

Fallen, but Created . . . and Redeemed

Romans 8:18-23

Sermon Outline

2. Evolution is a religion whose popularity comes partly because it seems to explain suffering in the world.
 1. But the real explanation for suffering is the fall into sin.
- THIS WORLD IS FALLEN, BUT CREATED . . . AND REDEEMED.
- 1'. In Christ, the Lord redeems what he created.
 - 2'. Evolution does not even explain the world, as science learns more of its created complexity.

Sermon

It figures that sooner or later, a series of sermons on defending the Christian faith in this day and age would take up evolution. For well over a century and a half, Darwinian evolution has kept some people from even listening to the claims of Christ. It has also pulled some Christians away from their faith. Perhaps you know someone upon whom evolutionary thinking has made this sort of impact. So today we turn squarely to the subject of evolution.

2.

Charles Darwin, who was born on the same day as Abraham Lincoln, had not been the first to propose a theory of evolution. What he did do was propose a mechanism for evolution that people found believable. He claimed that biological differences arose quite accidentally between various individual humans or dogs or horses or whatever other organisms. Certain of these characteristics gave the organisms possessing them a greater ability to survive than other humans, dogs, or horses. These organisms survived while others died out. That was it: an organism survived not because it was more virtuous than another or even had a greater desire to conform to nature but because it had better equipment for survival. Survival of the fittest—all by chance. There was no purpose to any of this. None of it required the intervention of God.

That turned out to be the big story. People used to think that God must be behind the intricacies of nature, but Darwin assured them that no supernatural designer was necessary. Since his theory of natural selection could, he thought, explain any life form, a Creator could be dispensed with. Many jumped on the bandwagon and said that the world—as they now saw it—was in effect no longer big enough for God. It could get to be the way it was all by itself. And they concluded that this was how it *had* to be. People still think

so. Evolution, someone quipped, enables a person to be both intellectually fulfilled and an atheist at the same time.

Yet evolution is a religion, even when it's embraced by atheists. People cling to it religiously. Well-known evolutionist Michael Ruse once debated creationist Duane Gish. He objected strongly when Gish insisted that evolution is a religion. Upon later reflection, though, Ruse admitted that Gish had a point. Evolution was and remains a religion.⁴ At the end of his book *Darwin's God*, Cornelius Hunter observes that evolution ultimately is about God.⁵ Right! It's about God's presence or absence in the world. Darwin might even have been trying to do God a favor and absolve him for a cruel world where, as Darwin himself said, parasites feed on the bodies of other organisms and cats play with mice. So Darwin put natural selection at center stage and moved God as far back behind the curtain as possible. Well, whether or not this truly was Darwin's motive, evolution certainly is a religion. It's about God, or the lack thereof.

This has given evolution enormous popularity and staying power, even among people who have no detailed understanding of science. For suffering takes place in this world, and they know it. The world is far from perfect, so they seriously doubt that God could be in charge of all this.

1.

Wait a minute, though. Would you look at a car that obviously stands in need of repair—belching out smoke when it starts, for example—and reckon that this vehicle appears so defective that it must have come about by pure accident? Even if a car's engine does not fire on all cylinders, who would say that therefore it must not have had any designer or builder? No, people would admit, even assume, that someone designed and built the car. But now something seems to be wrong with it.

That was the way John Henry Newman in the nineteenth century reacted to the anguish and corruption in the world. As Darwinism was growing in popularity, Newman did not close his eyes to any signs of design and reject the very thought of a Creator. Rather, Newman concluded from what he saw that some massive calamity must have put humanity out of joint with the Creator's purposes. There is something wrong, deeply wrong.

Evolution does not see this. It takes all that is wrong in the world as part of the way things irrevocably are. It regards death as natural.

Not so! The universe, and everything in it, was made by God. It is created, but fallen. For the human race is fallen. Death turns out not to be natural. It is the wages of sin, our sin. Evolution misses the point. It doesn't explain suffering. The world is fallen; that's the reason for suffering. But the world was still created by God. And God doesn't need

than the number of positive mutations that it is clear human genes are becoming worse, not better.⁷ The human genome constantly deteriorates, which is exactly what you would expect in a creation in bondage to corruption. The existence of the genome in the first place indicates deliberate design by our Creator, while the presence of deterioration reflects the corruption. This world did not evolve; it was created. And although fallen, it is redeemed.

A scientific movement called Intelligent Design has called attention to the sheer complexity of nature. This complexity shows more and more as instruments like microscopes and telescopes become increasingly sophisticated. It becomes more difficult all the time to regard this complexity as accidental.

Suppose a prisoner of war is told that he will be executed by a firing squad composed of three riflemen. The prisoner is blindfolded, taken to an appropriate place, the command to fire is given . . . and he survives without a scratch. What happened? Perhaps, the prisoner might think, the firing squad members all missed. Then the prisoner learns that there were actually six in this firing squad, not just three. He can now see that the results have turned out to be more complex than he had thought, that twice as many soldiers fired but none of their bullets hit him. What is more likely: that they all missed by chance, or that they colluded together—in other words, that they were involved in a design—to miss? The greater the complexity, the more probable design becomes.

Note, too, that much of the complexity in the world is, so to speak, irreducible. For example, an eye is composed of many delicate parts such as a lens, a retina, and an optic nerve. For these components to have come about gradually would not have helped. Even with fully functioning eye lenses and retinas, a person or animal lacking operational optic nerves still could not see. Partially formed eyes would not have assisted survival at all. Darwin heard this objection already in his day. It has even greater force in ours. If your eyes do not work as well as they might, you have no proof for absence of design. You have something that adds to the present groaning of creation.

One of my great professors in seminary was Harry Huth. Over the last quarter or so of his life, Dr. Huth suffered a series of heart attacks. Yet during these years, he served as a parish pastor and as a seminary professor. He continued his teaching and scholarly work up to the time of his death. In many ways, this turned out to be his most productive period. Through it all, he remained well aware that he could pass into life with the Lord at any moment. He spoke openly about his imminent death, not because he was resigned to it as natural but because he rejoiced over Christ and his defeat of death. Expectantly, he wanted to be with the Lord. Eagerly did he await the redemption of his body. He kept telling us students what a privilege he had in teaching us, although we

could tell on some days that the effort exerted quite a strain, maybe also produced some groans.

Harry Huth knew how to stand on tiptoe and look ahead with the eyes of faith. With the Holy Spirit as firstfruits, he lived by faith. He lived in hope, as a son of his heavenly Father, in a world that is fallen yet created and redeemed. Amen.

SERMON 8

Not Denial, but the Good News

Romans 1:16-20

Sermon Outline

THE ANSWER TO GOD'S WRATH LIES NOT IN DENIAL, BUT IN THE GOSPEL OF RIGHTEOUSNESS BECAUSE OF CHRIST.

I. For the atheist . . .

II. For the "new atheist" . . .

Sermon

Two men watched television in an airport terminal as they awaited a flight. A commercial for a charity showed a needy child scooping water from a stagnant pool. One of the men said commercials like this wouldn't be necessary . . . if God were doing his job. This surprised the other man. "I didn't think," he responded, "that you believed in God." That set the first man off. How could he believe in a God who could fix all problems with nothing but a word yet does not do so? "God doesn't fix the problems," the man concluded, "so I don't believe in him."

Former *Lutheran Hour* Speaker Rev. Ken Klaus had been waiting for the same airplane. He overheard this conversation. In the boarding line, he spoke with the man who had said he didn't believe in God. Rev. Klaus said, "It occurs to me, it's not so much you don't believe in God. It's that you don't like the god you believe in. You think of him as being apathetic, cruel, and unpredictable." Rev. Klaus went on to suggest that the man look at Jesus again.⁸

This incident provides a preview of this sermon. It indicates that atheists can believe in God more than they themselves think they do. This should not surprise us. As the psalms say, "The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork," and it is, after all, the fool who "says in his heart, 'There is no God'" (Ps 19:1; 14:1).

Nor should it come as a surprise that, lacking a sense of sin, atheists would even pass judgment on God. Yet the shoe really goes on the other foot. Our text says: "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men" (Rom 1:18). God's wrath is