

CHAPTER 13

BUT WHAT ABOUT . . . ?

QUESTIONS CHRISTIANS ASK REGARDING HOW TO LIVE IN UNITY WHILE STILL DISAGREEING ABOUT THE PARTICULARS

Among the many views on origins presented in this book and on this website, none are free of theological or scientific challenges. All face certain difficult questions that must be pondered. To help you think through some of the key issues, we've put together a list of questions that Christians often ask about origins. Some of the questions have no simple answers, and we know that the answers we suggest won't satisfy everyone. In some cases, we ourselves aren't completely satisfied with the answers we suggest, but they offer ideas that we've found helpful as we've worked through these issues. They represent the best we can offer at this time.

27. *With all this disagreement in the church, what should I believe?*

That's the biggest question, and of course we can't answer it for you. We understand that this issue can be overwhelming. After reading a book full of evidence and arguments, it's normal to feel a little uncertain what to think. If this were an easy issue, Christians would already agree!

Look back at the spectrum of young-earth creation, progressive creation, and evolutionary creation views in chapter 8 and in the Appendix. *Every* position raises theological challenges, and it takes time to ponder them. Don't feel as though you have to work out what you believe in a day or a month. For us and others we've known, it can take months or years of reading, pondering, and conversation to accept a new position.

Questions about how and when God created the earth are important, but they are not *essential* to our salvation. It is not essential for every Christian to come to a firm conclusion on these issues. It *is* important, however, that leaders be well informed. If you are a pastor, theologian, or scientist, if you speak publicly on this issue, or if you teach children about science, it is important to understand the various positions. When you speak from a position of authority people take your words seriously, so it is important that you avoid mistakes and misunderstandings. It's best not to promote one particular view without understanding and acknowledging the other views held by Christians. Having read this book, you're well on your way! If you'd like to learn more, check out the additional resources suggested at the end of each chapter and the articles on our website (www.faithaliveresources.org/origins).

Regardless of what you decide about origins, keep these things in mind as you discuss these issues with others:

- ▶ Fight against the worldviews of evolutionism and naturalism. Challenge claims that a scientific understanding of the Big Bang or evolution somehow disproves God. Whether or not the Big Bang and evolution happened, God is the sovereign Creator. Science can't prove or disprove that.
- ▶ Remember that all truth is God's truth. Even when an idea is promoted by an atheist or by someone you dislike, it is not automatically false. Be willing to consider true arguments from any source, and know that God owns all truth.
- ▶ Avoid adding to the gospel. Keep the gospel centered on the work of Christ and our need for grace, independent of views on origins. When non-Christians hear Christians make blanket scientific statements on origins, they get the impression that they'd have to change their scientific views in order to become a Christian.

28. What should I teach my children?

For young children, start with Bible stories. The Genesis stories are short and emphasize essential truths, so they are excellent for teaching children. Don't try to teach them any science or theology beyond what they are ready to learn.

Children can be taught a sense of wonder and joy when learning about the natural world. It comes naturally to them, but adults can nurture it and expand it. And when they express that wonder and joy, remind them to thank God for making all of it. When a child asks "Did God make the dinosaurs," you can simply and truthfully answer "Yes," without getting into the details about how God did it. You can tell children that the Bible tells us that God made everything and that God lets us study the world to figure how it works.

In elementary school children start to learn more Old Testament stories, including the idolatry of the nations surrounding Israel. This is a good opportunity to explain ancient Near Eastern cosmology and how Genesis 1 is a radical response to the paganism and polytheism of the surrounding cultures (ch. 6).

In middle school and high school teens are encountering the science of evolution in school. Developmentally, they are better able to appreciate that not all questions have black and white answers.

This is a good time to introduce them to multiple views on origins, explaining where Christians agree and disagree (see the end of ch. 1 for some educational resources). It's important that teenagers learn about the full range of views that Christians hold on origins. When they are taught only one particular perspective as the "right" view, they tend to consider it essential to Christianity. This can lead to a crisis of faith later on, a feeling that they will lose their entire Christian faith if they change their mind about origins. Even if you (or they) feel one view is best, let them know that there are other Christian views and discuss the options.

You can also encourage teens and young adults to consider a career in science. Christian scientists work alongside scientists of all worldviews and have opportunities to share the gospel with them. In addition, Christian scientists have the joyful task of exploring God's world! Encourage those considering a career in science to seek out role models and professionals in the community they can shadow. See the resource list at the end of this chapter for more on a career as a scientist and a Christian.

29. How do I deal with disagreements about origins with my family and church members?

The first few chapters of this book focused on topics on which Christians generally agree. In later chapters we explored issues of greater disagreement. Disagreements among Christians are not always a bad thing. If an issue is complex, it's unlikely that any one person has all the right answers. We can learn from each other. But in order to do that, we need to practice the virtues of humility and patience—as well as the habit of curiosity. We can model those in ourselves and encourage them in others.

Be humble. Pride can make anyone too stubborn to listen to new ideas or too quick to discard an old belief. Keep listening seriously to all sides, admit when you don't understand fully, and change your mind if you feel the arguments warrant it.

Respect and affirm the intelligence, motives, and faith commitment of Christians on all sides of the debate. Be slow to judge; give room for everyone to grow in their understanding of God's book of nature and God's book of Scripture. Don't accuse someone of holding a view because they lack knowledge or of changing their mind because they lack faith.

Nurture our unity in Christ. Remember what unites us as Christians. Cherish the central points of faith on which Christians agree.