



**Village
Bible
Church**



Doctrine Of Origin

Key Biblical and Theological Convictions of Village

Ratified by the guiding elders on 1/6/2020.

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References:

John Piper: goo.gl/Yjxhn

Evolution: www.thevillagechurch.net/mediafiles/evolution.pdf

Doctrine of Origins: www.heritageefc.net/origins.pdf

Along with writings listed at the end of this document.

The Doctrine of Origins

B.B. Warfield, one of the great thinkers of the Christian world back in the late 19th century and into the early decades of the 20th century, pointed out that the Christian doctrine of creation—the fact that God created the world—is the sole sufficient requirement for the fact that God can be Lord over this world. He cannot be Lord, He cannot be sovereign over creation, if he did not create it. Conversely, as Warfield said, if God created the world, then he is in charge of it. It is his, it is his possession, and it reflects his glory and his purposes. That states very clearly the alternatives that are before us. We can either believe that the world is as the Scripture reveals made by God, by a sovereign act, by his Word in order to display his glory and in order to present the theater for the drama of redemption, or we can understand that the world is merely an accident that somehow matter and time and energy intersected in such a way that through a “Big Bang,” as it is called, or by some other means, nothing simply became something.

The Christian worldview is predicated first of all upon the fact that God is the sovereign Creator of the world. That is exactly what the apostle Paul said in Acts chapter 17 to the Athenians. That is the first point, the first principle, the first axiom of the Christian worldview. If God did not create the world, then God is himself a created being; and that is a huge problem. The only other alternative worldview is Dualism in which there is the existence of God and creation independent of one another. Any way you look at it, nothing is compatible with the biblical worldview, nothing is compatible with Christianity, but the Christian doctrine of creation.

In the last several centuries, the doctrine of origins has become a tremendously divisive issue - both between Christians and non-Christians and even among Christians themselves. This paper seeks to define the boundaries within which views on the Doctrine of Origins must reside in order to be considered acceptable teaching at Village Bible Church. There is a broad spectrum of belief regarding this issue, but of course all such beliefs cannot be correct since many of them contradict one another. If we picture the broadest possible spectrum of belief regarding the Doctrine of Origins, the poles could be defined by Young Earth Solar Day Creationism on one side and Atheistic Naturalism on the other. All other positions, including those of non-Christian religions, appear to fall somewhere in between. Since Scripture represents the range of acceptable Christian belief from within this larger spectrum, the task of this paper is not to determine a single interpretation of the relevant Biblical passages to which all members of Village Bible Church must subscribe. Rather, it is our goal to determine what does and does not constitute a valid interpretive option of such texts.

In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.

So begins the truthful Scriptures, which God inspired as an authoritative guide to the orthodox faith.

First of all, let's start with scripture itself. We believe the Scriptures, both Old and New Testaments, to be the inspired Word of God, without error in the original writings, the complete revelation of His will for the salvation of men and the Divine and final authority for Christian faith and life. Accordingly, we believe that God created the world and all of its creatures. This is made clear in many passages:

- Job 38:4-7 Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth? Tell me, if you have understanding. Who determined its measurements—surely you know! Or who stretched the line upon it? On what were its bases sunk, or who laid its cornerstone, when the morning stars sang together and all the sons of God shouted for joy?
- Psalm 33:6 By the word of the LORD the heavens were made, and by the breath of his mouth all their host.
- Isaiah 42:5 Thus says God, the LORD, who created the heavens and stretched them out, who spread out the earth and what comes from it, who gives breath to the people on it and spirit to those who walk in it...
- Isaiah 45:18 For thus says the LORD, who created the heavens (he is God!), who formed the earth and made it (he established it; he did not create it empty, he formed it to be inhabited!): "I am the LORD, and there is no other..."
- John 1:1-3 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made.
- Acts 17:24-25 The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in temples made by man, nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything.
- Colossians 1:16 For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him.
- Hebrews 11:3 By faith we understand that the universe was created by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things that are visible.
- Revelation 4:11 "Worthy are you, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they existed and were created."

One of the unfortunate consequences of the 20th century fight with liberalism was the tendency of many fundamentalists to cling too tightly to non-fundamentals, such that essential truths became diluted. For example, creationism as a belief became associated only with "new earth" proponents who taught a literal 24-hour day creation account. Therefore, faithful brothers and sisters who loved the Lord and His Scriptures, but held to an interpretation of the "days" of Genesis 1 as being possibly longer than 24 hours, were deemed to be liberals and thus opposed at all costs. In addition, any interpretations which included recognition of literary devices such as poetry in the creation account were judged to be outside the boundaries of orthodox Christian thought.

Common Positions

It should prove helpful at the outset to define some of the more common interpretive positions.

Solar Day Creationism (Young Earth Creationism)

Those who adhere to this position hold that the earth was created in six literal solar days of approximately 24 hours each. Using the information contained in Biblical genealogies, the age of the earth is calculated at a relatively recent time, usually posited to be approximately 6,000 – 25,000 years ago depending on if you view the Biblical genealogies as exhaustive or selective.

Further, this position asserts that every “kind”² of animal was created via a special divine act and that macro-evolution (evolution from one kind/species to another) has not occurred.

Day Age/Day Phase Creationism (Old Earth Creationism)

Day Age Creationists hold that the six days of Genesis 1 refer not to solar days but to longer periods of time, i.e. “ages” or “phases.” In the minds of many Solar Day apologists, Day Age Creationism is associated with Theistic Evolution. However this affiliation cannot be assumed in every case. Many Day Age Creationists deny macro-evolution as vehemently as Solar Day Creationists and argue only that God created life as we know it in six distinct phases, during which special acts of creation were followed by indeterminate periods of allowing that life to propagate on the earth.

While some Day Age Creationists hold that death occurred during these ages and that the curse of death in Genesis 3:19 refers only to human death, others hold that there was no death of any kind during these ages and that Adam brought the curse on all of creation.

For some Day Age Creationists, this position represents an attempt to harmonize the current scientific theories about the age of the universe with the Biblical witness. For others, such scientific theories are irrelevant and this position is held solely on the basis of interpretive considerations related to Genesis 1 & 2.

(Day Age Creationism is sometimes referred to as Progressive Creationism or Process Creationism, but this term is misleading. Even Solar Day Creationists are technically Progressive Creationists since they believe that each solar day saw a different aspect of Creation brought into being.)

Gap Theory

Adherents of this position hold essentially that there is a gap between Genesis 1:1 and Genesis 1:2. Genesis 1:1, is held to refer to God’s creation of the universe, replete with life, which then was allowed to proceed/degenerate for some indeterminate time period, after which He began to create again from pre-existing materials, as referenced in Genesis 1:2. The Gap Theory attempts to square the sometimes puzzling geological record with the Biblical witness.

¹ James Ussher, *The Annals of the World*, IV (1658).

² “Kind,” which translates the Hebrew word *min* (cf. Gen 1:21, et al.) is not an easy term to define explicitly. It overlaps somewhat with the term “species,” but is not perfectly synonymous with it. “Species” is generally defined within the scientific community as reproductive isolation, either genetically or geographically, but this definition is too imprecise and the biologists continue to debate this subject extensively.

Theistic Evolution

Adherents to this position hold that the universe and the earth are as old as current scientific theories propose and that life as we know it has been continually evolving from simple to more complex organisms. However, Theistic Evolutionists do not hold that this process has been uncaused or undirected as their Naturalistic counterparts do. Rather, they hold either that God set the basic laws of evolution in place so that the end result would be as He decreed, or that God has been selectively intervening in the natural process at critical junctures. One such juncture that is often suggested is the creation of human beings. Theistic Evolutionists generally hold that human beings developed from other organisms but that either they reached a certain point at which they became human, perhaps because it was at this time that God gave them souls.

Naturalistic Evolution (Unguided Evolution)

The Naturalistic evolution theory posits the view that new species of life came into being as a result of natural causes only, that is, without any supernatural intervention. Thus it is a view that was expressly intended to take God out of the picture of creation.

The primary claim of naturalistic evolutionists is that human beings "have developed over millions of years from less advanced forms of life" without any supernatural intervention. The secondary claim is that science can explain this process satisfactorily in terms of natural forces and processes. When naturalistic evolutionists say that someone "believes in evolution", they imply that the person accepts both the primary and the secondary claim.

Analysis

Solar Day Creationism is almost universally considered to be a valid interpretation of the biblical teaching. Since there are no more conservative options that we are aware of, it seems safe to designate Solar Day Creationism as one boundary of acceptable teaching. The key question under consideration here, of course, involves what constitutes the other boundary.

Some of the questions raised in regard to the doctrine of origins are presently unanswerable with absolute certainty. The age of the earth, the length of the divine creative process and the possibility of animal and plant death prior to the Fall are all issues which cannot be settled conclusively on the basis of the evidence available to us. Differing beliefs on such issues should not, therefore, be a cause for breaking fellowship with other believers. These are not questions essential to salvation. Other questions related to this doctrine, however, are both more easily settled and of greater significance.

For the sake of simplicity, below are the tenets of the creation/ evolution debate which we find to be most representative of a faithful interpretation of the Scriptures. This is the case even if one views Genesis 1-3 as poetic, as poetry is not antithetical to truth or accuracy. For example, roses truly are red and sugar really is sweet.

- 1. The Genesis account of creation is historical fact and not a metaphor or myth.**
- 2. The physical world and universe were created distinctly by God; this created order presents a coherent cosmos that bears the imprint of the rational mind of God.** When we engage in a study of the world, we are not merely involved in a mental phenomenon; we are studying a world wholly dependent on its Creator for its origin and sustenance, both in form and function (Romans 11:36; Colossians 1:16, 17). This world is a distinct reality to which God has given inherent powers, properties, processes and structures that govern its interactions and operations. It rests fully and always on God's sustaining power for its very being and operations (Job 38, 39; Psalm 24:1, 2; Psalm 104).
- 3. God created the world and the universe out of nothing. It is not co-eternal with God. It wasn't always here. It didn't spontaneously emerge without His doing.**

What is essential here is that the triune Creator created all creation. Historic orthodoxy has stated that creation was *ex nihilo* which is Latin for "out of nothing" meaning that God did not use that which previously existed in His creation of the world, but rather that all creation came into being through His word.

Unlike humans, who create things from preexisting matter, God created "something" out of nothing, and that reality is distinct from Himself (Genesis 1:1, 2; Acts 17:24; Hebrews 11:3).

What is peripheral to this belief is the issue of 24-hour days and the consequent age of the earth. The Hebrew *yom* which is translated as "day" in most English versions of the Bible often refers to a distinct 24-hour day, but also frequently applies to any certain period of time. What is therefore critical is not that we teach that God created the earth in 6 (the 7th being a day of rest) distinct 24 hour periods, but rather that He created the earth in 6 *yoms*.

- 4. Adam and Eve are real historical people. God directly created one man (Adam) and from that one man created one woman (Eve). He made them of the dust of the ground. All humanity is therefore descended from this man and woman.**

This belief closes the door on macroevolution, which teaches that all life forms, including humans, share a common ancestor. The Scriptures are clear in the teaching of the unique creation of "Adam" and "Eve" (Genesis 2) and that all humanity is descended from them. Acts 17:26 says, "And he made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place..." This belief is critical within the Christian account of the fall and subsequent doctrine of original sin and has great soteriological (the study of salvation) connotations as the universal relationship of all humanity under Adam is pictured along with the specific relationship of the Church under Christ in such passages as Romans 5:12-21. In addition, this understanding of the historicity of Adam and Eve is crucial to a proper understanding of the uniqueness of humanity as distinct image bearers of the Creator (Genesis 1:27, 9:6).

- 5. Man had his beginning not millions of years ago but within the scope of the biblical genealogies. Those genealogies are tight at about 6,000 years and loose at 25,000.**
- 6. God made it absolutely good. There was no sin in it, when he first made it.**

The physical world, originally created by God, was perfectly good. God observed that the creation was "good" on six occasions in His creative process (Genesis 1). God saw that each thing was performing its assigned functions within the economy of creation. The Incarnation - God becoming fully human in Jesus Christ while remaining fully divine - supports the goodness of creation in that it would have to be good for the perfectly good God to take on physical existence while remaining divine and utterly holy. The good, however, has been corrupted. We believe that our first parents sinned by rebelling against God's revealed will. The Fall, subsequent to the Creation, resulted in all humans being born with a sinful nature, fully in need of redemption. Christ - in the mystery of the Incarnation, conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, true God and true man, existing in one person and without sin - served as the representative and substitutionary sacrifice for the sins of humankind (Hebrews 10:5-10).

- 7. God created each class of organism according to their respective "kinds" and these classes are never transgressed or transformed in such a way that the organism evolves into a new "kind".**

While macroevolution is outside of the boundaries of the Scriptures, there is much room for microevolution which is evolution within a certain species. For example, many species have grown larger or smaller in relationship to their changing environments. Such adaptation within a distinct species is in no way antithetical to the Christian faith and its Scriptures. For this reason, when someone asks a Christian whether or not he or she believes in "evolution," the ambiguity of such a term should lead one to seek clarification as to what type is being referenced. (e.g. no fish evolving into rats, but the dog "kind" gradually diversifying into the various breeds we have extant today)

- 8. Human death, both physically and spiritually, was a result of Adam's sin and was not part of the pre-Fall world.**
- 9. The precise age of the earth and the length of the divine creative process cannot be absolutely determined on the basis of the biblical evidence. Strong beliefs and debate are both permissible and encouraged. Dogmatic exclusivism on the issue of the age of the earth and the length of the divine creative process is deemed unjustifiable and unhealthy to the body of Christ.**

Determination

In conclusion, we are confident that God designed and created the physical world, that this world bears the imprint of its rational Creator, that He is the author of all life, and, especially, that He directly created the first human pair. Yet our stance leaves certain issues open. The most notable of these issues are the age of the Earth, the age of the cosmos, as well as the means used by God to create the variegated array of life on our planet. We are firm in our conviction that God created all of humankind through the direct creation of a historical Adam and Eve. We hold fast to the truth that through one man (Adam) humankind fell, and through one man (Christ) humankind is saved. We embrace God's creative design and action in the created order.

When it comes to the acceptable views for our members, we would say that while the doctrine of origins is an important position it is a secondary one. However, we believe strongly that it is altogether incompatible for a member of VBC to hold to a naturalistic view of evolution. Unlike any of the other positions that have been shared in this paper naturalistic evolution shuts the door to God being the creator and originator in the creative process. We deny the theory of naturalistic evolution, which states that nonliving substances gave rise to the first living material, which then reproduced and diversified to produce all living creatures.

Todd Wilson says it well when he says, "The idea of unguided evolution is incompatible with Christian theism. Within the biblical worldview, nothing is random. Not even a sparrow falls to the ground apart from the will of God (Matt. 10:29). If in fact God created the biological diversity we see through mutation and natural selection, then he superintended the process every single step of the way. Evolution would thus be a thoroughly directed process, the means by which God has chosen to bring about life throughout history."³ Likewise we affirm that creation ultimately exists for Christ. He is its source, its goal, its meaning. Scripture describes Jesus with these soaring words, "He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together" (Col. 1:15–17, ESV).⁴

God chose to create the universe and all that is in it to reveal His glory, divine nature, eternal power, infinite wisdom, and supreme authority (Isaiah 43:7; Psalm 19:1-2; Jeremiah 10:12; Romans 1:20; Revelation 4:11). God rules over His creation and cares about and is involved in the lives of individual people (Job 12:10; Acts 17:25; Colossians 1:17; Hebrews 1:13; Ephesians 4:6). In review which positions can be held by members of VBC:

- Solar Day Creationism (Young Earth Creationism)
- Day Age/Day Phase Creationism (Old Earth Creationism)
- Gap Theory
- Theistic Evolution

While each of these views have varied levels of strengths and weaknesses and while the Guiding Elders do not hold all these views as equally valid we do understand these four

³<https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2019/january-web-only/ten-theses-creation-evolution-evangelicals.html>

⁴ ibid

views to be held by Christian scholars and teachers as well as our own members that we respect. Therefore for the sake of charity we do not seek to make this issue one of primary importance and thus is not to be used as a barrier for membership. We know that this may mean a vast difference in any two members' view regarding origins so our exhortation is that all our members strive to treat all views within these boundaries charitably, respectfully, and intelligently as we discuss these controversial matters. We believe that we honor Christ by taking precisely this approach, and we think that this is a biblically faithful and academically honest way to impart knowledge.

A Word To Our Teachers

In James 3:1 we are told that teachers are held to a higher standard when it comes to God, so it is within any local church. Teachers within a local church are given a platform and voice to share their thoughts on God's word and doctrines of the Christian faith. All teaching in the church falls under the oversight and accountability of the Guiding Elders. The reason for this is so that there might be consistency in teaching no matter the setting or audience. To that end it is imperative for the elders to present for its teachers a standard teaching position regarding origins. So for the sake of consistency and unity of teaching involving all the campuses of Village Bible Church is the following:

We believe that the Word of God is an objective, propositional revelation (1 Thes 2:13; 1 Cor 2:13), verbally inspired in every word (2 Tim 3:16), absolutely inerrant in the original documents, infallible, and God-breathed. We teach the literal, grammatical-historical interpretation of Scripture which affirms the belief that the opening chapters of Genesis present creation in six literal days (Gen 1:31; Ex 31:17).

While this position should be the core of any teaching on the subject of creation it is our recommendation that any teaching on this subject give time and attention to the varied positions and the reasons behind each of these views in a charitable and non-dogmatic spirit. Any teaching that elevates this position to a primary issue will be out of step with the Guiding Elders and the spirit of this paper. To that end Todd Wilson shares some helpful reminders that should permeate all teaching and discussion of this topic.⁵ First, the doctrine of Creation is altogether important and should be studied by both the church and Christ-followers. Second, there is no final conflict between the Bible rightly understood and the facts of science rightly understood. God's "two books," Scripture and nature, ultimately agree. Therefore Christians should approach the claims of contemporary science with both interest and discernment, confident that all truth is God's truth. Sadly, Christians are known less for enthusiasm and more for their skepticism toward science. But the truth is that Christians do not need to be nervous about the findings of contemporary science—as though science might unearth a defeater to the Christian faith. It won't. It can't. Third, Christians should be well grounded in the Bible's teaching on creation but always hold their views with humility, respecting the convictions of others and not aggressively advocating for positions on which evangelicals disagree. Finally, everything in creation finds its source, goal, and meaning in Jesus Christ, in whom the whole of creation will one day achieve eschatological redemption and renewal. All things will be united in him, things in heaven and things on earth.

⁵ ibid

Final Thoughts

In this paper we have sought to address our doctrinal boundaries as a local church when it comes to the doctrine of origins. We do so seeking to understand: What degree of diversity will we allow? And given our diversity, what can we still affirm together as a unifying doctrinal core? While we weren't looking for perfect unanimity. Our ultimate goal was to maintain the "unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace" (Eph. 4:3) and to prioritize the gospel as of "first importance" (1 Cor. 15:3) and to arrive to a position on this issue that was in keeping with that faithful Christian saying, "In essentials, unity; in nonessentials, liberty; in all things, charity." May that be the case.

