

Introduction

I once observed a mother show her four year-old son how to button a shirt, giving him this preliminary instruction before she did: **"Get the first button right. If you get the first right you can get the rest right. If you get the first wrong, you'll get the rest wrong."**

Speaking metaphorically, Genesis 1:1 is the first button of human life. There is a foundational truth upon which all the truths that we know and live by rest. It's the very first truth from which all other truths flow. If we get it right, we can get life right. If we get it wrong, we will most certainly get life wrong. That foundational truth is the first verse in the Bible, **"In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth."** Let's take a look at this life-altering verse.

In the Beginning

I start with the opening words, **"in the beginning,"** which reveal a critical fact. The universe had a beginning.

You might think that's a given, but it isn't. Most ancient cultures, for example, believed that the universe is eternal and had no beginning. The ancient Greeks even argued that the idea of an ultimate beginning is rationally inconceivable. Their arguments were revived during the Middle Ages and Renaissance and then embraced by the rapidly developing scientific community of the 18th century. By the 19th century, scientists and intellectuals boldly declared that the idea that the universe had a beginning was dead – and that Genesis 1:1 was disproven or debunked.

But then, new evidence emerged in the 20th century: (1) general relativity theory, which implies that the universe is expanding; (2) the discovery that stars exhibit a **"red shift,"** which implies they're moving outward; and (3) the full realization of what the laws of thermodynamics mean. All of this evidence coalesced in the 1960's and led scientists to formulate the **"Big Bang"** theory, which rocked the scientific world. That world said the universe is an unbroken chain of cause and effect that can

be traced back endlessly. But the Big Bang represents a sudden discontinuity in the chain. Lincoln Barnett explains what that clearly implies in his book *The Universe and Dr. Einstein*; **“The inescapable inference is that everything had a beginning: somehow and sometime the cosmic processes were started, the stellar fires ignited, and the whole pageant of the universe brought into being.”**

I don't believe the Big Bang theory as science teaches it. But I do believe what it clearly implies. The universe isn't self-existent and eternal as science before the 60's said it was. It is now part of accepted physical theory that the universe was not and then it was. It had a beginning, in other words, just as the Bible's opening words reveal it did.

God

After the opening prepositional phrase, the Bible's first proper noun occurs. It's **“God.”** We spent 2011 building a purposeful and thorough vision of Him. Let me quickly mention two qualities of His that define Him in relation to the universe.

First, He is a living being who has the highest possible levels of consciousness and activity. He thinks and acts without limit.

Second, He is a spiritual or non-material being. He isn't made up of atoms and molecules like everything in the universe is. He doesn't have a body and a brain and doesn't miss them.

Those two qualities teach us this about God. He is a separate and special kind of reality. He is utterly unique - literally the only one of His kind. He's also infinitely superior to any other reality.

Created

Now, notice what God did. He **“created”** the universe. It didn't just pop into existence out of nothing without cause. He made it.

I've watched several episodes of a fascinating documentary titled *How the Universe Works*. One episode addresses how it came into

existence. One of the world's leading theoretical physicists, Dr. Michio Kaku, explains it this way: **"We now know that something came from nothing."** He goes on to say that there was nothing and then something, the universe, popped into existence without cause. That is a widely held point of view among theoretical physicists today, including the most celebrated of those, Stephen Hawking.

But it's illogical and absurd. More importantly it's unbiblical as well. The universe didn't just pop into existence out of nothing without cause. It was purposely conceived and made – by God. He created it. Hebrews 11:3 says it well, **"The worlds were prepared by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things which are visible."** Note two things that this verse teaches us.

The first is how God created. It was by His **"word."** Verses 3, 6, 9, 11, 14, 20, 24, and 26 in Genesis 1 confirm that. He created by speaking – by speaking a sequence of directly creative words. He spoke and what He spoke came into existence or occurred. He willed it into being or occurrence in other words.

The closest thing to what He did is the control we have over our bodies. Watch my arm. **"Move up"** (move it up). **"Move down"** (move it down). Repeat. How did I do that? Astonishingly, I simply willed it to move and it moved. It's an imperfect analogy but God created in that same kind of way. He willed something to exist or to occur and it did.

Hebrews 11:3 teaches us a second thing – from what God created. The universe **"was not made out of things which are visible."** That implies it was made out of something invisible, and it was. Einstein's Theory of Relativity, $E=mc^2$, helps explain that. Energy equals the mass (of matter) times the speed of light squared. Human beings have only the right side of that formula available to them. We can create energy if we have matter like oil, gas, wood, and so on. But we can't create it if we don't. God, on the other hand, has the left side of the formula available to Him. He has His own energy without matter and speed, and it's that energy from which He created the universe.

The bottom line is this. The universe didn't just pop into existence out of nothing without cause as Kaku and Hawking say it did. God conceived and created it instead.

The Heavens and the Earth

We come now to the final words of Genesis 1:1, which reveal what God created, "**the heavens and the earth.**" Those terms refer to all the matter that makes up our universe.

Let me ask you a question. How old are you? The answer is "**10,000 years-old.**" In Genesis 1:1, God created all the atoms that exist in our universe, including the ones that comprise your body. Think of that. All the atoms in your body have existed since Genesis 1:1, which, in my view, occurred approximately 10,000 years ago. That means, and I hate to say it, you and I are technically, in terms of atoms, that old. None of us is "**39 and holding**" believe me.

Anyway, the creation account in Genesis 1 reveals something about this universe God made. It has a structure (a character, order, or form). Notice His pronouncement about that structure in verse 31. It "**was very good.**" But then, tragically, Adam and Eve fell in Genesis 3. That in turn corrupted the structure of the universe, making it the mixed bag of good and bad that it is today.

Now, the structure of the universe is expressed in what we call "**natural laws.**" Those natural laws consist of the principles, equations, or formulas that underlie it. Some of those are consequences of God creating the universe as He did in Genesis 1. Others are consequences of the Fall in Genesis 3. But whatever their source, there are two categories of natural laws.

One category is the laws of nature – the ones that underlie matter. There is a law of gravity, for instance. It says that matter attracts and is attracted to other matter in proportion to their mass. No one knows what gravity is. But we do know that God himself conceived it and made it part of the structure of the universe.

There is a second category of natural laws – the laws of human life. These are the ones that underlie our spiritual, physical, psychological, and social lives. Let me give you a quick sampling of those. Feelings often aren't rooted in reality. Anger feeds on anger. The mind is the place of our widest and most basic freedom. Evil is best overcome by good. Money is a power not just a medium of exchange. Looking to lust lies on the same continuum as adultery does. Decisions are hinges of destiny. The first response of love is attention. And there is a last time for everything. Those are just a few of the countless laws that underlie human life.

So there you have it. The universe has a divinely conceived and created structure, one that's expressed in natural laws that underlie it.

So What?

But so what? What does that have to do with anything – anything practical at least? The answer is "**Much.**"

Consider this. Natural laws underlie literally every activity, experience, and event of our lives. There is never a moment when we aren't being reached and touched by them. When our worship service is over, I will step off of this stage and not float into the air but drop to your level. I am subject to the law of gravity. My body is attracted to the much larger mass of the ground below. Several weeks ago, my neighbor got mad at his wife and yelled at her. She got mad in return and yelled back and on it went - the anger and the yelling escalating. They were subject to the law that anger feeds on anger. His fed on hers and hers on his. There's no doubt about it. You and I cannot escape the structure of the universe.

The quality of our life, therefore, depends on how we engage and interact with that structure. All of us desire and seek to live well – to have an abundance of love, peace, and joy. The good news is that we who are disciples or friends of Jesus can by doing two things.

First, know the structure of the universe. Have a grasp of the

natural laws that profoundly affect our persons and lives. We get that grasp of course by reading and observing. I know, for instance, that feelings often aren't rooted in reality. Things are often not as bad or as good as we feel. How do I know that? It's by reading what others have written and by observing my own experiences with feelings. It's said, **"What you don't know won't hurt you."** Nothing could be further from the truth when it comes to the structure of the universe. So know that structure by devoting yourself to reading and observing.

There's a second thing we need to do to live well. Act beneficially and not detrimentally. Knowing the structure of the universe enables us to identify what is helpful and harmful. We then do what is helpful and don't do what is harmful. For example, knowing that feelings often aren't rooted in reality, I try never to make them a basis for decision or action. I make that role fall to knowledge, insight, and understanding instead. I always try to decide and act with my head not my heart.

So those are the two things we need to do to live well – to have abundance of love, peace, and joy. Know the structure of the universe and act beneficially not detrimentally based on what we know.

Let me quickly add that there is a place to start with that. That place is the commandments of God in the Bible. Understand this about those commandments. They're pictures of reality. They reflect the ways things are in the universe. They express its structure in other words.

You realize what that means of course. When we keep them, we're acting beneficially. When we break them, we're acting detrimentally. So, know them by reading and studying the Bible. Then live them out by doing what they say. We'll be helped if we do and harmed if we don't.

Conclusion

I note something in closing. Each of your shirts is right. You got the first button right and thus the shirt itself right. Let's leave here and do the same with life. Genesis 1:1 is the first button of human life. Let's get it right. We can then get life right if we do.