

The God Who Creates by His Word

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Preacher: Wayne Schuller

[0 : 0 0] and open with me to Genesis 1. It could be the easiest day you can do that. It's the first chapter of the first book of the Bible. And I want to say today, welcome to the Bible.

So this is how it begins. This is our book. It's a book I love and it contains the God I love, the God I worship. So welcome to the opening chapter of the opening book of our God, the book of beginnings, the book of Genesis. It's exciting. I find it very useful to remember that the Bible begins and ends with some similarities. So the Bible begins with creation and the Bible ends in the book of Revelation with a new creation, a new heavens and a new earth. So this business of creation is very, very important to God and very important to our story of being God's people in his creation. And today I want to ask three questions of Genesis chapter 1. And here are the questions. You've got to ask the right questions, I think, to kind of get where the text wants to take us. I think the questions we should ask are, who is this God of Genesis 1? Secondly, what is he like? What is he like? What are these six days of activity reveal about him?

And thirdly, where do we fit in? Where do we fit in? So who is this, the God of Genesis 1? What is he like? What does his creation tell us about him? And where do we fit in? Well, who is the God of Genesis 1? Well, he is the true and living and only maker. He is the creator God.

He is the God who was and is and will ever be. That's him. That's our God. He's the God who existed even before there was a beginning to begin at, there was God. Do you feel that sense of he's always been supreme? He's always been God. He's eternally God. It is not that in the ancient world, Genesis was up against some other models of creation as it is today, in a way you could say.

And one of the models in the ancient world was that there were many, many gods and they either worked together or they competed somehow and creation came out of that competition.

[2 : 3 4] But that's not what Genesis teaches. Genesis teaches there is one God who is, one God who creates, one God who sustains. And so we need to be very clear on this because I think our society is not as clear on this anymore and that seeps into even the way Christians think.

We have to be clear that the universe is not God. Everyone these days is trying to blur God and creation. But God is not embedded in the fabric of creation because before there was creation, there was God. So if you listen to too much Oprah Winfrey, that is what you'll start to think.

Or guys like Deepak Chopra or more kind of New Age thinking, popular kind of spirituality. What Oprah teaches is that everything is one. Everything is one. But that's actually not true.

When we get to Genesis chapter 1, it says everything is two. There is creator and creation. There are two fundamental orders of reality, two fundamental orders of being. There is unmade and made.

There is uncreated and created. In the beginning, God, the uncreated, created the heavens and the earth. So there are two orders of being and God is separate from his creation. And so you need to choose, like, do I think everything is one or do I think there is creator and creation? If you think that the burdens of the world lay on your shoulders or our shoulders, the burdens of creation, well then maybe you're reflecting that you think everything is one and that we're responsible for ourselves, it's actually not quite right. Even despite human individual responsibility, God is ultimately the one who will take care of his creation. And so the burden of creation weighs on the creator. On the other hand, some people think they can be autonomous. They think they have free will and they can do what they like in this world. It's all sort of mixed up and it's all one. Actually, that's not true either because if there is two orders of being, creator and created, then the created order depends on its creator. Not just for its initial beginning but for its sustenance and for its life.

[5 : 07] And so you can't think that you're autonomous or free. The whole universe you live in depends on the creator. So it's very important that we separate the two. It's very good news because it means that there is an accountability of the universe to its creator. There is an accountability for your life and my life to the maker. There is one who can judge, who is outside the box of our created reality. It's good news also that there's someone who can help us. There is a creator who can help us. And of course, the Bible storyline goes on to say that the creator helps us by entering. We'll come back to that. Sometimes people have this really, I think it's a foolish question to ask and I'll tell you why. Often the scientists or the atheists will say, or the grade five and six RE class in my case will say, who made God, Mr. Shuler? Who made God? And it's kind of like with the ha tone. Well, that's actually a category error.

That's the wrong question to ask. If everything was one, if Oprah was right, if everything was sort of interconnected, you would be right to ask, you know, this is behind this. Well, who's behind the God in that system? But if everything is two, if there is uncreated and created, then you can't ask in this sphere, who made you? That's uncreated sphere. You can only ask in this sphere, who made that? Do you see? So, God exists actually in this sort of, in this independent way of being which is uncreated. This is, of course, why the incarnation, why Christmas is so important to us is so important to us and, in fact, so incredibly amazing that God himself would bridge the chasm between uncreated and created, between unmade and made, that the word of God, the Son, would enter our creation. That's why it's so amazing. And, you know, and if you think everything is one, then incarnation is not such a big deal. And people will say, well, yeah, pagan gods, yeah, they walk the earth as well sometimes. But that's, if everything is one, it's not a big deal. But if everything is two, incarnation is a massive deal because it means for the first time in eternity, the uncreated one has breached the gap and entered his creation. So, it's an amazing thing. Now, so we want to separate the God of

Genesis 1. We want to say, here's God and here is his creation. But here's another problem. We don't want to separate them too far. We don't want to say that God has sort of created and injected energy into creation and then gone off and creation just survives on its own.

That's not Genesis 1 either. In Genesis 1, God enjoys his creation. He's speaking to it. He's blessing it. He's carefully, day by day, creating it. There's a real sense that this universe is going to depend on God for its ongoing life. And so, though they are separate, the one is very dependent on its maker. Creation is very dependent on its maker. Every day, every moment for its being, for its existence, the universe depends on God and we depend on God. We can never, ever get away from that.

By the way, that's called deism, the view that a deist God is a God who winds up the universe, makes it and then goes on a holiday and then we can just sort of play catch up without him.

[9 : 05] That's not Christianity. Christianity is theism, not deism, that God is separate but he sustains everything and we depend on him and he's interested in us. He's interested in his creation.

So, having made that distinction, I want to make one more comment about the identity of the God of Genesis 1. I want to be up front and say the God of Genesis 1 is a Trinitarian God.

He's a Trinity. He is God, God the Spirit and God the Word. He is complicated. He's a personal God. He's a God who says, let us make, which I think is more than just a majestic thing of saying.

It's majestically Trinitarian, let us make. I mean, just come with me. Listen for it in the opening two verses. In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was formless and void and covered the face of the deep while a wind from God, that is, spirit from God, spirit of God, swept over the face of the waters and God said, let there be light. So, there is God, God his Spirit and God the Word by which he creates. The whole chapter is God said this, God said that. God creates by his Word and so God's powerful, wise Word is his means of creation, which we know from Colossians 1 and John 1, that is the Son, that is the eternal Son. So, God is God, the Spirit and the Word, a Trinity and so it's here in Genesis 1 and it ought to be, though subtle, we ought to see it. So, that's who the God is. Second question, what is this God like? What is this sort of rhythmic, day-by-day pattern of creation tell us about our Creator God? Well, obviously it tells us he's a speaking God and his Word is central to his being, but I want to say more than that about God's words. God speaks in powerful poetry in Genesis 1.

There is a real rhythm to the days of 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6. The universe is created by his powerful, poetic Word. Let there be light. Let there be a dome to separate waters from waters. Let dry land appear.

[11 : 32] Let the earth bear fruit. Let there be light to separate day from night. And then every time it was so, and it was so, and it was so. And every time God saw that it was good. God saw that it was good.

God saw that it was good. Evening and morning, first day. Evening and morning, second day. Evening and morning, third day. There is a beautiful, wise, poetic rhythm to the days of creation. And it's so powerful. It's almost effortless. Let there be, and there is. It's a beautiful, powerful poetry of God and his Word. And though it's effortless, it's not careless. God really cares about what his powerful, poetic Word creates. So for example, I really love this section in our verse 22, where God just speaks to the birds. It's amazing. So verse 22, these are sort of things in the sea, but especially seems to be addressing the things that fly above the sea. God blessed them, saying, be fruitful and multiply and fill the waters in the seas and let birds multiply on the earth. Now I'm not that into birds, but God seems to like birds. And you think of the diversity of all the birds out there and all the, everyone knows a bird watcher and you know, they're kind of, they're very kind of geeky and they know all the million different birds. You know, I wonder if this is where Jesus got his line about, he said, not one sparrow will fall from the sky unless it will live with your Father in heaven.

Why does Jesus say God cares about birds? Because God blesses birds in Genesis 1. And so God enjoys his creation and he, by blessing it, he's showing his kindness to creation. There's joy and kindness from God to his creation. Now I want to take this a little bit further into an area of controversy.

And so please maybe just try it on with me and see what you think. I want to argue that I think in Genesis 1, God is really, really enjoying himself. God is having fun. Okay? Genesis 1 is God having fun in the, as an artist in the act of creation. You just think of the diversity of our world, the colour, the complexity, the grandeur. You know, God is enjoying that. He, he, he sort of, all this stuff about, you know, different species and, um, you know, there's the creeping things and the birds of the air and the wild animals. God's enjoying that diversity, that colour. Um, and you know, there are things here that, that he knows about that we are only still catching up on and maybe things we'll never, never fully catch up on. For example, I really like the, um, in verse 21, uh, here's a bit of a riddle in creation. I mean, there's so much I don't understand. I just think God is just enjoying it. Um, even enjoying the fact that we're frustrated by it. So God created the great sea monsters.

What's a great sea monster? Some might say, oh, it's just a whale. Well, that, that's what you would say if you're a boring clinical rationalist like we've all become. But God has great sea monsters and they appear elsewhere in the Bible. I won't tell you where, I'll let it be your little fun adventure to find them, but they're there and they've got scales and they breathe fire.

[15 : 09] God enjoys that, you know? And will we ever see these creatures? I don't know. But God takes pleasure in it. There's a, there's a majestic playfulness about this. I mean, what is it about the, the, God has to create a dome with water around the dome? I don't understand that. But it's, God seems to enjoy that's the way that he, he wanted to make it. And, you know, uh, it's God's fun. And I think God laughs at us when we're trying to rationally pick it apart, uh, when actually it's God, the artist at work. It's God, the artist in the creative zone. I mean, there's so much of creation that to be frank is kind of wasted. I mean, there's so much space. There's so much sort of empty space. And why does God have all that?

Well, he just likes it. Do you know what I mean? He just enjoys it. Uh, he's an artist. What, what, add your own questions. Why does God, uh, make the platypus? You know, sort of a weird creature, the platypus. Sort of our little Aussie weird thing that we, we're proud of. But God just enjoys the creativity in making creatures like that. Here's a, here's a way that you can test this, test my theory. Read Genesis 1. Go home and read it. And as you read each day, see if you can guess what's going to come next. Because like every good artist, there is order and there is unpredictability. There is creativity. And it's very hard to follow.

It really is. It's, it's, it's God having fun. Uh, he's doing light. Then he's doing ground and vegetation. Then he's back up doing the moon. Then he's doing ocean creatures, now birds. Now he's doing cattle, wild animals. It's kind of hard to follow. And that's good. Because within the order and structure, God is playing. God is having fun. Do you see? That's our creator, God. Uh, a quote from C.S. Lewis. If Christianity was something that we were making up, of course we could make it easier. But it is not. We cannot compete in simplicity with people who are inventing religions. Very wise, I think. It's true here. There's, there's so much we don't get in Genesis 1. That's not how we would write it. Our rational, clinical way of thinking. We lack the majestic playfulness of our God. He is God of wonders beyond our galaxy. And he's not distracted by our kind of committee-like approach to, to, to how we would like him to do it. I mean, let me give another example. And here, this is an example where the atheists really try and take Christians on and say that it must be wrong. So verse 16, God made the two great lights, the greater light to rule the day and the less light to rule the night and the stars. Now is any, I love astronomy. I did it at uni and it's great. Helen's teaching it to our kids. Any astronomer will tell you that the sun is not the greatest light there is. And that really the sun and the moon, I mean, the moon's not even a light, it just reflects light. And the fact is that the sun is quite insignificant in terms of where we are in the Milky Way galaxy and where that galaxy is in the kind of plethora of bigger galaxies. You know, Genesis 1 just doesn't get it, you know. This sort of, this very frowning, tut-tut scientific view critiquing Genesis 1, right? But actually what's happening in Genesis 1 verse 16 is God is teasing us. God is taunting us. Why is that? Well, because in the ancient world there were whole civilizations built around astrology. Astrology was everything. And you would, you'd pay a lot of money and people would be experts in what the stars are doing and they would be telling you what the gods want you to do and you'd follow them and you'd take all that very, very seriously. And you hear in Genesis 1, you kind of think, oh, well, where are the stars in the Hebrew account of creation? Well, they just come in three words. It just says, oh yeah, and the stars.

Just an aside. Because God is sort of mocking people who worship the stars. God is taunting civilizations that build everything around astrology in the ancient world. And I suspect God anticipated our own scientific mind. Good though that process is to try and play catch up with God. He's structured Genesis 1 in a way to sort of mock our seriousness, to sort of mess with our heads in a way to make us see him rather than be arguing and frowning and tutting about the details. Friends, we don't enjoy creation enough. We don't enjoy God enough.

We are so utilitarian and functional. God is creative and playful. We are too austere to understand Genesis 1 and we need to repent of being austere and repent of being rational and repent of being logical. I mean, when was the last time you did something creative? You know, you've got kids, it's easy. I do kinder duty and, you know, so you just look around, there's all these tables.

[20 : 39] You say, well, Lydia, what do you want to do? Oh, there's some painting. And I just shrug my shoulders. Oh, yeah, painting. You know, pick up a brush and then something comes alive in my heart. And I'm helping her and, I don't know, that's not how you do it. And I'm taking over and next thing, Lydia's gone off and Dad's just flicking paint and doing cool effects. That's what Genesis 1 is trying to evoke in us, that that's our God. You know, there's no tutting or frowning in Genesis 1.

When God says, oh, also I made the stars, he's just flicking stars out and kind of going, cool, that's excellent. God is skylarking in Genesis 1, skylarking with the sky, but skylarking nonetheless. So, I'm just trying to, I guess, think about what's behind the frowning and the tut-tutting between the kind of evolutionists and the creationists about this. It just seems, it feels to me like those sort of frowning arguments are a long way from Genesis 1. There's no frowning in Genesis 1.

There's no austere tut-tutting. And I think this is probably the best argument against evolution, if you want one, is that there's no poetry in evolution. There's no playfulness in evolution.

There's no blessing in evolution. There's no relationships in evolution. See, the God of Genesis 1 is the God behind a supernova, but also the God behind a baby laughing. You see? He's the God behind the spinning of the earth and the solar system and the planets and the galaxies.

He's also the God behind a newly married groom spinning his bride in a bridal waltz. He's that God as well. He's the God who designed the tilt of the earth so that we'd have seasons and days and years, as Genesis says. But also he's the God who gave us fruit-bearing trees and beaches so that we can sit back on a beach on a summer's day and drink an orange juice and praise him. You see, he's that God.

[22 : 54] If you are a mere rationalist, you will not understand Genesis 1. You will not understand God. You will not understand life in God's world. The God that we follow, here's a quote, the Trinity is the one we would all naturally long to be connected to and the Trinity is an intriguing, brilliant, playful, frightening, intoxicating God. And that's the God of Genesis 1.

Now, at this point in the story, everything is good. There is nothing intrinsically evil. God is spirit, but he's the God of stuff and it's his stuff and he likes it and the physical world is good. At this point in the story, evil hasn't entered yet, but that goodness remains nonetheless.

And creation reprojects or reflects the glory of the invisible God. Now, final question, where do we fit in? Maybe a little bit controversially, different things I read.

Christians like to say stuff like, we are the pinnacle of creation, you know, pat yourself on the back. I don't know about that. I mean, we're there on day six. We miss a lot. We kind of miss God's fun.

We miss God in his creative zone. I'd rather say that the centre of Genesis 1 is God, isn't he? God is the subject of every verb. God is the one, the artist, he is the one at work in the centre of creation. You know, if you live your Christian life as if you are the centre, you're not going to get far.

[24 : 35] You'll fall apart. There is one way, though, in which we do stand apart from the other creatures of creation, that we do stand above them. There's a mark that we do bear, which does give us a specialness. So I'll read it to you from verse 26.

And God said, God loves people so much.

He has a race, a creature, that bears his image to reflect his glory in a unique way. There's no other creature in all creation that bears the image of God. So that does make us special.

Male and female, equally in the image of God. And here in the very beginnings, it's important to see our gender as important to God, part of the diversity that God, the artist, loves and enjoys.

So please enjoy, if you're a man being a man, if you're a woman being a woman, if you've got children, let your little boys be little boys and your little girls be little girls, because God enjoys that. And together, men and women, God gives us the world. What a great gift.

[26 : 29] Yeah. Have the world. Rule the world. Fill it. Subdue it. Take care of it. It gives us authority. With authority comes responsibility. But it's very, very generous. Does this mean that God is no longer ruling the world? No, it doesn't. It just means that God has created a hierarchy. God, people, animals and creatures, trees, vegetation, the earth. You see, God has created a happy hierarchy in creation where God says, I will rule over you and I will rule through you, my image bearers.

It's a very happy hierarchy. And the whole chapter ends with this great, happy, playful ending. It was very good. It was very good. And it was, wasn't it? It was very good.

So let me summarise and conclude. Genesis 1 is about God. He's there on almost every line. It's all about God.

Creation is by God and for God. You are made in his image. You are made by God. You are for God. Here is the Christian approach to the world. There are two spheres of reality, creation and creator.

And we were made so that our constant attention would be drawn to God, to praise God, to worship God. That's the meaning of life. It's why we exist, to praise and worship God. You can see why sin is so bad when we turn our eyes off God and worship something in the created order, not in the uncreated order.

[28 : 02] See how wrong that is? Our purpose in life is not to escape creation. Even in the new heavens and the new earth, you will still be a creature dependent on God, made to orient towards God. You see, you will never escape being a creature.

You are always dependent on God. And so you can relish that and you can embrace that and enjoy it forever in the new heavens and new earth. Or you can begrudge that eternally in hell, but you will always be a creature.

God creates by his powerful, poetic word. He creates with majestic playfulness and with great care and great love for all that he has made.

So I summons you now, created beings, image bearers, worship God. Live for God. Praise God. And it's very fitting, isn't it, that if God should create by his word, that he chose to save the world through his word, becoming flesh and shedding blood on a cross.

Very fitting that he saves the world by the same means by which he made the world. And he'll recreate the world, the new heavens and the new earth, through that same word, our Lord Jesus Christ.

[29 : 23] So let's bow our heads and pay him homage now. Almighty God, Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, you are maker of all things and judge of all men.

We praise you for your kind and beautiful act of creation. We praise you for the reflection of your own beauty, joy and happiness in all that you have made.

Lord God, you are insurmountably good and powerful. And we praise you for your word, the Son. And we put our trust in him for our redemption, that is our transformation.

Amen.