

Mar. 7, 2010 Genesis 1:1-2, 26-27 “The Spittin’ Image” by Richard Boatman

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth... That’s Genesis 1:1. Verse 2 continues: *Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.* The rest of the chapter is made up of at least nine references to “And God said, ‘Let there be...(or Let *such & such* happen).’” Going back to the early church it has been debated as to whether the narrative of creation was literal or allegorical, in other words, a story in which “people, things, and events have a symbolic meaning” used to teach ideas and moral principles. Early church teachers such as Origen and St. Augustine leaned toward this latter understanding of the creation account.

Today, there are many **views of creation**. Ken Ham of the *Creation Museum* postulates a very literal rendering of Genesis 1 believing in a very young earth, just several thousands of years old. Dr. Guillermo Gonzalez, former assistant professor of Astronomy at Iowa State University is a Christian who believes in a very old planet and cosmos but is a strong activist in the *ID* or *Intelligent Design* movement. Dr. Francis Collins who headed up the *Human Genome Project* under President Clinton and, according to the Associated Press, will be nominated by President Obama to head the *National Institutes of Health* is founder and president of the *BioLogos Foundation*. Collins, also a “born again” believer argues both an old earth and God’s use of evolution as the primary tool for creating.

C. S. Lewis in his book *The Problem of Pain* adds to the mix: “For long centuries, God perfected the animal form which was to become the vehicle of humanity and the image of Himself. He gave it hands whose thumb could be applied to each of the fingers, and...[a] throat capable of articulation, and a brain sufficiently complex....The creature may have existed in this state for ages before it became man: it may even have been clever enough to make things which a modern archaeologist would accept as proof of its humanity. But it was only animal because all its...processes were directed to purely material and natural ends. Then, in the fullness of time, God caused to descend upon this organism...a new kind of consciousness which could say, ‘I’ and ‘me,’...which knew God, which could make judgments of truth, beauty and goodness...we do not know how many of these creatures God made, nor how long they continued in [this]...state. But sooner or later they fell. Someone or something whispered that they could become as gods...They wanted some corner in the universe of which they could say to God, ‘This is our business, nor yours.’...We have no idea in what particular act...[the] impossible wish found expression. For all I can see, it may have concerned the literal eating of a fruit...”

It can seem quite confusing when so many “experts,” all professing personal faith in Christ, deduce such diverse biblical interpretations. Sherlock Holmes and Dr. Watson were camping. They were both awakened in the middle of the night. “Watson,” Holmes asked, “what can you deduce from observing the stars overhead?” “Well,” Watson began, “based on the location of the Big Dipper I’d say it’s 3 a.m. And judging by the subtle haze in the west and the barometric pressure in the atmosphere, there will be a light mist tomorrow with a temperature of 55 degrees.” “No, Watson, you ignoramus,” Sherlock snapped. “We can deduce from observing the stars overhead that someone has stolen our tent.”

We may deduce from Genesis 1:1 something simple yet profound: “God created...” I would submit to you that the creation account is not so much about process as it is about authorship. And it is through this Creator God that we find ourselves. Christians can approach the creation account from different angles and still believe in the complete authority of Scripture, still hold firmly to the orthodox tenets of the faith: Creation, the Fall, Redemption through Christ, etc. The Apostles’ Creed is but one of several that help show us what we as professing believers must embrace, and what we need not. It begins: “I believe in God the Father Almighty, Creator of heaven and earth...” Notice that nothing is said about the process of creation. But there is no doubt as to who created. The early creeds constitute the profound effort of our early forebears to help us focus on essentials.

And one of the great essentials is found in our being made in God’s image: **the spittin’ image**. It’s a term I’ve heard all my life but never really thought about its origin. One thought as to the derivation of “spittin’ image” is that saliva symbolized the substance of a person, the resemblance being so strong that he/she seemed “spit out of his mouth.” Another argument is that *spitting image* is actually *splitting image*, referring to a tree being halved and half being the “splitting image” or grain of another. A third line of research suggests that “spittin’” is a miss translation of “spirit,” the person being a “spirit image.” All these explanations lend themselves to our being created in the substance and Spirit of God, His image and likeness. Hear Genesis 1:26-27: ²⁶ Then God said, "Let us make human beings in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground." ²⁷ So God created human beings in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.

We are **spirit beings**; we possess a soul; we live in a body. Hebrews 12:23 speaks of “the church of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven...” It speaks of

us as “the *spirits* of righteous people made perfect.” Note, *the spirits of [the] righteous*. John 4:24 says, “God is Spirit, and those who worship him must worship Him in spirit and truth.” 2 Corinthians 5:17 intones, “Therefore any persons who are in Christ are *new creations*; old things have passed away and all things have become new.” “New creations” literally means “a new species of being that has never before existed.” And finally 1 Thessalonians 5:23: “Now may the God of peace sanctify you entirely; and may your spirit and soul and body be preserved complete, without blame at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

The Fall in Genesis 3 references a time when we became separated from God’s Spirit, when the serpent “whispered that they could become as gods...” This act of sin or defiance or independence or ignorance or misplaced affection—call it what you like—produced **spiritual death**. For God had said, “In the day you eat of it, you shall die.” Well, clearly their physical bodies lived on for centuries, this vessel not being meant to die. But the death was spiritual when the pure left the impure; when the Holy Spirit left the corrupted human spirit.

To be “born again” or “born from above” is a direct reference to the rebirth of our human spirit, God’s presence entering again and filling our inner being with God-life. It is **redemption and restoration**. Receiving Christ’s redemptive work reconnects our spiritual image to God. The ongoing work of the Spirit’s restoration renews our minds and conforms our will to the realm of God.

The narrative of Scripture from Abraham to Moses to Joshua to Jacob to the Judges to the kings and prophets, to Elizabeth to Mary to Jesus and to the Church is the story of God’s redemption and restoration of the planet and humankind culminating in and through the person of Christ—the person of Christ we come to know through the Bible, by the Holy Spirit, carried in the vessel of his Church—God’s living organism on earth—not the institution but the “enlivened” people. Some of these are enlivened in a quiet, intellectual, yet deep way, ala C. S. Lewis. Some, like our new friend George, are touched in a very passionate way.

George was one of the pastors on our Greece tour. A little over thirteen years ago, George was an atheist, a hardened Harley rider and drug abuser. But George’s life began to crumble. His wife died and his addictions were killing him. Being his own *god* wasn’t working. George hit bottom. “Bottom” is different for all of us. But hitting bottom has everything to do with giving up control, with yielding our independent and stubborn will back into the hands of our Creator God. George was powerfully redeemed and, like all of us, is in the process of being restored by a living and daily communion with the Savior—a communion of union. Amen.