

Handout 1

The Core Wisdom of the Bible

Reformation Fellowship

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Introduction—What Is Wisdom?

- A. What is “wisdom” ?
1. Correlated with knowledge and understanding.
 2. Related to skill and ability.
 3. Hence, wisdom is the knowledge and understanding that enables one to perform skillfully.
 - a. To do or to produce something skillfully.
 4. *DEFINITION: Wisdom is the skill or ability to perform excellently or to make something excellent because one has the knowledge and understanding that enables him to perform excellently or to produce something that is excellent.*
- B. Wisdom is what enables an individual to perform excellently (skillfully), rather than not, with regard to some particular task.
1. Hence, it is to perform in such a way that some particular thing that one does or makes is excellent.
 2. Or, it is to live in such a way that the life that one lives is lived excellently.
 - a. *James 1:5* > => “if any one lacks wisdom” = “if anyone lacks the ability to perform (i.e, to live) excellently”
- C. What is wisdom in human beings?
1. There are any number of different “performances” where performing excellently would be desirable (hence, there are many ways that human beings could be “wise”).
 2. But the “performance” that is of utmost interest to the authors of the Bible is this: to perform the task of being a human being. Hence, the wisdom they seek to promote is the wisdom that enables one to live excellently in the way one conducts himself as a human being. Hence, to be wise is to be able to *do* excellently and to *be* excellent.
 - a. Wisdom, then, is the ability to perform excellently in living out one’s existence as a human being; it is the ability to “succeed” at being a human being.
 3. However, by what standard is one’s being a human being measured? Who determines whether one has lived as a human being “excellently”? Who determines whether one has been a “successful” human being? What standard is used to decide that success?
 - a. Some faulty human standards:

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- (A) An excellent life is one wherein one achieves "happiness" (*eudaimonia*).
- (1) Wisdom is *eudaimonistic* wisdom.
- (B) An excellent life is one wherein the suffering and pain of human existence is significantly ameliorated. A successful life is a life that avoids a great deal of pain and sorrow.
- (1) Wisdom is *therapeutic* wisdom.
- (C) An excellent life is one wherein one comes to know and meet his moral obligations (duties).
- (1) Wisdom is moral or *deontological* wisdom.
- b. The true, relevant standard is the standard of God's will, God's purpose, God's design, and God's expectations.
- (A) God is the one who can judge whether one has lived "excellently" as a human being.
- (1) What God judges to be true is what is *objectively* true.
- (2) Note that the faulty human standards emphasize what a human being would *want* from his existence. The true standard involves what God wants from a human existence.
4. It is difficult to articulate a definition of what it means for a human being to live one's life in an excellent manner. However, even if we can't articulate it, we can tacitly know what it means. For the most part, we have the ability to discern when a human life is an excellent one.
- a. An analysis or definition would include, at least, these two things:
- (A) The person's navigating his existence and experience gracefully, impressively, and honorably.
- (B) The person's living his life in a manner fitting for a human being [where what is "fitting" for a human being is defined by God's original conception of who a human being was created to be].
- (1) For a human being *per se* to conduct himself excellently would require moral perfection. Only a perfectly good human being can be an excellent human being.
- (a) However, since as sons of Adam we are all sinful and morally depraved, true human excellence is completely out of reach to us.
- (b) Hence, the Bible speaks of a wisdom that leads to a lesser degree of excellence than moral perfection. While it is not true human excellence, it is a kind of "excellence" nonetheless.

[A] In the context of human sinfulness, wisdom is made manifest when an individual lives his life in a manner "fitting" for a morally imperfect human being who (i) knows that he is inescapably sinful, and yet (ii) strives to know, love, honor, and obey his creator in the context of and against the backdrop of his sinfulness.

[1] The "wise" man lives his life as gracefully, impressively, and honorably as is possible for a sinful, morally imperfect human being to do.

5. In the light of all of the above, we could aptly define wisdom this way:

a. *Wisdom is the knowledge and understanding that equips a human individual to live in such a way that God is pleased with his or her life.*

(A) *James 1:5* > "if any one lacks wisdom" = "if anyone lacks the ability to live in a manner that is pleasing to God"

6. Should we care about being wise? Are we actually motivated to live excellently, and to be pleasing to God? What if I don't care whether God is pleased with me?

a. It is highly likely that God created us with a built-in interest in being an excellent human being, and hence in being pleasing to God.

(A) When we are not so interested, it simply shows that we are depraved and perverse. Our built-in, created inclinations have been suppressed, ignored, or twisted.

D. Two different senses in which the word "wisdom" can be used.

1. 'Wisdom' can be used to indicate an *attribute*.

a. The attribute of having the ability to perform excellently, or having the ability to produce something excellent.

(A) *Exodus 31:1-11* > God granted to Bezalel and Oholiab the *wisdom* (=the ability, the skill) to make all of the various elements needed to construct the tabernacle to God's specifications.

(B) *James 1:5* > "if any one lacks wisdom" = "if anyone lacks the ability to live in a manner that is pleasing to God."

2. Or, through a kind of metonymy, 'wisdom' can be used to indicate a particular performance or product that is excellent as a result of the "wisdom" (skill or ability) of the one who did or made it. In other words, "wisdom" = a particular "wise" something = a particular excellent something.

a. It is a kind of metonymy of cause for result.

(A) Metonymy of cause for result is where one uses a word that literally denotes the cause of some result as a way of denoting the result itself. In other words, the cause that gave rise to some result is used to stand in for the result itself.

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- (1) "The cleverness of the criminal made several people go bankrupt."
- (a) Where "cleverness of the criminal" does not denote the literal cleverness of the man, it denotes the clever scam or clever fraud that was concocted by the criminal.
- (2) "His compassion cost him his life; he drowned trying to save the stranger."
- (a) Where "his compassion" does not denote the compassion of the man, literally; it denotes the act that was motivated by the man's compassion, namely, his act of risking his own life to save a stranger from drowning.
- (3) *Romans* 1:18, "The wrath of God will be brought forth from heaven against all the disregard of God and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in their unrighteousness."
- (a) Where "the wrath of God" does not denote his wrath, literally; it denotes the adverse and harmful effects that, God in his wrath, will cause to occur in the lives of unrepentant sinners.
- (b) See also *Revelation* 15:1, 15:7, and 16:1.
- (4) *Romans* 3:7, "But if by my lie the truth of God is magnified to his glory, then why am I nevertheless condemned as a sinner?"
- (a) Where "my lie" does not denote my lie, literally; it denotes the ultimate consequences of my lie (that is, of the falsity of my response and reaction to God's truth). That is, my false and unrighteous response (unbelief), leads to God's responding in mercy and forgiveness as a consequence. It is God's mercy, forgiveness, and faithfulness to his promises that magnifies God's glory. Hence, it is not literally "my lie" that magnifies God's glory. Rather, it is God's mercy, forgiveness, and faithfulness to his promises that results as a consequence of my lie that magnifies God's glory. Hence, "my lie" is being used to stand in for the response of God comes about as a consequence of my lie.
- (5) "The wisdom of Bezalel and Oholiab will be destroyed if the tabernacle is destroyed."
- (a) Where "the wisdom of Bezalel and Oholiab" does not denote the wisdom (skill) of these men, literally; it denotes the various elements of the tabernacle that they so skillfully (wisely) produced.
- (6) *1 Corinthians* 1:20, "where is the wise man? [= where is the man who has wisdom?]" "Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? [= Has not God shown that the lives and performances of individuals in this world which are purported to reflect their wisdom (that is, the knowledge and understanding that leads to their ability to choose and act well) actually, in fact, reflect

their foolishness (that is, the ignorance that results in their choosing and acting badly)].”

(a) In this case, more specifically, we have a metonymy of the enabling attribute for the result of that enabling attribute.

[A] The attribute (wise / wisdom) is being used in place of that which presumably comes about as a consequence of that attribute (wise actions, choices, and/or words).

E. What is wisdom as related to God? That is, what is the “wisdom of God”?

1. Two different senses in which it is used:

a. “Wisdom of God” = an attribute of God.

(A) Wisdom of God = God’s **ability** to perform excellently or to produce something excellent.

(1) God, because of his wisdom (ability), can be an excellent creator, protector, judge, provider, etc.

(2) *Romans 11:33*

(a) “the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God” = the ability of God to perform excellently or to produce excellent things is deep in its abundance; that is, God’s skill to perform excellently or to produce excellent things exists to a profound degree.

[A] The excellent things of God’s “wisdom” (skill or ability) that are in view here are his profoundly wise judgments and purposes.

b. “Wisdom of God” = some particular thing that God has done or created.

(A) Wisdom of God, through metonymy = **some particular excellent thing** that God has done or made.

(1) Metonymy of cause for result (effect).

(a) In this case, more specifically, we have a metonymy of enabling attribute for a result of that enabling attribute.

[A] Where the phrase (the **wisdom** of God) that literally denotes an enabling attribute of God (his wisdom) is used to stand for an effect of that enabling attribute.

[1] God’s attribute is being used in place of that which presumably comes about as a consequence of that attribute (wise actions, wise choices, wise plans, and/or wise words).

(2) Examples.

(a) “Satan could not stop or thwart the wisdom of God.”

[A] This assertion is not intended to say that Satan could not stop or thwart an attribute of God.

[B] This assertion is intended to say that Satan could not stop or thwart some particular *wise plan* of God.

(3) *1 Corinthians 1:21* [wisdom = God's wise plan or purpose], *1:24* [Christ, the wisdom of God = Christ, the center of God's wise plan or purpose for saving certain individuals from destruction], *2:7* [the wisdom of God = the wise plan of God for saving certain individuals from destruction]

Part One: God, Created Reality, and the Nature of Their Relationship

A. *PROVERBS 8:22-36*

1. Two elements within *Proverbs 8:1-36*:
 - a. Extended exhortations to receive instruction from WISDOM. [8:1-21, 32-36]
 - (A) Wisdom instructs in accord with truth and righteousness.
 - (1) Wisdom leads to nobility, truth, righteousness, knowledge, discretion, and justice.
 - (B) Wisdom is more valuable than gold, silver, or jewels.
 - (C) All who heed wisdom are blessed; they will find Life and the favor of Yahweh.
 - (1) All who reject wisdom harm themselves and are destined for death.
 - b. Declaration that WISDOM co-existed with God, prior to the beginning of created reality. [8:22-36]
 - (A) It makes no sense to read this as a random, unconnected thought inserted into the middle of the chapter. We must understand it as making an essential contribution to the point of the chapter.
 2. What is this "wisdom"?
 - a. Given that (i) WISDOM pre-existed with God himself and that (ii) God "possessed" it at the beginning of created reality [8:22], there are two viable options for what WISDOM means:
 - (A) An understanding that enables God to function skillfully and with excellent results (i.e., a wisdom) that was possessed by God at the very beginning of created reality.
 - (B) Or, as an instance of metonymy, a wise plan for created reality devised by God before he brought created reality into existence.
 - b. Given that (i) it is reasonable to assume that WISDOM means the same thing throughout the entire chapter of *Proverbs 8*, and that (ii) the primary point of *Proverbs 8* is to exhort his readers to receive instruction from this WISDOM, it seems

unlikely that WISDOM is an understanding that enables God to function skillfully and with excellent results. Here is why that seems unlikely:

(A) In the case of human beings, wisdom (skill to perform excellently) results from an understanding of the reality human beings inhabit. What would wisdom be in the case of God? What pre-existent reality could God have understood such that he was enabled to be skillful in his creation of reality? Whatever it could have been, is it plausible to think that we could come to share God's understanding of THAT reality? It seems unlikely. We can never understand the depths of reality the way God understands them, such that we could perform as God does.

(1) On the other hand, if God's wisdom is not some sort of understanding but is something else entirely, then it is difficult to know how we could receive instruction from it. We know what it means to be instructed in some "understanding" of something. What would it mean to be instructed in something that does not involve and "understanding" of something?

(B) Therefore, it is not very likely that the wisdom Solomon has in view is that which enables him to perform skillfully and with excellent results—whether that be some understanding which he had before the world was created, or anything else.

c. But it does make sense to understand WISDOM to be the "wise plan" for created reality that God devised before he brought created reality into existence.

(A) It makes sense for Solomon to be asserting that God brought created reality into being in keeping with a wise plan for created reality that he had previously devised.

(B) It makes sense that we human beings could receive instruction from (and about) this wise plan for created reality that God had devised. In other words, by learning about and acquiring an understanding of God's wise plan for created reality, a human being gains an understanding of created reality that would enable him to perform skillfully at living in that created reality.

(C) Hence, such an understanding of "wisdom" (i.e., as God's wise plan) can make sense out of Solomon's contention that being instructed by this "wisdom" (i.e., by his wise plan) would lead to truth, righteousness, blessing, and Life.

3. Translation of *Proverbs* 8:30-31 >

a. "Then I was beside him as a trusted confidant; and I was his delight day after day, at all times causing joy before him, causing joy by the inhabited realm of his world, even by the delight I brought with the sons of men."

(A) Or, however, the word meanings and syntax of the text are to be analyzed, the basic sense is this: The Wisdom of God was there with God at the beginning and was trusted by God to direct him in his creation of created reality. God took delight in the Wisdom of God (that is, in the plan that he had devised). It caused

God considerable pleasure, joy, and delight. In particular, the world of human beings brought him great pleasure, joy, and delight.

(1) Interpretation and translation of the biblical text needs to happen from the outside in (not from the inside out), from the top down (not from the bottom up). Hence, while it is clearly a dialectical process, we do not ultimately determine what a text means on the basis of how we have decided the vocabulary and syntax need to be analyzed, rather we determine how the vocabulary and syntax need to be analyzed on the basis of how we have decided we have to understand the meaning of the text.

(B) Solomon’s point that God particularly took delight in the sons of men is noteworthy for this reason: God would be more impressed with the vast expanses of the cosmos if the Wisdom of God were the blueprints for the material structure of reality. But if the part of the Wisdom of God that gives God particular delight is “the sons of men,” then it would seem that the most important part of the Wisdom of God is the storyline of the history of mankind. For the most striking aspect of a human existence is the story that unfolds in and through that existence.

4. Summary of the point of *Proverbs* 8 and the relationship between the two different elements of this chapter:

a. To know God’s plan for created reality is to understand the plan and purpose behind my own existence and the plan and purpose for reality itself. When one understands the plan and purpose for reality itself—and for his own existence—then he will be equipped to function in that reality in such a way that the life he lives is excellent.

(A) Human beings should seek to be instructed by God’s wise plan (God’s WISDOM)—the plan in keeping with which all of created reality is created by God. If a man is instructed by God’s wise plan and comes to understand it, then he will be guided into truth and righteousness. To be so instructed by God’s wise plan is more precious than gold, silver, or precious jewels, for the one who is instructed by God’s wise plan will find the favor of God and Life.

b. Solomon’s point is that human wisdom comes from possessing and being instructed by the “wisdom” that existed before the world even began, that is, from possessing and being instructed by *the wise plan* of God that he had devised before he even began to bring anything into being.

(A) To live as a wise human being involves living one’s life skillfully in keeping with the nature of what created reality actually is. And what is created reality? It is exactly what God planned created reality to be before it even began. Hence, for a human being to live wisely entails his knowing and understanding the basic nature of the preconceived plan of God for created reality and living one’s life in the light of his understanding of that divine plan.

(1) The foolish man is the man who does not have a clue about what created reality is, while the wise man understands the true nature of the created reality within which he lives.

(a) The foolish man does not have a clue about what created reality is because he knows nothing of what God conceived reality to be before he brought it into existence. The wise man understands the true nature of the created reality within which he lives because he knows and understands what God conceived reality to be before he brought it into existence.

[A] In other words, the foolish man is foolish because he knows nothing of God's WISDOM (=wise plan for created reality). The wise man is wise because he knows and understands something of God's WISDOM (=wise plan for created reality).

5. What is the nature of God's WISE PLAN (wisdom) in this passage?

a. If created reality is a mechanism that God built (a kind of "Robo-world"), then God's WISE PLAN (wisdom) would be his plan for the mechanical structure of created reality. That is, his wisdom would be his ingenious blueprints for the Robo-world.

(A) Difference between two paradigms (thought experiment):

(1) Robo-world (the paradigm I grew up with).

(a) The creations in Robo-world are semi-autonomous.

(b) "History" is not created by the inventor; it is created by programmed actions of robots.

(2) The primary alternative: an author imagining a story into existence.

(a) Everything that is in the story comes out of the mind and imagination of the author.

(b) No creature is in the least bit autonomous.

(c) History is created by the author, not the characters.

(B) If created reality is a sort of Robo-world reality, then human wisdom amounts to living in keeping with the mechanisms ("laws") of created reality.

(1) This would be just like the wisdom of the ancient Stoics.

(C) Given that we have inculcated the Enlightenment paradigm from our culture and education, this is the most "natural" way to understand what God's wise plan must be.

b. However, if created reality is a story that God is authoring, then God's WISE PLAN (wisdom) would be his plan for the narrative plot structure of created reality. That is, his wisdom would be his wise and wonderful idea for a set of inter-locking stories to author.

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- (A) Then human wisdom amounts to knowing, understanding, and appreciating the meaning, significance, and purpose of the stories that God is authoring, and hence, it amounts to having a successful and excellent existence because one's choices and actions are informed by an understanding of what God is doing.
- (B) Since we are products of Enlightenment thought and assumptions, this is not the most "natural" way for us to understand God's wise plan. Nevertheless, ultimately, *it is the best possible explanation for all the data* that we get from common-sense experience, philosophy, and the Bible.
- (1) Best explanation of all the data: God as author and created reality as story; created reality as an "idea" in the mind of God.
- (a) The compatibility of divine sovereignty and human freedom > *requires* > a particular conception of divine causation > *requires* > a particular conception of God as transcendent > *requires* > a conception of God wherein his relationship to reality is analogous to the relationship between an author and his story > *requires* > a conception of created reality as story-like, rather than machine-like.
- (b) Two other specific examples of data that are best explained by the "story paradigm":
- [A] Our ordinary experience and common sense suggests to us that our existence seems to have meaning and significance. It makes no sense to us that our existence is without meaning and absurd.
- [1] A reality that has nothing more than a mechanical structure to it has no intrinsic meaning and significance.
- [a] God could build a big machine that pumps out widgets. But why? Why make a machine that pumps out widgets?
- [b] God could create a physical, material reality that operates lawfully in accord with the scientific laws. But why? What is the point?
- [2] By its very nature, a narrative does (or, at least, may) have an intrinsic meaning and significance.
- [a] Hence, reality as a narrative more closely matches our expectations for reality.
- [B] Personal identity is not a problem if human existence has a narrative structure. Personal identity is a difficult (perhaps even unsolvable) problem if human existence merely has a mechanical nature.
- c. As tempting as it is to us to see the "wise plan" of God to which Solomon is referring as blueprints that God designed for a mechanistic structure and reality, that conclusion should be resisted. Abductive reasoning (inference to the best possible explanation)

- tion) would lead us to conclude that God's "wise plan" is his wise and wonderful idea for a set of interlocking stories.
6. Therefore, abductive reasoning would lead us to see the biblical worldview as a form of idealism, not a form of materialism. Stories are, by their very nature, a set of ideas; not a conglomeration of material stuff.
 - a. The crucial difference between materialism and idealism is not how "thin" is the stuff out of which created things are made. The crucial difference is *the degree of autonomy* created reality has from the author or creator of reality.
 - (A) Idealism sees created reality as *NOT in the slightest degree* autonomous from the creator.
 - (B) Materialism sees created reality as *semi-autonomous* from the creator.
 - b. Hence, in *Proverbs 8*, the "wise plan" of God (that existed with God when God brought created reality into existence) is his conception of what **story** to tell (an **IDEA**), not his blueprint for what mechanical structures to make.
 7. From *Proverbs 8*, we are left with the following question:
 - a. How *detailed* was God's pre-existent plan? Did God pre-determine every detail of created reality? Or only the general outline of it?
 - (A) In other words, did God pre-determine every detail of each interlocking story? Or did he determine only the broad outlines of each story? Or, only the broad outlines of the meta-narrative that subsumes all the individual stories?

B. Acts 17:22–31

1. Points Paul makes:
 - a. The God whom the Athenians honor as "the Unknown God" is the creator of all of created reality. Unlike the dumb idols that the Athenians worship, he needs no temple he has no need for any human being to serve him or give him anything.
 - b. The Unknown God is the one who creates each and every human being and the whole of history.
 - c. The purpose that this Unknown God has for mankind is that each and every human individual should come to know this God who creates history.
 - d. This Unknown God that we should come to know is eminently knowable for two basic reasons:
 - (A) He is "not far off," he is "near to us," for "in Him we live and move and have our being."
 - (B) We are his children (made in his image); hence, just as we can come to know one another, in a somewhat analogous way, we can come to know the Unknown God.

He is not so very mysteriously different that knowledge of him is out of reach. He is like us in very important ways.

- (1) Our creating dumb idols to represent God to ourselves as we do shows how ignorant we are of this Unknown God.
- e. Therefore, we should all repent of our ignorance of this God.
 - (A) A day is soon coming when a man appointed by God will come to rule over the world. It is the man Jesus. He was demonstrated to be this man by his resurrection from the dead. In order for one to have a place in the kingdom that he will establish, one must repent of his ignorance of God.
2. To make the point that this God that we should get to know is "not far off." Paul says that "in him, we live and move and exist (have our being)."
 - a. Paul cannot here be conceiving of created reality as a mechanistic and materialist reality.
 - (A) To assert that we live, move, and have our being "in him" would be a strange thing to say if we are semi-autonomous, mechanical entities.
 - (1) We would not say of the engineer who designed Robo-world that the robots within it "live, move, and have their being" in the engineer.
 - (2) Even "by him" would be a strange thing to say: "by him we live, and move, and have our being." If we are semi-autonomous, then we "live, move, and have our being" within ourselves; for that is what we were created to be—self-functioning and self-sustaining.
 - b. On the other hand, if we were characters in a story of which God is the author, then to assert that we "live, move, and have our being in him" would be a completely appropriate way to describe us.
 - (A) The entire being of a character within a story lies *within* the mind of the author.
 3. *Acts 17* confirms what we see in *Proverbs 8:22-31*. The pre-existent plan of God (the Wisdom of God) was a *pre-conceived script of the narrative that God was going to bring into being*; it was not a plan for a mechanistic structure that he was going to build.
 4. *Acts 17* hints at an answer to our unanswered question (How detailed is the pre-existing script according to which God creates reality?). It suggests that *everything* that occurs is part of that script.
 - a. For "in him we live, and move, and have our being."
 - b. However, this evidence is not completely definitive. Paul could be speaking in very broad and general terms, not meaning it as an absolute statement.

C. *JOHN 1:1-5*

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1. John uses “*logos*” to describe exactly the same thing that Solomon calls the “wisdom of God.”
 - a. John says the *logos* was in the beginning with God. Solomon says the wisdom of God was in the beginning with God.
 - (A) These are identical statements. *Logos* and *wisdom* are synonymous. Roughly speaking, both denote the “wise plan” of God.
 2. John says NOT ONE THING that has come into being has come into being “apart from” the *logos*. That is, NOT ONE THING that has come into being has come into being apart from the “script” or wise plan that existed with God from the very beginning.
 - a. *John* 1 answers the question that remained after interpreting *Proverbs* 8. Namely, did God pre-determine every detail of each interlocking story? Or, did he determine only the broad outlines of each story, or the broad outlines of the overall meta-narrative? John makes clear that *God pre-determined every detail of each and every individual, interlocking story.*
 3. What John says about “life” being in the *logos* (in the context of his gospel) suggests that John is *not* conceiving of the *logos* as the plan of a mechanistic structure. He is conceiving of it as the plan for the unfolding story that he has decided to bring into being—a story that involves salvation from destruction into life.
 - a. Life is not some sort of mechanical entity that could exist in the mechanical structure of created reality. Rather, it is an abstract entity; not a tangible, concrete entity. It can exist as part of a particular narrative. But it could never exist as a specific concrete material entity in a material and mechanical reality.
 - b. Therefore, John confirms here what we saw in *Proverbs* 8: the pre-existent plan was a pre-conceived script of the narrative that God was going to bring into being. And it was not a plan for some mechanistic structure that he was going to build.
 - (A) Going further, John makes clear that every second of our lives pre-exists as part of the pre-existent plan of God.

D. **GENESIS 1:1-2:4a**

1. How have we typically understood *Genesis* 1?
 - a. As a description of God’s fashioning all the semi-autonomous entities that make up the natural world: the sun, moon, stars, birds, fish, animals, plants, and human beings.
 - (A) Except for those who interpret it as a myth, we typically interpret it as a basically literal description of how and when God created material, physical reality.
2. Why have we always interpreted it as we have?
 - a. Because, from the period of the Enlightenment, we have thoroughly absorbed a materialistic, mechanistic paradigm. We read *Genesis* 1 through the lenses of that paradigm.

(A) While God is an invisible, intangible being, created reality consists of material, tangible "stuff." The creation account is an account of how all the material, tangible "stuff" that is other than God came into being.

(1) The typical reading of *Genesis 1* assumes a false picture of reality: the physical world is what God created; God himself (and other spiritual beings) are uncreated. (Typically, this picture of reality would not be explicitly articulated and acknowledged in these terms, but it is the tacit understanding that underlies the typical reading of the *Genesis* creation account.)

(a) Implication: primary reality is the reality in which God dwells (along with Satan, angels, etc.); physical reality (the reality we humans inhabit) is of secondary importance to that primary reality. (From the Bible's perspective, human history is of much greater import to God's purposes than, for example, the angelic realm. This variance shows the tacit underlying assumption to be false.)

3. How should we interpret *Genesis 1*?

a. Illustration of the sort of genre that *Genesis 1* is:

(A) See accompanying paper entitled "*Model Creation Stories to Aid In Our Understanding of Genesis 1*".

(B) All of the following statements can be made about all of the model creation stories outlined in the paper mentioned above:

(1) The order in which things come into existence is arbitrary. The order is not intended to be chronologically accurate. In fact, it is not even intended to be rationally coherent.

(2) The groupings of things that are said to come into being alongside other things is arbitrary. It is not intended to reflect any literal ordering of creation.

(3) The created entities that are mentioned in the account are not intended to be exhaustive. The account is not meant to be an absolutely exhaustive account of all that God created. Rather, it is only intended to communicate the breadth of God's creative act as a way of suggesting the larger truth that God is the creator of absolutely everything that is.

(4) The assignment of each particular created thing, or of each sort of created thing, to a particular direction, box, or month within these accounts is totally artificial. (It is dictated by a subsidiary purpose of the account, not by the primary purpose of the account.) This assignment is not intended to reflect any truth whatsoever about the nature of created reality nor about the nature of God's creative act. For, as already suggested, the groupings created by such assignments are completely arbitrary.

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- (5) The creation of each and every account has a subsidiary purpose. Not only is the purpose of each account to take a philosophical position on the nature of God and his relationship to reality (it is exactly the same philosophical position in all three creation stories mentioned in the paper), but each story has its own unique subsidiary purpose: namely, to justify some hypothetical religious practice or perspective (bowing to the east, the attribution of meaning to the rainbow, the celebration of the Son of God in December).
- (6) None of these stories is intended to describe *how* or *when* created reality came into being. Their sole purpose is to maintain that every aspect of everything that is and of everything that occurs is the result of God willing it into existence. Everything that is comes about simply because God has conceived of it and willed it to be.
- (7) All of these stories have *a certain fanciful "feel" about them*, because they all express a philosophical truth through the medium of a fictional, unrealistic, and somewhat fanciful story. It would be a huge mistake to allow the fanciful "feel" of the account to distract me from the earnestly serious philosophical statement that is being expressed.
- (C) If the model creation stories in the paper mentioned above successfully imitate the nature and character of the creation account in *Genesis 1* (and I maintain that they do), then all of the above statements apply to the creation account in *Genesis 1* just as surely as they apply to the model creation stories in the above paper.
- b. Primarily, *Genesis 1* should be interpreted as a philosophical statement about the nature of created reality in relation to God its creator:
- (A) It is not directly a polemic against the gods of polytheism. (It does indirectly function as such a polemic, of course, because it promotes a radically different worldview from polytheism. But that is not its primary purpose. Its primary purpose is to make a positive statement about the nature of created reality in relation to God.)
- (B) What it states:
- (1) God brings all of reality into being simply by willing reality to be what he wants it to be.
- (a) This account does not describe God as fashioning reality out of pre-existing materials.
- [A] God is not a craftsman who exerted himself to fashion or craft the world.
- (b) Nor does it describe God as having magical speech that allows him to conjure up created reality out of nothing, where there was no pre-existing thing.

[A] “And God said ‘Let there be X,’ and there was X” is not a magical incantation. While it is logically possible that it be a magical incantation, that is not the best way to understand it.

[1] God is not a wizard who conjured up the world.

(c) Rather, God’s speech (“Let there be X”) is an expression of his will and desire.

[A] “Let there be X and there was X” is meant to suggest that all of created reality—out of blank, sterile nothingness—came into being simply because God willed it to be.

[1] Hence, it describes God as merely WILLING created reality into existence.

[a] Note the similarity to an author. An author “wills” his created reality to be whatever he wants it to be. He need not exert himself in any way. By contrast, a craftsman or engineer must exert himself to *craft* or to *engineer* created reality to be what he wants it to be.

[2] God is an author who imagines the world into being.

[a] Created reality is utterly dependent upon God’s will to have existence. If God wills for X to exist, X will exist. If God does not will for X to exist, X will not exist.

[b] *Genesis 1* confirms what we saw in *Proverbs 8*, *Acts 17*, and *John 1*—namely, the created reality that God creates is not best understood as a sort of mechanistic structure. Rather, it is best understood as a kind of narrative, as something that can simply be willed into being.

[c] Hence, created reality is utterly and completely dependent upon the will of God; it is NOT semi-autonomous.

(2) ***Everything that exists*** exists by the will of God.

(3) It is not nature that God was primarily interested in bringing into existence. History is what God was primarily interested in creating; nature was simply the context (the stage) for history.

(a) The initial creation account is mistakenly taken to be THE CREATION ACCOUNT. That is not so. *Genesis 1* is the account of *the creation of the heavens and the earth*, the stage upon which God’s continuing creation is to take place. It is not the account of *creation itself*. The account of the creation of the most important aspect of God’s creation does not begin until the account beginning in *Genesis 2:4*.

c. Secondly, as an explanation of the meaning and purpose of Sabbath-keeping.

(A) This is why the author of this account *contrives* an account where nature is created in “six days” and the seventh day that follows is when God ceased from his task of bringing nature into existence. After his work of creating nature has been completed, we are to understand that only then did God begin to create what he was really interested in creating (human history, the story).

E. **Hebrews 1:2**

1. All of the “ages” were created specifically with Jesus—the *Messiah*—in view. Hence, God’s authoring of all of history was to the end that Jesus, the *Messiah*, might be highlighted, exalted, and glorified in and by that history.
 - a. The very point being made here presupposes this very important point: *it is God who authors history*. Certainly history is created, authored, and determined as the net effect of choices made by the various human actors. But, ultimately, history is created, authored, and determined by God. This can only be true if God is the author of all the human choices made by human beings.

F. **Ephesians 3:7-11**

1. *“Of this gospel I became a servant in accord with the gift of God’s grace that was given to me, consistent with the working of his power. To me, the very least of all the sanctified ones, this grace was given: (a) to convey to the Gentiles the good news about the incalculable treasure of the Messiah, and (b) to bring to light what is his plan for distributing his blessing to all (since from long ages past the secret had been hidden in God, in the one who creates all things). My bringing this to light was so that the multifarious wisdom of God pertaining to his ekklesia (which is in accord with the purpose that he formed for the ages, to the benefit of Messiah Jesus, our lord) might now be made known to the leaders and authorities in divine matters.”*
 - a. Paul is using wisdom here in much the same way that “wisdom” is being used in *Proverbs 8:12–9:6*. In this passage, the “multifarious wisdom” of God (literally, the “multi-colored wisdom” of God) consists, specifically, of the many different “stories” that God has created wherein select individual human beings come to be joined to the eternal people of God in and through their life journeys.

G. **Hebrews 10:5–10**

1. *Therefore, when it comes to the ritualistic system of sacrifices, it says, “You do not want a sacrifice and offering, rather, you have arranged a body for me. In whole burnt offerings and offerings for sin, you find no pleasure. Then I said, ‘Behold, I have come (in the scroll of the book it is written concerning me) to do your will, O God.’” After saying above, “sacrifice and offering” and “whole burnt offerings and offerings for sin” you “do not want” nor do you “find any pleasure in them”—things that are offered in accord with the Covenant—then it says, “Behold, I have come to do your will.” He takes away*