

1. GENESIS ... BACK TO THE BEGINNING

(BOUNDARIES & BLESSINGS IN CREATION)

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And God *divided* the light from the darkness ... (Genesis 1: 4).

I woke up one morning to the sound of rumbling and whirring. Indeed, my whole house was shaking. The windows were rattling. The bed was rocking. The very ground seemed to be quaking. What could be disturbing my peaceful sleep? Was this an earthquake? Was this the earth swallowing me? Was this the end of the world?

As I opened the blinds, I was shocked to see an old man on his tractor ploughing up my beautiful lawns. What? I rushed outside waving my arms and yelling at the top of my voice, "What do you think you are doing? You are on private property. Why are you ploughing up my manicured lawns, and my vegetable gardens? And, pray tell, who are you anyway?"

The old man looked at me quizzically and dryly explained, "Why neighbour, I live on the farm down the road. I finished ploughing up my own paddocks for planting, and just ran out of new ground to plough. I enjoy riding the tractor so much that I decided to start ploughing up more country so we could get an even bigger and better crop for everybody. So, here I am on your land. Aren't you the luckiest bloke in town, 'cause you're the first I have furrowed outside my own farm!"

"What?" I protested, "you finished your own paddocks, decided to cross your own boundaries, run outside your own fences, and thought I might like your tractor running all over my place? I want your name, please, sir. Who are you?" (I wasn't ready for his answer, and I bet you aren't either.)

"Who am I?" he responded with a quizzical frown, and then a wry smile, "Why, I am *Farmer Geddon!*"

Now, if I was to follow in the steps of my Lord, I might add the Master Teacher's usual words after this little parable (but with a slight negative twist), "**The Kingdom of God is *not*** like old *Farmer Geddon* who ploughed outside his boundaries."

PLOUGHING UP BOUNDARIES DESTROYS THE QUALITY OF LIFE

Ploughing over legitimate boundaries is a sure way to botch our blessings. Imagine what life would be like if nothing was properly differentiated, defined, or distinctly delineated. What chaos would ensue if everything became furry and fuzzy round the edges.

Unfortunately some people do endure life with blurred vision, for example. If you have normal vision it's pretty hard to imagine what life must be like if one is unable to see the palette of colours out there --- or worse, unable to make faces out, or even to recognise a wall in front of them. Their visual world is just like the kindergarten child whose water-colours have run together all over the page --- everything is smudged.

Others have lost the ability to taste the exquisite variety of foods and everything is a bland flowery dough in their mouths. I am told that when an habitual smoker gives up their habit, one of the first things that returns is their wonder of taste and smell lost to them all those years.

Our human condition for happiness and fulfillment requires proper distinctions; our quality of life, even our very safety, depends on differentiation, definite lines of demarcation. Imagine what disaster would await if there were no traffic lights, or no lines on the highway, or worse, no edges to the corners. Chaos! Danger! Accidents galore! We need definition, differentiation, borders and boundaries. We don't need a metaphorical **Farmer Geddon** ploughing all over the countryside.

Unfortunately we are living in a world where society thinks it's okay to ignore the distinctions, the "fences" God has erected in His world. Whenever our society blurs the lines of demarcation in God's created order we invite loss of colour, loss of meaning.

But let's not get too far ahead of ourselves. Let's go back to the very beginning and see why this is so. Let's go *back to the future* in **Genesis chapter one**, back to the boundaries and blessings God built into the whole cosmos.

FIRST PHASE:- CREATION

The word **create** (Hebrew *bara'*) is used sparingly in the Bible. But in the very first chapter of Genesis it is used at three critical points:

- 1). When God created **the material universe** out of nothing ... **In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth (Gen. 1:1)**. Theologians call this creation *ex nihilo* ... creation out of nothing.
- 2). When God created **conscious life** ... **So God created the great creatures of the sea and every living and moving thing with which the water teems, according to their kinds, and every winged bird according to its kind (1: 21)**.
- 3). When God created **mankind** ... **So God created man in His own image ... (1:27). (¹)**

¹ This third use of the word **create** carries an added emphasis. *When it comes to mankind, the rare word create is repeated three times; So God created man in his own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them (1:27)*. This threefold emphasis on man as God's unique creation in the cosmos is itself repeated in Genesis 5: 1-2 --- *This is the written account of Adam's line. When God created man, He made him in the likeness of God. He created them male and female and blessed them. And when they were created He called them man.* Thus, when it comes to mankind, both passages put a triple emphasis on the rarely used word **create**.

So, the Bible teaches there were three critical junctures in God's creation of our world: **ONE**, The creation of the heavens and earth out of nothing; **TWO**, the creation of conscious life; and **THREE**, the creation of human beings. These three crunch-points of our world's existence are uniquely described by the word **create**.

SECOND PHASE:- DIFFERENTIATION

After God created the heavens and the earth we are told the work of creation continued, but with a different approach: **And the earth was formless and empty and darkness was over the surface of the deep ... (Gen. 1:2)**. Think about this: The original material creation **was formless**, which is to say, it was an undifferentiated mass --- if we were explaining this to our kids we might even say, it was a blob of glob.

The initial material creation was a mixed conglomerate which had no specifics, no refinements, no categories, no shapes, no delineations within the undefined lump. Nothing was yet distinguishable, nothing had been separated out of the **formless** mixture.

Next, we are told it was also **empty**, which emphasises that the material was in a rough and unfinished state. It means unfurnished. (²) All the potential was sealed up in that formless mass just waiting, as it were, to jump out for recognition.

Notice also, that the whole **formless** and unrefined material was shrouded in **darkness ... And darkness was upon the face of the deep**. And so the Creator-God next sets about calling out of that featureless material mass all of its hidden potential.

God will now differentiate the specifics locked up inside the chaos. Almost every time when God differentiates a special feature out from the formless mixture he introduces it by saying, "**Let ...**" (³)

1). The first delineation God teases out is light ... "**Let there be light ... and He separated the light from the darkness (Gen. 1:3)**. Ah, a boundary, a distinction between light and dark!

And right at this point a lot of folks balk. They say, "But God did not create the sun until Day Four, so how can there be light?" Ah, but modern science helps us to understand that light is closely related to energy. So it is not surprising that out of the formless matter, light in the form of energy became the first differentiation.

2). Next, God says, "**Let there be an expanse (firmament, which we call "Space") between the waters to separate water from water under the expanse from the water above it. And it was so (1:6-7)**. We now have another separation; a space between what's **above** and what's below, i.e., **under**. More differentiation.

² The Hebrew word **בְּהוּוֹ** **bôhûw**, describes an undistinguishable ruin. The Greek describes that which is in a rough state.

³ I first learned this truth from reading **Francis Schaeffer** over forty years ago in *Genesis in Space and Time: The Flow of Biblical History*, IVP, Ill., 1972.

3). The third differentiation occurs when God says, “**Let the water under the sky be gathered to one place and let dry ground appear. And it was so. God called the dry ground land, and the gathered waters he called seas. And God saw that it was good.**” (1: 9). There is now a demarcation between the dry land and the oceans --- yes, another fence, as it were!

4). The fourth step of differentiation is, **And God said, “Let the land produce vegetation: seed-bearing plants and trees on the land that bear fruit with seed in it, according to their various kinds ...”** (1: 11). In this next step of demarcation, we see the difference between non-life and plant life, the difference between minerals and vegetation. And within the plant life there is further differentiation for each kind carried seed to propagate its own special variety. We know this as genetic differences.

5). The fifth step in the process of differentiation is in **verses 14-16; And God said, “Let there be lights in the expanse of the sky to separate the day from the night ... and God made two great lights --- the greater light to govern the day and the lesser light to govern the night. He also made the stars.”** More distinction, more **separation**.

Do you see that the whole idea of separation, differentiation is being driven home? So far we have moved from bare, empty, dark material mass just, well, *being there*, to light (energy) opposed to darkness, to differentiated space above and below with areas of water and dry land, and boundaries between living plants and the non-living, to the categories of day and night on the earth. But there is more differentiation to come.

6). The sixth differentiation we have already noted, **verses 21-22, So God created the great creatures of the sea and every living and moving thing with which the water teems, according to their kinds, and every winged bird according to its kind ...** This is the difference between conscious and non-conscious life. But, observe, we have a further distinction between conscious life in the oceans, and conscious life in the air.

7). We then come to the seventh differentiation in **verse 24; And God said, “Let the land produce living creatures according to their kinds; livestock, creatures that move along the ground, and wild animals, each according to its kind”, and it was so.**

At this point in the creative process, God Himself has marked out everything in its proper (ordained!) place. The original formless and empty conglomerate has finally taken a distinct existence with each aspect in its own appointed place, beautifully distinguishable and in harmony with all its various parts.

This whole process of refining is indicating that *everything has significance in its own rightful place*. For example, in **Genesis 1: 14** after being told that, **God said, “Let there be lights in the expanse of the sky to separate the day from the night”** that He explains, **“and let them serve as signs to mark seasons and days and years ...”** Everything is for the earth’s benefit. The Bible’s worldview is clearly ***geocentric!*** But why?

Why the day and the night? Why the dry land and the seas? Why the plants and varieties of vegetation? Why the conscious life of animals and birds and fishes? Ah, that's right! Every detail is in readiness for God to introduce the crown and the reason for all this differentiation: Man, i.e., mankind!

8). And God said, “Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground” (1: 26).

God sets man apart from bare minerals and matter, he is different from plants and differentiated from the conscious life of fish and birds and animals. Man stands in stark contrast to every other created thing. *God explains the function of each part as it exists in relation to mankind.* We live in a geocentric cosmos because it is ***anthropocentric***.

It was **Francis Schaeffer** (1912-1984) who wrote;

It is either not knowing or denying the createdness of things that is at the root of the blackness of modern man's difficulties ... Once one removes the createdness of all things, meaning and categories can only be some sort of leap, with or without drugs, into an irrational world. Modern man's blackness therefore, rests primarily upon his losing the reality of the createdness of all things (all things except the personal God who always has been). (⁴)

In simple terms, **Schaeffer** is saying that once we lose the created boundaries and differences between the various parts of our world, man descends into irrational darkness ... he loses his proper orientation. Blurred boundaries botches the blessings!

THE VALUE OF A TREE

Let's tease this out a bit. **Schaeffer** observed that only the Christian has the proper perspective on a tree, for instance. This person respects it as a tree, created by God. They therefore, do not condone chopping it down just for the sake of wantonly chopping it down.

However, the Bible-believer is also free from pagan “sacred grove” taboos about nature, so he is quite relaxed about chopping it down to fulfil the need to build a house. At the same time, his Christian duty toward the needs of future generations means he will try to plant at least another to take its place. Responsible stewardship.

So, what have we so far seen? This: The word ***divided*** (or ***separated***) is repeated, over and over again in the Genesis creation story. The doctrine of differentiation is a critical theological key with huge practical implications for the way we see ourselves and our world.

⁴ Francis A. Schaeffer, *Genesis in Space and Time*, Inter-Varsity Press, Ill., USA, Third printing, 1972, p30

WHAT MAN'S DOMINION DOES NOT INCLUDE

This is critical in deciding all manner of bioethical questions. It is precisely because humans are unlike all other sentient life, unlike the fishes and birds and land-animals, that certain implications follow. It is precisely because humans are made in God's image, that no human being should ever be treated as an object for another's gratification.

This is the key reason why such activities as **slavery, abortion, human embryonic stem- cell research, and artificial human cloning** are all evil: These all place man in dominion over other people made in God's image. These activities fail to observe the differentiation God has placed within His created world for our good.

To understand that every human being is an imager, a reflector of God our Creator also means any form of **racism** is out of the question. As **Dr Martin Luther-King** famously and beautifully said, everybody should be treated and judged, not by the colour of their skin, but by the content of their character.

(This is not to deny there are authority relationships in the Bible, but they are relationships to be exercised in loving care for the well-ordered running of our fallen society. Leadership invested with God's authority is not an excuse for abusive control of our fellow human beings.)

In simple terms it reminds us of old **Farmer Geddon**. Fences exist for a good reason. Differentiation is necessary, because boundaries of distinction are required for harmonious living. Smooth operation requires the separation of the various segments.

To be continued ...