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## "In the beginning": The Lord Calibrates Our Faith

09/02/2012

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This week I happened to come across a [youtube video](#). I posted it on Facebook so some of you may have seen it. It was a clip of an extreme fight —mma, or something of that nature. The clip was interesting for two reasons. The first reason is that one of the fighters was a real acrobat. Before the fight began, as his name was announced, he began to move about the ring. As he did so he would do flips and tricks that were so smooth and fluid. The first thing that he did was

jump and do a flip and twist in the air. He landed on his feet without a single hesitation, like it was as easy as walking. This, of course, really stimulated the audience. They began cheering enthusiastically at the entertainment of it all.

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Once the fight commenced this fighter really began to really show off his dexterity. It was almost as if you were watching a gymnastics performance rather than a fight. At one point he did a cartwheel and backflip combo that immediately turned into a one handed handstand! Then he made his way towards his opponent with a nimble whirl and twist of a great performer. And then, right in the middle of one of his spiraling rotations his opponent advanced and struck him in the face. The acrobat immediately hit the floor. He was out cold. His stillness was a radical contrast to his fluid agilities moments before.

It is my belief that what happened in that ring is exactly the kind of thing that we have occurring in the passage before us this morning. The words that we just recited are some of the most profound words that have ever been penned. They are some of the most powerful words that man has ever read. They compose the single most significant philosophical statement there ever was. In sum, they serve as a power punch that silences all the other worldviews that clamor and hoot for acclaim.

With this one sentence the Lord declares himself to be the supreme God. With just a few words he shows us that he is the only God and he alone is to be feared.

That is exactly what the Israelites needed. Keep in mind that this book was written to the escapees. The Israelites had just emerged out of their captivity in Egypt. They had been there for 400 years. For 400 years they had been immersed in the Egyptian culture. No doubt they



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had heard the tails of the Egyptian gods. They had no doubt been indoctrinated in the theologies of its paganism and pantheon.

Into this situation God speaks. He breaks forth to set the record straight once and for all. And by it the Lord imparts a true understanding of Himself, his world, and his people.

And though 3000 years have passed, the words still serve the same purpose. These words are here to calibrate our minds. They are here to set the record straight for us. The times may have changed, but the truth is, we are just as susceptible to the same cultural trappings. We need to have our minds rightly calibrated to the same realities.

Most particularly, the nature of God. And that is exactly where this passage begins. *“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.”*

## I. The Lord calibrates our understanding of Himself

It is no accident that the first line of Scripture is about God. Our minds are immediately directed toward God. And we are given the impression that he is that mighty champion. This passage does a great job of declaring the God-ness of God. You could say that almost everything we need to know about God is found right here.

I was speaking to Mark this week about the passage and he and I concurred that we could preach 10-12 sermons on this passage alone. It says so much about God. I just want to hit a few highlights though.

The first thing that we learn about the nature of God is that he is **personal**. God has revealed himself. That means that he wishes to be known. He wants to interact. He could very well have left us in the dark as to his existence, but he didn't. He brings us this word about himself so that we might relate to him.

How different this is from what is advanced in today's culture. In today's world we are told that there is nothing out there except deep space. All there is is a vast impersonal realm that was created billions and billions of years ago. Despite the vast numbers of stars and galaxies that fill the universe, such a godless perspective makes it seem rather empty.

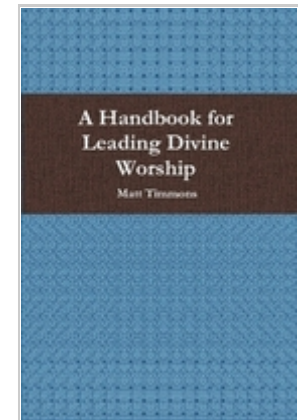
In opposition to this, we find here that there is a God and he is not silent. He reveals himself to us, and he does so for the purpose of establishing a relationship with us.



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But not only do we see that this God is **personal**, we understand here that he is **Trinity**. Well, at least the passage hints at the fact that there is a plurality in the Godhead. The word for God here is the word “Elohim.” And it is in the plural. The normal word for God is the word El. But when you add the “him” it is like adding an “s” in English. It makes it plural. But the word for “create” is in the singular. So the passage is saying that there is one God, but he exists as a plurality.

The rest of Scripture will flesh this out as to exactly what it means. But it is interesting to note that the very foundational teaching of Christianity is given some expression right here in the first word of the Scripture.

The passage also indicates something of God’s **immensity**. By that I mean that God is bigger than time and space. That God is before the beginning reminds us that he is eternal. That God created the heavens and the earth speaks to his inability to be confined to the material world.

A number of weeks ago I ended the message here by telling you about the Mormons who were in the neighborhood. I said that they turned down another street and that I wanted to run after them. Well, low and behold, that very day I told you that they came to my house. As a matter of fact, my daughter came to get me and she said, “Your wish came true.”

They wanted to go through their spiel like they always do, but I stopped them. I said, “How would you like to do this: Let’s have a challenge. You want to serve the greatest God, do you not? So let’s do this: If your god is bigger than my God, I’ll convert to your religion. If my God is bigger than yours, you convert to mine. Would you do that?” He said, “I don’t know. But I’m very interested in what you have to say.” I began by saying this, “Where is your god?” After a long pause (may I say, pregnant pause!), he said, “Ummmmm. Heaven, I think?”

I wanted to say, “You don’t even know where your god is?” Instead I said, “My God is everywhere. As a matter of fact, he is so big that all heaven and earth cannot contain him. He is so big that he created time and space.” And I pointed them to this verse right here.

They responded with stares. I think they understood that they had just lost the challenge.

The Mormons believe that god is basically just like us. He has a body and you never know where he is going to be. And when you compare the two, he ends up looking quite puny by

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comparison.

Truly, the God that is described here is much greater. And much more worthy of our trust.

One more quick thing I'd like to mention about the nature of God. This passage helps us on one of the most basic questions people ask. You kids might ask, "Who is God's god?" Or you might have someone say to you, "Who created God?" The answer to that is "No one!" This passage shows us that God is **self-existent**. He is not dependent upon anyone or anything for life. He always was and always will be because he has life in and of himself.

We probably could say much more about the nature of the Creator. And as we go along, we will. But it is important that we say something about the creation.

This passage not only calibrates our minds as to the nature of God. It gives us a particular perspective of reality.

## II. The Lord Calibrates our understanding of reality

All worldviews must attempt to answer the question of metaphysics. Metaphysics is the study of reality. And everyone must try and give some definition to reality. For instance, Plato said that there were two realms. There was the realm of ideals. And there you had things that were perfect. There was a perfect chair there in that world. And Plato said that everything in this world was a poor copy of the ideal world. So we have lots of chairs, but they are just bad attempts to replicate the ideal chair. (some of you are probably saying, "Yes, these chairs are extremely poor copies of the ideal chair!")

Today, there are people who say something completely different about the world. They say that there is no other realm. As a matter of fact, they would deny that there is anything except matter. The only things that exist are the things you can taste, touch and see. And when it comes to angels, heaven, or any other intangible thing they simply do not exist.

All these people are trying to understand the world in which we live. And that is a good thing. But how are we to understand the world in which we live? How do you know that one day you are going to wake up and find out that you are really an alien that has been dreaming the whole time.

Sounds odd, doesn't it? But it's a good philosophical question. What is real? What is the

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nature of the universe? Thankfully, we don't have to grope around for the answer to this question. God gives us the answer right here.

The first thing the passage says regarding the universe is that **God created everything out of nothing**. Or, to use the old Latin phrase, it was created *ex nihilo*. The word for create is an interesting word. It is a word that is used only in reference to God. It means to give being to something new. So, before this time, there was nothing. God was the only thing that existed. Then, at his command, everything popped into existence.

This, of course, means that we do not agree with our atheistic and materialistic friends who say that all things began with a big bang or that matter is eternal. We believe that God is the source of all things. Or as the book of Hebrews says, *by faith we understand that the universe was created by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things that are visible*.

But not only is **it created out of nothing**, but **it is created with a purpose**. You notice that things didn't appear randomly or by chance. Things came into being intentionally. There was deliberate action on the part of God.

And you realize that this flies in the face of what is propagated by almost every textbook in America. The consensus of contemporary society is that chance governs all things. The world came into being completely by accident. And since it was a random happenstance, things today have no real direction or purpose.

And this mentality has led people like the French philosopher Albert Camus to believe that we as humans do not have any purpose. He even said, "The main question is not so much if we should commit suicide, but when." He understood the logical consequences of this kind of thought. If the world had a unintentional beginning, then our lives are meaningless and there is no use in continuing to live.

That's what makes this a very important point. The world does have purpose. God was intentional about his creation. And keeping that in perspective is imperative if we want to live life to its fullest.

The last thing we should understand about the universe is that it *was created in distinction from God himself*.

This verse reminds us that the world is not God and God is not the world. It's the distinction that pantheism misses. A lot of Eastern mysticism was imported into the United States in the 60's, 70's, and 80's. It came under the cover of what was the "New Age" movement. And it is just as prevalent today. If you don't believe me, just go and watch the Star Wars movies. As Steven Spielberg develops the notion of the Force, he is playing on the idea that there is a hidden power inherent in the very substance of the universe.

Our day is filled with pantheistic thinking. The prominence of things like Yoga, where you try to transcend the world and unite with the world, tells us that pantheism is very much alive and well today. And you can look to many people associated with environmentalist movement today and find some pantheistic tendencies.

That's why it is important that our text brings out this Creator-creature distinction. God created the heavens and the earth. He brought it into existence, but, as is clear here, he is not to be identified with it.

So you see that this passage has a lot to say about the nature of the universe. We learn a lot about the world in which we live. Again, it is like a punch that drills all the other worldviews and sends them to the ground in silence.

But there is one other thing that we should note about this passage. It not only calibrates our minds to a right understanding of God and his world. It should calibrate our understanding of ourselves.

### **III. The Lord calibrates our understanding of ourselves.**

This passage wasn't just designed to tell us everything we've just talked about. It wasn't simply for the communication of brute facts. It's here to remind us that we must fear God and keep his commandments.

My daughters have a cd they like to play. It has some children's bible songs on it. And one of the songs is entitled, "Jesus is the Boss." Its basic premise is that, since God created everything, he's the one who gets to call the shots. He is the boss. He is the one to whom we must give homage.

My friends, it is imperative that you not walk out that door today thinking, "Hmm, that was interesting." This passage is here to remind us that we owe our very existence to God. He is



the one who is our Sovereign, and as such we must love and serve him always.

I believe that this is the main reason why we are embroiled in the battle of the beginnings. This is why people will fight to the death for things like evolution. People will hold to evolution, no matter how scientifically untenable it may be, because it allows them to avoid God's sovereignty over their lives. Evolution is their best attempt to erase God. It is not the scientific data that convinces them of its truthfulness. They are first and foremost convinced that they want to live their own lives. Evolution is simply the cover they use to justify their autonomy.

This passage is set before us so that we might rightly understand that we have no autonomy. We do not have the right to do what is right in our own eyes. Jesus is the Boss.

### **Conclusion:**

There was a man who lived in New York and he attended a Presbyterian church pretty much all his life. He was a successful man by the world's standards. As a lawyer he had made a name for himself and established a good deal of wealth from his labors. But one day the minister of that church announced that he was going to do a series of messages from the book of Genesis. And as he read this opening line, that lawyer had a flash of insight. He realized that, though he had attended church almost all his life, he never really had acknowledged the Lord as God. He had lived as if he were his own sovereign and God made little to no difference to him.

After hearing these words he realized that such a life was not right. He realized that he needed to submit himself to the Lord. And from that day on he began prosperously serving Christ as his Lord.

That is the design of this passage.

In hearing these words it is as if you have looked right into the eyes of God today. To turn your head away and not acknowledge him would be a grievous sin. These words are here to tell you that Christ is the King who sits upon the throne. He is the champion that cannot be matched by any other. Because he is such, you must turn away from your autonomous living and submit yourself to him.





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