

Importance of Origins

Review

Our objective up to this point has been to prepare our minds for continual change. We want to be transformed in our way of looking at the world so that it agrees with God's view. As we saw in our last lesson God's viewpoint does not coincide with man's. Man may harden his heart to God, but this does not change the truth of God and His final authority.

Remember how God confronted Adam and Eve in the garden? He came to them in hiding and approached them with the question, "where are you?" God used a question to help Adam and Eve think through their own HVP. He then took them back to the historical command that He had given them, specifically not eating from the tree of good and evil.

Adam and Eve had considered themselves as the final authority of what was right and wrong. They wanted to weigh out what they thought best; to believe God (the Creator) or to believe Satan (a creature). In the end they made the decision and they followed Satan's direction. We will talk more about this in future lessons, but we need to realize that God did not accept their attempt to be a final authority. Nor did he accept that they could appeal to some neutral ground in which there was no responsibility. Rather God held them responsible and judged them according to their sin. In the end, Adam and Eve changed their HVP to reflect God's DVP.

We want to change our HVP as well. Our desire is to see our HVP overcome by a deep trust in DVP. By studying God's Word in the present we can prepare ourselves for the stressful situations that are sure to come in the future. Rather than waiting for a difficult circumstance to come and take us off guard, we want to think through our DVP strategy now. Establishing what God has said on the major areas of life is where we will start; remembering to apply what we learn through the ReConnect drill.

Faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ. (Romans 10:17)

We also discussed the importance of being prepared with a DVP strategy in order to respond to the questioning unbeliever. When you apply the ReConnect Drill in your life, there will be a time when others notice how you respond to difficult circumstances. This will bring questions from the unbeliever about how you are able to deal with this or that. 1 Peter 3:15 tells us to be ready to respond to these questions giving a reason for the hope that we have with gentleness and respect.

In this lesson we want to begin to look at the importance of studying origins and how these truths effect the foundations for making sense of the world around us.

Introduction

When someone talks about the origins, they expose their ultimate beliefs, the most basic of views that take precedence over all else. Being the most basic of beliefs you might think that there are a large variety of origin accounts out there, but actually all the views that exist can be reduced to two basic types. One type is the true creation stories of the Bible and of some tribal traditions still holding to the Creator-creature distinction. The other type are those that deny the Creator-creature distinction, making all reality basically of one kind.

We will be looking at examples in upcoming lessons. However, before we do this, we need to emphasize how important the origins topic is to one's worldview. You must understand that talking with someone about origins can raise some pretty strong emotions. You can have a conversation blow up in your face and suddenly find yourself in a shouting match. Origins, in a very real sense, is a deeply religious and sensitive subject with most people.

In upcoming lessons we will also look at the different strategies Christians have used to try to reconcile the biblical creation story with the modern evolutionary view of origins.

The Importance of Origins

Whether you look to ancient or modern man, you see him unavoidably thinking and talking about origins. When the ancient man was praying about crops or telling an adventure story, he used images of origins. Modern man, when he is trying to justify space exploration or explaining why his body has certain features, refers to evolutionary origins almost automatically.

Our view of origins contains such an important set of foundational beliefs. Consider what the theologian A. W. Tozer said,

"I believe there is scarcely an error in doctrine or a failure in applying Christian ethics that cannot be traced finally to imperfect and ignoble thoughts about God."

What Tozer is saying is that, for the last 2,000 years, whenever the Church has gotten messed up it always goes back to a wrong answer of who God is, what God is like. If we get the wrong answer to that question we're in deep spiritual trouble because it will catapult down through many areas of our life. The details that need to be learned in

the book of Genesis are ones that underly issues we face every single day. They are the foundations of all other learning. Consider the following questions:

- Who is God and what is He like?
- Who am I? Where did I come from? Where am I going?
- Is truth absolute and where does it come from?
- Where did evil come from? Is there any escape from it?

These few questions are just a few that are answered in the book of Genesis. So much of what we need to make sense of this world is found in God's first book of the Bible. To get an idea of how fundamental the content of Genesis is, lets start by looking at the last book of the Bible, Revelation.

Biblical Symmetry

Several passages in Revelation show how crucial the event of creation is for defining who and what God is. If we're wrong here, the rest of the what God has to say is going to be confusing. In Revelation 4 John gets a vision of the future, what will happen in the throne of God just before the Tribulation, in the presence of God He is praised. Look at the content of that praise in Rev. 4:11:

Worthy are You, our Lord and our God, to receive glory and honor and power; for You created all things, and because of Your will they existed, and were created. (Rev. 4:11)

See the emphasis? This is at the end of history. The content of the God's praise is focused on the beginning of history, and that sets God apart. That's why He is praised and not angelkind or mankind. God alone is the One who created, and this is remembered for ever. It was a crucial act of history and it must always be remembered. It sets God apart which is what the word holy means - unique or different. God alone is holy

In Genesis God began the Scriptures by telling us the story of His creation, now at the end of the Scriptures He ends the Bible by telling us of a new creation. We read:

1 And I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth passed away, and there is no longer any sea. ... 4 and He shall wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there shall no longer be any death; there shall no longer be any mourning, or crying, or pain: the first things have passed away. (Rev. 21:1; 4)

The Bible speaks of a new universe, an entire re-creation, and that takes place at the end of history as we know it. The current creation replaced by the new heavens and the new earth.

And he showed me a river of the water of life, clear as crystal, coming from the throne of God and of the Lamb. (Rev. 22:1)

Later, when we get into Genesis you'll see there's a river that comes out of Eden and flows east, and apparently it came out of the throne of God in Genesis. So the new universe is structured very similarly to the first universe. Notice a careful reference in verse 3,

And there shall no longer be any curse (Rev. 22:3)

So the new creation is an uncursed and really uncursable universe. There is a remarkable symmetry of the Bible.

That's something we want to come back to again and again as Christians, God is a coherent thinker, and one of the proofs (if you want to call it that), one of the evidences of the inspiration of the Bible is its coherence. As you study it more you begin to see the levels of coherence throughout the text and that is an evidence that the Bible is God's word, not man's. Man was involved but God was governing the process.

Origins at the Heart of Man

Why is origins always "hanging in the background" of serious conversations? Why is it a "hot button"? Why, for example, do people who hear about creation-evolution debates so quickly respond with their opinion?

When you talk or hear about the subject of origins you will notice it is a very sensitive subject. Remembering back to the time that I went to university I met a friend named Jeremy Thomas (*we are still close friends and it is actually much of his notes that this course is based on*). Jeremy was confronted with the issues of origins in a really major way while pursuing his science degree. Here is his story:

Several years ago when I was a student at Texas Tech I was pursuing admittance to medical school and I had this biology teacher, Dr Michael Dini. And this guy was a real piece of work. He was an excellent teacher. I really enjoyed his classes but he was very intent on pushing his agenda of evolution on students by denigrating the Bible or certain mis-interpretations of the Bible. And when I went into his office to get a recommendation from him for med school this guy says "well, you've qualified academically, you've got all A's in my classes, I know

you because you've worked as an UTA and as SI for my Biology classes so I can say all good things about your character and then he says, but I have one more criteria you must meet. "How did the human species originate?"

This professor approved of all that Jeremy had done in his classes and even as his personal teaching assistant, but it wasn't enough, he had to know that Jeremy believed in the evolutionary theory. I remember talking to Jeremy about this and hearing how the professor felt that anyone who believed in the Bible's account of origins would not qualify as a doctor because they would be unable to stick to the scientific method - their religion would get in the way.

Why is the issue of our beginnings such a big deal? Why do we get all hot and bothered when the discussion turns to origins? The reason people get uncomfortable is because you're touching on something that goes to the very root of their being. Origins underlies everything. This is a sore point with everyone because everyone is emotionally and deeply committed to a view of origins.

Before we get through Genesis 3 we're going to have a whole lot of people upset with us. We're going to have the biologists agitated, the geologists, astronomers, physicists, feminists. The creation story literally goes against the grain of every area of unbelieving thought, and because of this you need to be prepared that people are going to be upset with the topic.

It's very important to realize that whenever you discuss origins you're really discussing a person's ultimate belief, and that ultimate belief is part and parcel with their view of God. Show me a person's view of origins and I will show you the person's view of God - they are that closely related. The Holy Spirit organized Genesis this way because He's addressing the heart of men, and origins is the starting point of it all.

Importance of Origins for Meaning

We have to borrow a little from future lessons here because the relationships of God, man, and nature are discussed. It turns out that man has to get involved with origins whenever he gets seriously involved with the meaning of things in his life. Let's see how this works.

As we go through Genesis you're going to notice a special focus on the importance of language. Why is this? Because it controls everything else, that's why. Let me illustrate. You cannot talk about any subject, it doesn't matter what the subject is, pick any subject you want to. The fact is that you cannot discuss that subject, think about it or act on the basis of your thoughts unless you have already established a basic view of:

- the universe

- yourself
- truth
- language

You can't start think or communicate without developing some basic views of things. This goes for both the Christian and the non-Christian. We need to briefly explore this and why we want to address this issue of language and meaning.

Meaning Requires Classification

Think about the human desire to classifying the world around him. For example, think of a little child beginning to learn about the world around him. What is the first thing little babies start to say when they are learning to talk? Besides the cute little sounds, what do they start with? Nouns. Like dog, cat, food, etc.

One of the most fascinating things about a child is watching them learn language. Dr. Mortimer Adler, who for years was one of the editors of Encyclopedia Britannica, made this statement:

Do you realize that every one of us have performed the greatest intellectual act we will ever perform for the rest of our life by the time we are six years old.

What did he mean? He meant that a child learns language for the first time without having known a previous language. Adults can learn another language, but not in the same way. They use their first language to launch them into a second language. However, this is not the way a child does it. They are able to somehow learn language without having a first language in their mind. I don't know if you've thought about how miraculous that is and crazy thing is that scientists still can't explain how this works fully.

Children are created in the image of God, and have been preprogrammed for their environment. They start with a noun which classifies some subject. But how do they learn these nouns? Well they see something around them, let's say a dog and they ask "what's that?" Almost every time Mom will reply "it's a dog" even if its a Collie. What has the mother done? She's classified the animal, "it's a dog". They may later see a Terrier and again ask "what's that?" Mommy again says, "that's a dog too." After a while the child will see another dog he has never seen before and guess what he says, "look mommy, a dog." At some point the child will see an animal and will say something like "what's that?...that's not a dog?" Wow! The child has learned to do something amazing. He's learned the category "dog". Even when he sees many other animals the same size, a sheep, a cat, and the child is going to learn that there are dogs, and sheep aren't one of them and cats aren't one of them. They've learned a category.

We all have a built-in need to classify the world around us. The truth is that we can't communicate without classifying and that means that the universe around us is classifiable and that is SO IMPORTANT. Without a classifiable world we cannot know anything.

Meaning Requires Stability

Not only must we be able to classify the world around us we must also depend on it staying the same, that is remaining stable.

Imagine if we couldn't classify things. Imagine for example if a little child is sitting here learning and he's just learned that there is a terrier, a cocker spaniel, a collie, and the cat is not a dog, the sheep is not a dog, he knows what d-o-g means. Then during the night the animals transmute forms. What happens to the learning process? Obviously it stops. If dogs are no longer dogs then you don't have the category dogs and that means you can't have knowledge.

You can't even begin to speak unless you can classify, and you can't classify something unless the universe is stable. Language and knowledge depend on the universe being stable.

We are going to cover this a bit more later, but it is enough at this point to say that to have meaning for any part of life there must be meaning to the whole of life. To ensure the meanings man needs for the everyday events - rains for crops, why his body is the way it is, etc. - he must reach out to the ultimate context of life, the origin of the world. There is this unavoidable need in his heart to require meaning and stability in the world. Of course, as Bible-believing Christians we know that this need has been designed into the human heart by God.

As in language, so in math. To have meaning there must be stability of categories. If I write the simple equation,

$$y = ax + b$$

there must be constant values for "a" and "b". Without these constants, math as a modeling tool is hopeless. Not only that, rules of operation like addition (" + ") must continue as reliable descriptions of physical relationships. The pre-conditions for science, like all thought and language, is for a fundamental stability of categories in this world.

Meaning Requires Context

After you start to classify the world what comes next? Suppose you have the word, "dog," we all know that we don't learn that abstractly, that there is a connotation to it,

there's some event that triggers the learning process, a dog bit me, a dog licked me, something happened. In other words, you have an experience that begins to shape the meaning of that word, there's a context to it. "Dog" means something in a context.

Words have meaning in context. Now, if you use a word and a child comes up and says, "Daddy, what does lizard mean? He's heard you say the word, so he says what does that mean? You get in a position where you can't really tell him what it means because he has no experience of it, and so you spend 5-10 minutes in a big discussion about what this word means, and after that he still doesn't know what it means because he doesn't have any context, he has no place to put it in his head, there's no way to organize it.

So the second thing that we have to have to make things work in language is context. How do you define a word? You look it up in the dictionary and you find 25 meanings and which one is being used? You have to go back to the context. Meaning comes from context. That's why when we read Scripture we have to be careful to always interpret the meaning of a word in context, and I've really worked with the word "save" in James for example. How is James using the word "save"? But that's not just true of Scripture, it's true all over.

So, there are two preconditions for knowledge and meaning and those are stability of categories and context. So, as we're developing from infancy to adulthood and we're learning language what are we doing? We're coming into direct contact with God through His universe.

To sum up I could put it this way: you can't say anything about anything without saying (by implication) something about everything. The term "everything" points unmistakably to origins. If this is true, then is it possible for anyone to be neutral on the origins issue?

In our next lesson we will begin looking at this neutrality issue as well as begin comparing the biblical creation to an ancient origin-myth.