

Q&A: Do you believe in biological evolution – in terms of the origin of life?

Anonymous asks:



Do you believe in biological evolution – in terms of the origin of life?

It might sound like a strange thing to ask a Christian, but some people believe that it is plausible that God created the evolutionary process and that the Genesis 6 days of creation were not literal 24 hour days, allowing to marry old earth theory (billions of years) with the bible.

There was a time when I used to hold to this belief.

Big topic I know, but in brief, what's your take?

Cheers

□

Hopefully you won't be upset by something of a non-answer here. Why the non-answer? Because this is a topic that divides Christians and needlessly complicates the gospel message as seen by non-Christians. At a certain level the question (or rather the precise answer) of origins is a secondary one.

This is not to say that I am anything-goes though. I am a *creationist* – note that I haven't said 'Creation Scientist' or 'Young Earth Creationist' or other such thing – my non-answer remains. I do firmly believe that God created the heavens and

the earth and all that is in them.

Further I believe that Genesis has much to tell us about creation. Genesis affirms (in significant contrast to many creation myths) that God is the agent of creation, that he creates *ex nihilo*, that creation is well-ordered, purposefully and inherently *good*. Genesis gives me insight into the relationships between humanity and the world, humanity and God, and within humanity itself. I look to Genesis and I learn about stewardship and toil, marriage and intimacy, faithfulness and obedience. I recognise the origins of the sin that I see in myself, I recognise the grace of God that we now know fully revealed in Jesus Christ.

Genesis is the Word of God. It is Truth.

I do not necessarily see in Genesis the outworking of how God did this. The genre of early Genesis is more akin to apocalyptic writing such as Revelation than narrative history.

That is not to say that it is not historical. It has internal consistency and there is sense in the narrative however it is taken – absolutely literally, imprecisely literally (such as the “gap theory”), descriptively literally, etc. etc.

I am a person who is well-schooled and well-educated. I understand what science is, and is not. I understand its bounds and recognise the questions it can and cannot answer.

I know the difference between science that postulates, experiments and repeats, and science that observes, extrapolates and contends. I am aware that statements of extrapolated facts given by some scientists are at least over zealous, sometimes even biased.

I disagree with how many humanist rationalists attempt to use Genesis – asserting “this is what the Bible absolutely literally says, and it is stupid.” I also disagree with many religious rationalists who make a similarly wrong step, just

in the opposite direction “this is what the Bible absolutely literally says, and we should take it absolutely literally like that irrespective of other inputs.”

So, I rejoice that God has made me, designed this world. I rejoice in its beauty, I ache for its woundedness, I long for its redemption. I am, therefore, a non-answer creationist, and that is all.

Q&A: Forgiveness... can you explore and unpack the topic (a little) and steer us towards some useful scripture.

Dave 0 asks:

Forgiveness. I've heard it said:-

“My dear wife I forgive you for last night's dinner!” is judgement rather than forgiveness – and I think I'd agree.

In a circumstance like sexual abuse we are “moving in a direction of forgiveness (and may never get there this side of heaven).” – which to me at least feels like a cop out.

“I forgave him as my gift to myself” – which doesn't seem to really be forgiveness.

“We forgive as God forgave us” i.e. unrepentant and dead in their sins – which I am inclined to, but ponder just how you

do it, if that is the call.

Will, can you explore and unpack the topic (a little) and steer us towards some useful scripture.

Hi Dave 0

Two parts of scripture. Matthew 18:21-35, which in the ESV is as follows, and on which my boss preached the other week.

21 Then Peter came up and said to him, “Lord, how often will my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? As many as seven times?” 22 Jesus said to him, “I do not say to you seven times, but seventy-seven times.

23 “Therefore the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his servants.⁷ 24 When he began to settle, one was brought to him who owed him ten thousand talents.⁸ 25 And since he could not pay, his master ordered him to be sold, with his wife and children and all that he had, and payment to be made. 26 So the servant⁹ fell on his knees, imploring him, ‘Have patience with me, and I will pay you everything.’ 27 And out of pity for him, the master of that servant released him and forgave him the debt. 28 But when that same servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii,¹⁰ and seizing him, he began to choke him, saying, ‘Pay what you owe.’ 29 So his fellow servant fell down and pleaded with him, ‘Have patience with me, and I will pay you.’ 30 He refused and went and put him in prison until he should pay the debt. 31 When his fellow servants saw what had taken place, they were greatly distressed, and they went and reported to their master all that had taken place. 32 Then his master summoned him and said to him, ‘You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. 33 And should not you have had mercy on your fellow servant, as I had mercy on you?’ 34 And in anger his master delivered him to the jailers,¹¹ until he should pay all his debt. 35 So also my heavenly Father will do to every one of you, if you do not

forgive your brother from your heart."

And Romans 12:9-21

*9 Let love be genuine. Abhor what is evil; hold fast to what is good. 10 Love one another with brotherly affection. w0utdo one another in showing honor. 11 Do not be slothful in zeal, be fervent in spirit,⁷ serve the Lord. 12 Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer. 13 Contribute to the needs of the saints and seek to show hospitality. 14 Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. 15 Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. 16 Live in harmony with one another. Do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly.⁸ Never be wise in your own sight. 17 Repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all. 18 If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. **19 Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it⁹ to the wrath of God, for it is written, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord."** 20 To the contrary, "if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink; for by so doing you will heap burning coals on his head." 21 Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.*

Which takes us to Deuteronomy 32 which is in the context of noting Israel's rebelliousness and their rejection of God's grace.

"'Is not this laid up in store with me, sealed up in my treasuries?

35 Vengeance is mine, and recompense,⁶ for the time when their foot shall slip; for the day of their calamity is at hand, and their doom comes swiftly.'

36 For the Lord will vindicate⁷ his people and have compassion on his servants, when he sees that their power is gone

and there is none remaining, bond or free.

So here's my take on it:

God is judge. Sometimes the path of justice is clear. Sometimes the path of justice is murky. Either way, we are not able to be the judge because we neither have the capacity to see through the mirk, nor the integrity to condemn a fellow sinner. Vindication does not come from the assertion of our rights but when we are submitted under the grace of God when "our power is gone."

The outworking of this submission is in two modes. Firstly, when it comes to the dealing with our "brothers", as Peter asks Christ. The instruction to forgive here is in the context of ensuring the body/family of Christ demonstrates the grace of God. This involves truth, sometimes hard truth and conflict management as spelled out earlier in Matthew 18, and is towards repentance and reconciliation. The dynamic here is clearly one of an issue being faced, repentance occurring, and forgiveness offered. I don't think this is controversial.

The second mode is the more abstract dealing with the wrongs of this world. Paul's imperatives help us here as we are instructed to not be slothful, haughty, etc. Of particular relevance is his referral to dealings with people who are not brothers but enemies, and our interaction with evil. This mode takes us back to our "emptiness" before God. We are not to be "wise in our own sight" and so be overcome by evil, but to overcome evil with good. That good coheres with the notion of "do not avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God." This is not forgiveness in the sense of responding to repentance but the individual responsibility of "so far as it depends on you, leave peaceably with all." This is impossible without that empty reliance on the grace of God – which is faith. Faith that he will actually do justice, bring vindication, deal with this on his terms which are better than

my own.

Looking at your two examples of “moving in a direction of forgiveness” and “forgiving as a gift to myself” – I think much of the inadequacy of these articulations can be alleviated by applying the above modes rather than the over-used term of “forgiveness.” The mode towards the unrepentant abuser is not so much forgiveness but “vengeance is yours, oh Lord, I trust you to judge him.” The “gift to myself” is the recognition that judgement is a heavy load to bear – and to hand vengeance to Christ is to take up the yoke and burden of grace that is easier and light.

Hope this helps.

W.

Q&A: As an Anglican, what do you believe [about the intermediate state]?

Anonymous asks:



Hi Will,

Growing up, I was taught that when a person dies they go directly to heaven or hell. Of course the biblical teachings of the “resurrection of life” and the “resurrection of damnation” seem to contradict this view. To overcome this discrepancy, as I am aware, some teach that the resurrection only involves the physical body and that the dead, prior to their resurrection, are consciously aware and living in “spirit”. This teaching, to my understanding, is not cohesive with Scripture in it’s entirety, and in a number of instances I find it completely incompatible, both in it’s application and to the very nature of God.

I believe the bible is very clear on the matter – The dead know nothing. Unconsciously, ceasing to be, until Jesus resurrects us from the dead. – When we consider the application it truly is remarkable – for within a state of unconsciousness time is no more. Between death and the resurrection is like a “blink of an eye” – and – we all are brought to God at the same time. A remarkably beautiful reunion.

I am curious. As an Anglican, what do you believe?

Thanks

Hi Anon and thanks for the question. This is the topic of the *Intermediate State* and is a subject that has received much debate over the years/centuries.

You specifically ask me “as an Anglican” so I’ll start there.

The 39 articles are not particularly attentive to the “Intermediate State” but they do reject the form of it that is clearly extra-biblical, and that is the concept of purgatory around which a Roman Catholic sacramental system was cemented.

Article XXII clearly states that purgatory is “a fond thing vainly invented, and grounded upon no warranty of Scripture, but rather repugnant to the Word of God.” In all that I talk about below I am *not* talking about purgatory.

The 1662 Book of Common Prayer includes much eschatological language and expressions of eternal hope – these do not interact with the question at hand because they allude to the final state. We must note, however, that in the intermediate time the BCP draws upon a framework of “Christ’s Church militant here in earth” and the “Church Triumphant” who in some sense are present with Jesus. And so we see, for instance:

*The glorious company of the Apostles : praise thee.
The goodly fellowship of the Prophets : praise thee.
The noble army of Martyrs : praise thee.
The holy Church throughout all the world : doth acknowledge thee*

– *Te Deum Laudamus, Morning Prayer*

THEREFORE with Angels and Archangels, and with all the company of heaven, we laud and magnify thy glorious Name; evermore praising thee, and saying, Holy, holy, holy, Lord God of hosts, heaven and earth are full of thy glory: Glory be to thee, O Lord most High. Amen

– *Preface in Communion*

We meekly beseech thee, O Father, to raise us from the death of sin unto the life of righteousness; that, when we shall depart this life, we may rest in him, as our hope is this our brother doth; and that, at the general Resurrection in the last day, we may be found acceptable in thy sight; and receive that blessing, which thy well-beloved Son shall then pronounce to all that love and fear thee, saying, Come, ye blessed children of my Father, receive the kingdom prepared for you from the beginning of the world: Grant this, we beseech thee, O merciful Father, through Jesus Christ, our Mediator and Redeemer. Amen.

– *Collect in Holy Burial*

Language such as this implies an intermediate state, associates it with rest and peace and worship – but does not equate it with the culmination of the kingdom or the ultimate resurrection. This is in line with more recently espoused Anglican theology such as that of N. T. Wright (I reviewed the book of his that most engages with this topic) who decries an escapist framework whereby the gospel is couched in terms of departing to heaven when we die, rather than in terms of seeing the Kingdom of God come to this earth in its fullness when we are raised from the dead. N. T. Wright's framework only holds together exegetically if some passages of Scripture are seen to be referring to the ultimate resurrection and other passages are seen to be referring to an intermediate state.

You say "the bible is very clear on the matter." It would be helpful if you could point me to the parts of the Bible which you draw on to provide that clarity. It's hard to engage otherwise.

There are certainly parts of Scripture that do seem to clearly imply an intermediate state. From the fact that Samuel can appear before the witch of Endor, and the framework undergirding the parable of Lazarus and the Rich Man, to affirmations from Jesus that the thief on the cross will be with him that day in paradise, and references to a great cloud of saintly witnesses.

I have certain degree of sympathy with your view, and recognise its beauty. I have a friend, a mechanical engineer, who suggests that in the intermediate state time is shaped as a parabola so that no matter at what point you enter it you get to the end at the same time – we, who die before the parousia, all arrive together to accompany the bridegroom to collect his bride. That too, has beauty.

In the end, I am comfortable with a post-death pre-resurrection form of existence as the church triumphant

celebrates and awaits the fullness of the Kingdom of God. But whatever the viewpoint, the eventual promise is the same, and that is what is at the heart of the gospel.