve a certain amount of random suffering and strife, disease and deformity, but also give rise to the creative adaptations that would enable species to rise above the pain. In Darwin's worldview, for example, God would not be blamed for the devastation caused by hurricanes, especially if it turned out that man's treatment of the environment or ill-advised building choices had contributed to his pain. Provided by their Creator with amazing brains, human beings would be expected to adapt in ways that would keep their affliction from occurring so widely or so often.

Today, however, evolutionary theory is often being used to support a worldview that has no such nobility to it. Darwin would roll in his grave like a Galapagos lizard to see his ideas morphing into the philosophy now called "Scientific Naturalism." Richard Dawkins, the Oxford professor who is one of the leading prophets of this worldview says this: *"The universe we observe has precisely the properties we should expect if there is at bottom no design, no purpose, not evil and no good, nothing but pointless*

*indifference.*" Life is merely an accidental machine, devoid of any transcendent meaning, hope, or soul.

What is the version of reality that gets created by the logical outworking of those ideas? It is a world in which people are free to terminate the physically weak or ignore the plight of the disadvantaged on the grounds that the natural order is "survival of the fittest." It is a world in which human beings can't really be expected to transcend their appetite for sex, food, or power over others, because they are only higher-grade animals doing what comes "naturally." It is a world in which people could freely choose to grow and harvest other human beings for their own survival. For as Dostoyevsky once remarked, seeing this view of reality playing itself out in Russia: "If God does not exist, then everything is permissible."

But what if this isn't reality? What might happen then and how can Naturalism account for it? How does the law of the jungle explain a people who sense that not everything is permissible, even when it would satisfy their appetite to do it? How does it account for a species schooled for centuries in an environment of tyranny and rank, suddenly rising up and declaring: "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all people are created equal... that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights"?

How does Naturalism explain the prisoner of war who sacrifices the bread he so clearly needed to keep him alive, in order to save a sick cellmate? How does Richard Dawkins account for the fact that the people he tries to shred with his intellectual claws still pray for his soul? How does a universe of pointless indifference bring into being a collection of cells who can imagine a world where no one's indifferent and all life is sacred? How does a species that consists only of random molecules stuck together for a season, have the capacity to conceive of a Reality made up of Spirit and a World without end?

Evolution alone cannot explain the dignity and self-transcending consciousness of humanity. But there is something which does: **"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God... Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. In him was life, and that life was the light of humanity. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has never been – will never be -- able to put it out."**

What that Light tells us is that you might indeed have come from the dirt of the earth, the dust of the cosmos, but you must never forget that you are *God's* dirt. God has taken you in his hand, pressed you in the heat of His love, and made of your carbon a diamond -- a human being, the jewel of creation, fashioned to reflect God's glory and bring blessing to others. Never forget this truth, nor what it means that you have been made a human being.

Please pray with me...

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<sup>1</sup> 1 Corinthians 13:9-12

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<sup>2</sup> Claudia Wallis, "The Evolution Wars," *Time Magazine*, August 15, 2005.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, p.34

<sup>4</sup> Charles Darwin, *The Origin of Species*, 6<sup>th</sup> edition, p.154.

<sup>5</sup> William A. Dembski & James M. Kushiner eds., *Signs of Intelligence: Understanding Intelligent Design*, 2001.

<sup>6</sup> Psalm 139:14.