

# Feature Article



## Is Historic Biblical Creationism Divisive?

Some Reflections

*By Russell Baylis*

### First of all, let's clarify what Historic Biblical Creationism is

It is the view that takes Genesis ch.1 as an historical account of creation. A 'day' is taken to be a 24-hour period with an evening and a morning. And it happened, using the clues elsewhere in the Bible, about 6,000 years ago. This historic view excludes millions of years since the beginning, a time-period essential for evolution. Sir Isaac Newton, arguably the most influential scientist in history, believed it, as do many PhD scientists today.

Many people today are not aware that the scientific evidence is very supportive of this biblical creationist view, as we are taught evolution as fact. The biblical creationist view was the mainstream Christian view until the late 19th century, when Darwinian ideas became more widely accepted, including within the church. Now it seems that holding the biblical creationist view is seen as non-mainstream, controversial, and even divisive.

Division is not new, but unity in the church is mega-important. How is it to be maintained when opinions differ? Every church leader, or teacher, has to form opinions or convictions concerning some, at least, of the following topics.

For example, 'remarriage after divorce' is an unavoidable issue today. (I encountered it in my first week as a pastor.) It is important because once a church leader has conducted just one re-marriage, changing one's mind is hardly an option.

### Let's consider how convictions are formed.

Some factors influencing the formation of a leader's convictions will be:

- Their denomination or denominational training
- Friends and connections
- Their own study and research

### Here are some topics which could be considered divisive in the church (listed alphabetically !)

- Baptism in water - How? Whom? When?
- Baptism in the Spirit
- Being filled with the Spirit
- Creationism and Genesis chapters 1-3
- Demons - do they exist? If so, how to deal with them? Can Christians be demonised?
- Ecumenism and inter-church relationships
- Heaven and hell
- Holy Communion - are the bread and wine purely symbolic? Who is qualified to lead it?
- Inspiration and Inerrancy of Scripture
- Israel and the future

- Jesus the only way to God
- Liberal theology
- Millennium views
- Remarriage after divorce
- Same-sex marriage
- Speaking in tongues
- Women's ministry

Having formed convictions on an issue, what does a leader actually do about them? What factors might influence the actions of leaders arising from their convictions? Some factors will probably be:

- An awareness of the views of others in the church; is this guesswork or are the topics openly discussed?
- The significance or standing of those with different convictions; is disagreement worth the possible damage?
- An assessment of the value and importance of the topic: what is important?
- Current teaching being emphasised in the life of the church: what is immediate?

#### **Some possible actions:**

- Forbid discussion to avoid disunity
- Ignore the topic by never addressing it, so any view is seen as acceptable
- Promote one view only, ridiculing or ignoring other views
- Promote one view only, explaining other views
- Explain various views and their strengths to promote discussion

#### **What about the cultural and church contexts, which can influence the appropriate approach?**

- A topic may be impossible to avoid in pastoral ministry. So it must be handled, whether or not teaching is offered e.g. remarriage after divorce.
- Not to offer teaching on a topic of doctrine is

effectively to condone the prevalent view in the church, whatever that is. But are we aware what others in the church believe about heaven and hell, for example?

- To affirm a belief frequently, but without offering a biblical rationale, will reinforce it in the minds of some, while leaving others who have questions feeling they should not ask their questions e.g. the inerrancy of Scripture.
- Not to offer teaching may leave the church ill-equipped or confused. That confusion may not be articulated, precisely because of its accompanying confusions. Many will then feel they are supposed to know what to believe and feel reluctant to raise their questions.
- Not to offer teaching on an important view held widely in the prevailing culture is effectively to condone that view e.g. that would surely apply to evolution.

#### **Some Scriptures concerning divisions in the church:**

- Luke 12:51-53 - Jesus said he didn't come to bring peace on earth but rather division.
- John 1:14 - The Word became flesh and dwelt among us.... full of grace and truth.



- 1 Corinthians chapters 1-3 - Of all the issues at Corinth that Paul addressed, the issue of unity came first. But subsequently he didn't ignore the other issues.
- Phil 2:1-2 What is involved in being "of the same mind... and of one mind"? (Ans: read on in ch.2.)
- 2 Tim 2:23-25 "Avoid foolish, ignorant

controversies, Timothy,” says Paul, “They breed quarrels”.

- 2 Peter 3:3-7 Scoffers will come....
- Jude 18-19 ... there will be scoffers... who cause divisions, worldly people, devoid of the Spirit.

### **Some Personal comments:**

The analysis above arose from considering the response from some church leaders that the topic of Creation (interpreting Genesis 1-3) is divisive. So in order to maintain unity, it is often ignored.

I hope the analysis above is thought-provoking and helpful. At least it should show it is not the only divisive topic around. Are we to ignore them all? Is the truth never divisive?

It is too easy to underestimate the importance of this subject. Thinking unbelievers reject Christianity principally because of evolution; ask any evangelist.

Genesis 1-3 form the foundation on which many doctrines are based, including the gospel. It is simply not possible to preach the gospel coherently and at the same time to ignore these chapters.

Unfortunately many church leaders, being busy, have not done sufficient research to find answers to the common questions. Their training may have been inadequate or biased. Yet there are websites available with thousands of articles giving clear answers e.g. [creation.com](http://creation.com) and [AnswersInGenesis.org](http://AnswersInGenesis.org) (I plead guilty to shelving this topic during my years as a pastor; there was no internet then, but that is no excuse.)

This final comment is more serious. In his letter to the Romans Paul taught that God’s invisible attributes “have been clearly perceived ever since the creation of the world in the things that have been made” (1:20). Perceived by whom? The clear answer is humankind; so no room for millions of years after the creation of the world. He also taught that sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin (5:12), thus clearly endorsing the historicity of Genesis 3

and the absence of death before Adam. So no millions of years of death and suffering. In fact Paul’s account of the gospel in Romans has ‘biblical creationism’ firmly embedded in it. Now his final instruction in the letter was to “watch out for those who cause divisions and create obstacles contrary to the doctrine that you have been taught; avoid them” (Rom 16:17). So those who cause divisions in the church must include those who abandon this clear teaching, which the church held as mainstream for 18 centuries. Therefore, contrary to what some church leaders suggest, it is not biblical creationism which is divisive. Rather, it is the attempt to adopt into the biblical history the millions of years on which evolution depends which is divisive.

Is what God himself wrote in Exodus 20v11 so difficult to understand? Did the church really misinterpret it for 18 centuries?!

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