

Tent Size

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Recently I visited a Sabbath School class where the leader started the meeting by asking a question. “Does the SDA church spread a tent large enough to include me?” he asked. Why was he asking such a question? He explained that science played a large role in his life. So large a role in fact, that he subscribed to science’s evolutionary account of life’s origins; namely natural selection over billions of years as opposed to a relatively recent six day creation as recorded in the Bible. Should he suffer discrimination simply because he believed science’s explanation of origins, he wondered? If the “church tent” was not large enough to house him and others of like mind, was not the body of believers being narrow-minded and unfairly exclusionary? He affirmed his belief in God and Christ. Further, he queried, since we are all brothers and sisters in Christ, shouldn’t our “church tent” be large enough for him and the growing number of others who have also come to this scientifically based conclusion?

Clearly, his line of questioning was an attempt to make the case that differing beliefs on origins is not a significant issue in the entire scope of things. He posed that we are all worshippers of the same God. Should it really matter then that we disagree on exactly how we got here? Furthermore, shouldn’t church members be moving forward in working for our Master and not be distracted or divided by non-essentials, such as the origins debate?

Sound convincing?

Most would agree that Christians are instructed to be open-minded and inclusionary especially with fellow believers. Should a difference of opinion in origins be exempt from these virtues? To be open-minded, however, requires a thorough investigation of the issues, lest it become mere gullibility.

In the origins debate, there are serious questions the church should ask those who incorporate evolutionary science with the Bible. Why? Because the answers may have profound repercussions outside the origins debate, and consequently may compel the church to rethink its beliefs in other areas such as the origin of death, the origin of sin, God’s creative power, the resurrection, and human free will.

Let us consider death. Has death always been a part of our world, or was it added somewhere along the way? In the Genesis account God indicates that death was not part of His original plan; rather it entered human existence as a result of “sin” (Genesis 3:19). Evolution, on the other hand, requires death from the very start. Without it, the genetic pool could not be “purged” of mutations found in the less adaptive life-forms. Evolution

requires death to prune these less adaptive organisms, to permit the resultant selection of the more adaptive ones.

Biblically, however, death is never a positive event — it is always portrayed as the ultimate negative end. Paul makes this very clear in II Corinthians 15:26:

“The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death”.

In this text, Paul labels death an enemy to both God and humanity. If evolution were true, however, why would he label it an “enemy” at all? Evolutionarily speaking, death is the “pruning shear” which ultimately allowed us to walk upright, acquire a conscious brain and emerge atop the kingdom of mammals. Death, then, would not be an “enemy” to an evolutionary God—it would be a necessity. No death. No evolution. Period.

Looking at it from a human evolutionary perspective, like it or not, it is inescapable that death was required to get us to where we are today. If given a choice of having a life which ends in death, or no existence at all, most people would choose the former. Because of this, it also follows that death under this scenario would not be humanity’s enemy either.

For an evolutionary God to say that death is the last enemy to be destroyed is, at a minimum, disingenuous. But there is a larger issue here than merely questioning His integrity as it pertains to death (as important as that might be). Clearly, if God isn’t being truthful in this area, where else is He not being honest? Once the truth of God’s word is put in play, a number of other questions quickly arise: Does sin really cause death? Is “eternal life” really “eternal”? Is heaven really as depicted in scripture? Is death really “destroyed”—even if God decides at some future date to create again via the evolutionary method? And the list goes on.

This problem speaks directly to the Character of God — specifically His trustworthiness and truthfulness in His revelations to us. During Christ’s prayer to His Father in John 17:17 He said, “thy word is truth”. Employing literary sleight of hand (e.g. allegory etc.), as a means to explain away this contradiction will not white-wash the discrepancy to the millions of believers over the last two millennia who have read I Corinthians 15: 26, and believed literally what the words say.

Questions regarding God’s position on death (and hence His honesty) aside, there are other equally pertinent issues that need attention. We now look at the questions of “sin” and the “Adversary”.

In the evolutionary paradigm there would come a point during the evolving process when humans “acquired” the capacity to function on a moral level, and hence became morally accountable to God. At this point, whenever it occurred, God would have to tell humans:

“I have good news and bad news for you. The good news - you are to be congratulated on being the lucky evolutionary winners! You have successfully developed the most advanced adaptive traits out of the trillions of other living and extinct life forms that have ever existed on this planet. The bad news - there is just one problem with all of this! Now that you have honed these attributes into the highest form, you must stop using them altogether. The self-preserving behavior that aided your evolutionary ascent is now outlawed! You are instead to become altruistic, put fellow humans first, become a servant to all— not only to the stranger (story of the Good Samaritan) but to your enemies as well (Sermon on the Mount). In fact I now want you to lay down your life for your fellow man—even if they are mistreating you (1 Peter 2:21). No more *selfish gene* behavior!”

Unfortunately, the very process that God utilized to “create by natural selection” would have selected for behavior He afterward labeled “sin”. This “sin” would not be any small matter, for it would be punishable by death—and not just any death, but a grim death in a “lake of fire” (Romans 6:23, Revelation 21:8).

This evolutionary scenario would then make God, and not an Adversary, responsible for “sin.” God alone, via the natural selection process, would have fostered the ingrained selfish tendencies. Under these circumstances, why would there be any reason to even have an Adversary? This again hits home on the honesty issue--is God blaming someone else, real or fictional, for what He had actually done Himself? If this was true, who would want to have anything more to do with Him--much less seek Him to correct the problem which He *in fact* implanted via the evolutionary method in the first place? How could anyone ever trust Him again about **anything**?

In addition, what about God’s engineering ability to create what He ultimately wants? In the natural selection model, the assembly line output is loaded with unacceptable or undesirable traits and totally devoid of the virtues that God ultimately wants. Is this the best that He can do?

In a PBS interview the outspoken evolutionist Richard Dawkins (Author of “The God Delusion”) was asked his response to the view proposed by some Christians that God is the designer of the whole evolutionary system itself. His response: “I find this a rather pathetic argument. For one thing, if I were God wanting to make a human being, I would do it by a more direct way rather than by evolution. Why deliberately set it up in the one way which makes it look as though you don't exist? It seems remarkably roundabout not to say a deceptive way of doing things.”¹

This leads to the next area to be examined—namely is God as “all knowing” as the Bible claims? Paul writes in Colossians 2:3 that:

“In whom (Christ) are hid **all** the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.”

¹ <http://www.pbs.org/faithandreason/transcript/index-frame.html>

This biblical statement (along with others in the Bible) makes it clear that Christ is the sum of all knowledge—He knows everything there is to know (past, present and future). Under the evolutionary creation model, the evidence would suggest otherwise however.

In chapters 11 and 65, Isaiah describes a heaven with animals. He points out that the heavenly “lion will eat straw like a bullock”, and that “They (animals) shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain, saith the Lord.” Clearly there will be no predation in heaven. This is entirely consistent with the statement in Revelation 21:4, that there will be no more death there.

In Revelation 20, John paints a picture of the world after the second coming. The King James Version uses the word “bottomless pit” which resembles the state of the world before God started creating back in Genesis chapter one. It is a stark lifeless planet (Zephaniah 1:1-3), except for the Devil and his angels (Revelation 20:1-3), during that 1000 years. After the resurrection and death of the wicked, God is quoted in Revelation 21:5 as saying “Behold I make all things new”. This would of course include everything—including all non-human life forms.

The question then arises: If an evolutionary God has the ability to create multiple and varied life forms without the use of randomness and death (required by evolution) at the end of time, why didn’t He use the same method in the very beginning? Why would He opt for billions of years of suffering and death of His creatures on an unimaginable scale, when He could have avoided the whole carnage in the first place? **What type of God would do that!**

Unfortunately, the evolutionary God’s problematic behavior is not limited to the animal kingdom alone, for the same question can be posed about human beings. Paul writes in 1 Thessalonians 4, and 1 Corinthians 15, that the “dead in Christ” will instantly arise to the trumpet sound at the second coming. The vast majority of these risen saints will have been dead for so long that nothing of their original bodies exists. If Paul is right, then Christ will need to “recreate” these saints in an instant during the resurrection process. To Paul the ability to instantly “recreate” someone who has already died (arguably more difficult than creating someone without a past history) is not a problem for Christ. Yet, in the evolutionary model, Christ is either unable or unwilling to create “Adam” and “Eve” in this manner.

Let us assume Paul’s description of the second coming is accurate, and that Christ is the same “yesterday, and today, and forever” (Hebrews 13:8) along with being the “sum of **all** knowledge” (Colossians 2:3) as already stated. With this in mind, Christ surely had the knowledge and power to instantly create Adam and Eve from nothing at the very beginning. For what possible reason then would He choose a prolonged death-riddled evolutionary process burdened with the obligatory baggage of *selfish genes*? Or, if Christ does not have this knowledge and power, then Paul’s account of the resurrection cannot be true. Either way (a less-than loving God versus no resurrection), the evolutionary point of view destroys at least one central post in our “church tent”, and with loss of either post the tent falls.

Finally, there is the issue of “free will”. Almost without exception, materialistic evolutionists state there is no such thing as “free will”. They contend that everything is determined by chemical reactions in our brains—nothing more, nothing less. Chemical reactions have no freedom—the same reactants always produces the same product—no exceptions. Consequently, humans have no real freedom either! It’s all just an illusion! Any attempt to explain moral accountability solely by the known laws of physics and chemistry fails and determinism ultimately wins.

Many biblical evolutionists attempt to get around this problem by invoking a special act of God. Francis Collins, in his book *The Language of God*, solves this dilemma by having God implant a “soul” into all humanity at some point in the past (p. 207). Since “all have sinned and come short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:25), this would infer that God implanted defective “souls” into humanity from the onset, or else every member of the human race (large numbers surely involved at this point) decided at the very same time to “en-mass” rebel against Him right after the implantation of their “souls”. At face value, the second scenario seems less plausible than the Eden story. If the first option is true, it makes God responsible for sin with all the accompanying difficulties already discussed.

For God to be without reproach in the whole free-will question, He must put into perfectly functioning humanity a perfectly functioning (e.g. not “sinful”) moral system as described in the Genesis account. Unquestionably, placing a perfectly functioning “moral” system into evolving bodies which must survive by employing selfish choices is a certain recipe for failure.

Because the evolutionary creation theory does not accept the Genesis story as literal, its other options to obtain free will fall short of what is needed—namely a way in which evolved chemical pathways are not bound by fixed chemical laws (determinism).

How important is “free will”—without it, turn out the lights, the game is over—there is nothing left to discuss.

Now back to the Sabbath School teacher at the start of this article. Given the questions that have been raised, how should the church proceed? It could decide that whether we were formed by God in a special creation or by Him (to some degree at least) via the evolutionary process, the fact that Christ rose from the grave two thousand years ago still stands. Christ Risen then serves as a fresh starting point from which we proceed forward in the Christian era. This option lets the church members unite around this banner, while leaving beliefs such as origins to sort themselves out in the fullness of time.

But the same science that developed the evolutionary model also states there is no scientific evidence that resurrections have ever occurred, or ever could occur for that matter. Creationists are often accused of bias or “cherry picking” scientific data when it suits their needs while capriciously discarding science’s explanation of origins. But doesn’t the same hold true for the science-based “Biblical evolutionist” who continues to

believe in resurrections (Christ's and the saints) which his/her science categorically denies?

If Biblical accounts of resurrections are false, the tent question and the tent then disappear. Paul in I Corinthians 15: 14 states it bluntly:

“And if Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain.”

Let us assume just for point of discussion that science would allow for Christ's resurrection. There is then a more important consideration to be entertained: namely which Christ arose from the tomb—the creationist or the evolutionist? They are very different—different by action—different in character!

It now seems we have come full circle. Why? Because the character of God is really what is being debated in this discussion. And, isn't this the very question that started the whole costly sin mess in the first place?

How one characterizes God (creationist vs. evolutionist), and how one reads the Bible (literal to allegorical) are critical--but not to the tent size. Since they are the central posts from which the tent is suspended, don't they define the tent itself? Consequently, in answering the question posed by the Sabbath School teacher at the beginning of this article, shouldn't the discussion shift from “increasing the size of the tent”, to whether its been a “two tent” model all along?