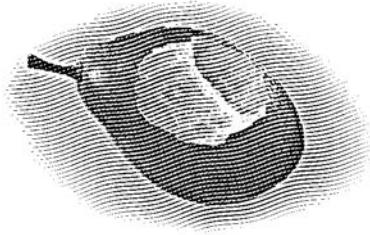


Creation *and* Morality



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Gen. 2:16, 17; Gen. 1:26–28; James 3:9; Acts 17:26; Prov. 14:31; Matt. 5:44–48; Rev. 20:11–13.*

Memory Text: “And the Lord God commanded the man, ‘You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat from it you will certainly die’ ” (*Genesis 2:16, 17, NIV*).

People love to talk about “human rights.” From the Magna Carta (1215) to the French Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen (1789) to various United Nations declarations, the idea is promoted that human beings possess certain “inalienable rights,” rights that no one can rightfully take away from us. They are ours by virtue of being human (at least that’s how the theory goes).

The questions remain: What are these rights? How are we to determine what they are? Can these rights change, and if so, how so? Why should we, as humans, have these rights, anyway?

In some countries, for instance, women were not given the “right” to vote until the twentieth century (some nations still deny it). How, though, can a government grant to people something that is their “inalienable right” to begin with?

These are hard questions, and their answers are inseparably linked to the question of human origins, the study for this week’s lesson.

**Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, February 2.*

Our Dependence on the Creator

Genesis 2:7 depicts God as creating Adam individually and represents him to be an intelligent, moral being rather than as an animal. The text does not say, but one can imagine God using His hands to form the dust into the intended shape and size. One might think that the great Sovereign of the universe would not stoop to get His hands dirty in the making of man, but the Bible reveals the Creator as One closely involved with the Creation. Scripture records many occasions when God willingly interacted with the material creation. Examples include Exodus 32:15, 16; Luke 4:40; and John 9:6. Indeed, the incarnation of Christ Himself into humanity, into human flesh, where He day by day interacted with the created world in much the way we do, refutes the notion that God would not stoop to “get His hands dirty” among humanity.

Read Genesis 2:16, 17. **What command did God give to Adam? What is implied in this command?**

We may ask, What right did God have to make rules for Adam and Eve? Compare this situation to that of a child in a family. The child’s parents provide the child with a home and all of life’s necessities. They love the child and have the child’s best interests in mind. Their greater experience and wisdom can spare the child much misery if that child will accept their guidance. Some children find this guidance difficult, but it is universally recognized that as long as the child is dependent on parents for necessities, the child is obligated to accept the parents’ rules. In like manner, because we are always dependent on our heavenly Father for life and its necessities, it is always appropriate for us to accept God’s guidance. Because He is a God of love, we can trust Him to always provide what we need for our own good.

Read Psalm 95:6, 7 and Psalm 100. How does the psalmist express our dependence on God? What obligations does that dependence automatically place on you, especially in regard to the way in which you treat others?

In the Image of God

Read Genesis 1:26–28. What special attribute was given to humans that was not given to the animals?

What exactly is “the image of God”? This question has generated a great deal of discussion, and opinions vary. But the verses provide some clues regarding the nature of the idea. First, note that to be made in the image of God implies that we resemble God in certain ways. One important aspect of the image of God is that God gave to humans dominion over the other creatures. As God is sovereign over all, He has appointed to humans a share of sovereignty by giving them dominion over the fish, the birds, and the land animals.

Notice, too, that God purposed to make man in “our” image—that is, an image involving the plurality of the Godhead. Then He made humans male and female. The image of God is not fully expressed in an individual but in relationship. As the Godhead is manifest in three Persons in relationship, the image of God in humans is expressed in relationship of male and female. The ability to form relationships is part of the image of God. Relationships, of course, imply responsibility and accountability, which means morality. Hence, right here we are given a strong hint as to how morality finds its basis in the Creation story.

Read Genesis 9:6 and James 3:9. In what way is the idea of humans being made in the “image of God” clearly linked to the concept of morality?

Humans have wrestled for millennia with the question of morality. Even before one gets into what is the right kind of morality, the whole idea of morality itself raises a host of deep issues. Why should humans, as opposed to beetles, fleas, or even chimps, have a moral conscience, a concept that distinguishes between right and wrong? How can beings, made essentially of amoral matter (quarks, gluons, electrons, and so forth) be aware of moral concepts? The answer can be found in the early chapters of the Bible, which reveal humans to be moral creatures made “in the image of God.”

Made of One Blood

In Genesis 2:23, Adam is given the task of naming his wife, whom he called *Havah*. This word is related to the Hebrew verb *hayah*, which means “to live” (Jews sometimes use the related expression *lehayim*, “to life!”). The Hebrew word for “Eve” (*Havah*) can be translated as “life-giver.” Eve’s name represents the fact that she is the ancestor of all humans. We are all one family in the most literal sense.

Read Acts 17:26. How does Paul link the brotherhood of all humanity to the Creation? *Compare with Matt. 23:9.*

We are united in that we all descended from one woman, Eve, and from one man, Adam. And God is the Father of us all. This fact is the basis of human equality. Think how different human relations would be if all people recognized this important truth. If we ever needed proof of how far fallen we are, of how badly sin has damaged us, we have it in the sad fact that humans often treat one another worse than some people treat animals.

Read Proverbs 14:31 and 22:2. How do these texts help us to understand the link between morality and the fact that we are created by God?

Many factors have divided the human race: political, national, ethnic, and, of course, economic. The economic factor is, arguably, one of the most consequential (though never to the degree that Karl Marx envisioned: the workers of the world never did unite; instead, they warred against each other based on their nationality). Today, as always, the poor and the rich often regard one another with suspicion and disdain. How often these sentiments have led to violence, even war. The causes of poverty and the solution to it still continue to baffle us (*see Matt. 26:11*), but one thing is sure from the Word of God: rich or poor, we all deserve the dignity that is ours by virtue of our origins.

Years ago, after Darwinism became fashionable, some justified the exploitation of the poor by the rich on the grounds of “social Darwinism,” the idea that in the natural world the strong overcome and exploit the weak, so why should not the same principle apply in economics? How is this another example of why a correct grasp of origins is crucial to the understanding of morality?

The Character of Our Creator

God created us in His image, which means, among other things, that He intended for us to resemble Him in character. That is, we are to be like Him as much as is humanly possible (notice, to be like God is not the same thing as to aspire to be God, a crucial difference). In order for us to be like God, in the sense that we reflect His character, we must have a proper understanding of what that character is.

Read Matthew 5:44–48. What do these verses reveal not only about God’s character but also about how we should reflect His character in our own lives?

Read Luke 10:29–37. Again, what does this reveal about the character of God and how it should be reflected in humanity? *See also Phil. 2:1–8.*

The story Jesus told involved two men from different people groups, groups that were antagonistic toward each other. But Jesus showed that they were neighbors. Each was within the other’s sphere of responsibility, and God was pleased when their differences were set aside and one treated the other with kindness and compassion.

What a contrast is seen between the principles of God’s kingdom and the principles of Satan’s rulership. God calls the strong to care for the weak, while Satan’s principles call for elimination of the weak by the strong. God created a world of peaceful relationships, but Satan has distorted it so thoroughly that many regard survival of the fittest as the normal standard of conduct. If the vicious process of natural selection (in which the strong overpower the weak) were the means by which we came into existence, why should we do differently? If we accept this view, are we not following God and the dictates of nature as He ordained it when we advance our own interests at the expense of the less “naturally selected”?

What are other ways in which you can see how an understanding of our origins can affect our moral concepts?

Morality and Accountability

In an earlier lesson, we looked at Paul’s sermon to the men in Athens (*Acts 17:16–31*). Follow the line of reasoning he used, noting not just where he started but where he ended. What’s so important about the conclusion he came to, particularly regarding the question of origins and morality?

Paul’s sermon to the men of Athens began with Creation and ended with judgment. According to Paul, the God who made the world and everything in it has fixed a day on which He will judge the world. To be endowed with morality implies accountability, and each of us will be held responsible for our actions and our words (*see Eccles. 12:14 and Matt. 12:36, 37*).

Read Revelation 20:11–13 and Matthew 25:31–40. What is clearly taught in these texts that is directly tied to morality?

Everyone who ever lived will meet together in God’s presence to face the judgment. The difference between the two groups in Jesus’ parable is how each person treated those who were in need. The Creator is interested in how His creatures treat each other, especially those who are needy. There is no place in heaven for the principle of natural selection; it is contrary to the character of the God of peace.

If the Bible teaches anything, it teaches that the justice so lacking in this world will one day be meted out by God Himself. More so, the whole idea of judgment implies a moral order: why would God judge, much less punish, if there were no moral standards to which people could be held?

Think through the reality and certainty of judgment. Why, then, is the gospel and the promise of salvation in Christ so crucial in order for us to have assurance in that judgment?

Further Study: According to Scripture, Adam was the first man and was specially created from the dust by God. Our understanding of the origin of morality is founded in the origin of Adam. Biblical concepts of morality are, then, inseparable from biblical concepts of origins.

Recognizing Adam as the first human also refutes the possibility that any fossils were ancestral to Adam or other humans. From where, then, did these fossils come? Several other possibilities exist.

First, the humanlike fossils might be forms of humans with normal intelligence but with growth patterns unlike any present-day human. A second possibility is that the fossils may have been degenerate due to their own lifestyle or environmental stress or other factors. A third possibility is that they may be the results of Satan's direct attempts to corrupt Creation in ways we do not understand. Another possibility is that they were not humans but were similar in morphology. Different people may prefer different explanations but, because we do not have direct evidence to settle the matter, it is best to avoid being dogmatic in our speculations. Fossils do not come with labels attached that say, "Made in China 500 million years ago" or the like. Our understanding of earth history, which varies greatly among scientists, provides a frame of reference within which we interpret fossils, but we do not have proof of our interpretations. They are, in the end, only that: interpretations, nothing more.

Discussion Questions:

- 1** Think through the implications of what it would mean if there was no Creator who imposed a moral order on humanity. Where would moral concepts come from? Many people who don't believe in God nevertheless do hold to some strict moral standards. On what basis, other than God, might a person be able to develop a moral code? What are some possible scenarios that they could come up with? What, though, would be the ultimate weakness in them all?
- 2** How does our view of Creation inform our opinions regarding current issues such as euthanasia, cloning, abortion, etc.?
- 3** A local citizen who volunteered his time to give tours at the Nazi concentration camp of Dachau began the tour by talking about Charles Darwin's theory of evolution, implying that Darwin's theory led to Dachau and the like. What's the obvious logic of that line of reasoning? In what ways might it be flawed?

The Two Paths

Chief Asang was weeping, and no one could console him. I had no idea why he was upset, but I asked God to help me to comfort him. I am a student missionary teaching the children of the chief's people.

As I approached the chief, he reached out and hugged me. "Thank you for coming," he said when he saw me. "Something is bothering me, and I know you can help." Confused by his greeting, I wondered what I could do to help him.

"I had a dream and saw two pathways," he said. "One path was wide and brightly lit. The other was a narrow trail, rugged and dark. My people were walking on the wide road, laughing and drinking as they traveled. On the narrow path I saw you, and some children from the village, including my own grandchildren. Thistles on the narrow path tore your skin, but you didn't seem to mind. You were singing some of the songs you, and the children sing at morning worship.

"Then, suddenly, everything changed! The wide road became steep and dark, while the narrow trail became bright. Suddenly the wide road ended, and my people fell into a ravine, screaming in terror.

"I looked toward the narrow path and saw you and the children entering a pearly gate. Then I saw the face of Jesus that you showed us in the picture roll. He was welcoming you and my children to the city you call heaven. Most of my people were lost," the chief mourned. "And I was among them! Please tell me what this dream means."

I prayed for God's help to answer the chief's tearful plea. Then I said, "Your dream of the two pathways was written a long time ago in God's Word." Opening my Bible, I showed him Matthew 7:13 and 14.

"How can my people and I get on this narrow trail?" the chief asked with a pleading voice.

"You must decide to follow Jesus now, while there is still time, Chief," I encouraged.

"Please, tell me what we must do. I will tell my people to listen to you," he responded, hope filling his voice.

I explained God's plan of salvation to the chief. I told him that his people are God's children, and He wants to welcome them all into His kingdom. Chief Asang is receiving Bible studies and plans to be baptized soon.

Your mission offerings help to support Seventh-day Adventist schools that send missionaries like me to people still living in darkness. Thank you for helping us to reach God's children everywhere with His love.

RENEBOY AUTENTICO is a student missionary from Mountain View College in the Philippines.