

Session 1: Why are we talking about this?

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If you are participating in this series, you have an interest in delving a bit into the Theory of Evolution. I also hope that you are interested in more than learning about Evolution; you are also interested in how to address this topic with your students. May our Lord bless your efforts!

Informal surveys of my Biology students indicate that many of our schools are dealing with Evolution by simply stating that we don't believe Evolution; instead, we believe Creation, and that's the extent to which they go. While this is a true statement, it certainly leaves many questions unanswered and may leave students very confused. I believe that we can, should, must do better.

Addressing Evolution can be a daunting task. Many teachers are not comfortable approaching this topic for a variety of reasons. We'll discuss these in a few moments.

I hope to assure you that you don't have to be afraid to address this issue. You already possess the most potent defense against Evolution – the inspired Word of God.

Slide 2: The Prevalence of the Theory

The famous quote by Dobzhansky has been quoted and requoted since he first wrote it in *The American Biology Teacher* in 1973. This quote reflects the status of Darwinian Evolution by mainstream science. As far as secular science is concerned, there is no longer a question about the origins of the diversity and complexity of life on Earth. The Creation/ Evolution debate has long been settled. The typical Evolutionist would likely comment, "The body of proof for Evolution is overwhelming. Evolution is fact. I wish those pesky Creationists would let theology be theology and science be science." In other words, for the most part, the debate is over. Consensus favors Evolution.

The availability of wide varieties of programming through cable services and online streaming services opens up another avenue for evolution to reach our youth. Nature programming on Animal Planet and Discovery Channel and otherwise excellent documentaries, such as those on BBC, assume Evolution to be true. While these programs may not outright argue its merits, Evolution being mentioned in passing, as though it is just naturally true, callouses the viewer.

This viewpoint should be neither surprising nor troublesome for the Christian. The world has a long history of rejecting God and His Word. And God warned that following Him is never going to be the popular thing to do.

However, we may not be as isolated as academia would lead have us believe. The world of academia can be almost fiercely loyal to Evolution, possibly as a reflection of anti-Christian or anti-religion attitudes. We'll consider challenges to the faith of our college youth in a bit. While many in academia are loyal to evolution, some are indifferent to it. My daughter, who trained as a nurse in the University of Wisconsin system, had minimal conflict in her courses, not because she hid her faith, but more because the instructors were more concerned about the practical side of training nurses than getting into the philosophical debate regarding origins.

A recent study showed that roughly 35% of the US population does not accept Evolution. Of course, the report caused much consternation among vocal science educators, who promptly called for a refocused curriculum with additional stress on evolution.

Slide 3: Our Students' Backgrounds

In past decades, the population of WELS school-aged children was relatively homogeneous. The students, for the most part, came from families who were lifelong Christians. The students were well versed in Scripture from early on. And society, in general, did not denigrate Christianity as is being done today.

The circumstances have dramatically changed. Our WELS schools are reaching students from vastly different backgrounds and upbringings. Much of this is intentional. Congregations are using their schools as outreach instruments. Some states are allowing for choice programs, where public funds can be used to finance a parochial education. Praise God that tools are being employed to reach more of the lost!

The students, who by grace are being served at our schools, also bring with them different backgrounds and outlooks. Many of these students have minimal exposure to the Scriptures. They have only heard Evolution taught, and so are unaware of the Creation story, or if they have heard of it, it was dismissed as being a myth of the radical right or uneducated.

The students who come to us from Christian families have been bombarded with worldly views. The explosion of information available and the incredible ease with which it can be accessed as given our students much more exposure to worldly views than in previous generations.

Finally, sheer repetition tends to dull our sensitivity to the issue. Several generations have been exposed to the idea that evolution is just scientific fact, that there is no debate, and that holding on to Creation is comparable to believing the Earth is flat. The repetition wears us down.

The statement, "We don't believe Evolution. We believe in Creation" if left there, will either leave these students with serious questions or will simply spark a denial.

Slide 4: Acceptance by Christian Organizations

Creationists now face the additional challenge that some religious organizations have softened or completely changed their stance on evolution. The Roman Catholic Church officially accepts the premise that evolution and the Bible are compatible. Other organizations have espoused the compromise of theistic evolution which still acknowledges God, at least in some form, but that he either created the world and let Evolution take over, or that he guided the process of evolution to a greater or lesser degree.

For the most part, theistic evolution is viewed by most for what it is- a feeble compromise that does justice to neither side.

Unfortunately, most adherents to evolution group all religions and schools or theological thought into one all-encompassing category and label it "religion." The teachings, arguments, or beliefs of one element of this "religion" group are taken to be the position of all. This consolidation is a misrepresentation.

There is little wonder why many people in our society are confused or have the wrong impression of why we Christians cling so tightly to the Biblical account of Creation.

Slide 5: Misguided Reasons to Examine Evolution

It is appropriate that we mention some of the dead-end roads that many well-meaning anti-Evolutionists start down.

We are not going to bring down the Theory of Evolution by upholding Scripture. The Theory of Evolution may fall, but only when sufficient evidence is brought against it and a significant number of researchers is willing to accept a new paradigm. It is unlikely that Creation will be that paradigm. But that's not the point. We uphold Scripture not to influence science, but souls. We know that this would and its science is destined for destruction. We are concerned with souls, which last an eternity.

Neither are we concerned with offering proof of the validity of Scripture. Attempting to validate Scripture through human wisdom is a dangerous and slippery slope. The purpose of this series is NOT to delve into Apologetics. But Apologetics does not claim to prove the Bible. Instead, its purpose is to remove obstacles to the Gospel. We Lutherans believe the Bible to be God's Word because our Lord says it is. Acceptance is a matter of faith, given by the Holy Spirit. If we believe we must prove the validity of Scripture in one place, we commit to offering proof for all of it, and that is not possible because much of Scripture is miraculous and beyond our reason. A second reason that attempts to prove the Bible is dangerous is that the scientific methods and data we may offer as proof are subject to change. When we rely on human knowledge and understanding, we rely on the least firm footing.

An argument, no matter how eloquently delivered or compellingly stated, will never result in faith. Faith is a gift of the Holy Spirit working through the Means of Grace, not scientific data. When all is said and done, our calling is to proclaim the Word and leave the results to the Spirit. As one pastor summarized, "The goal is the soul, not the argument."

Slide 6: An Opportunity!

To most of us in the WELS, the Creation/Evolution debate (maybe even battle) is viewed as something negative. Please don't misunderstand; the fact that God's Holy Word is ignored or discarded is tragic, and no good comes of it. Tragically, the lie of Evolution has replaced the truth of God's Word for so many, and many are proud of it.

This subject does offer opportunities that can be very beneficial. The first benefit is that this subject provides an opportunity to witness to the truth, which is why you are in the public ministry in the first place. We can point to Scripture and expose the lie, not for the sake of better science, but so that our students see the danger in Evolution to their faith. You don't need to understand every scientific nuance of evolution to battle against it because you already have a deep understanding of the most potent weapon against this teaching, that being the Scriptures.

A second opportunity is that this topic offers direct application to our faith. Teachers sometimes struggle to find applications to what is taught to the Christian faith. Not so here. The application of our

faith is seamless and natural. When we look at what evolution teaches, we naturally will turn to what the Lord tells us in his Word. To take it a step further, we can't accept Creation apart from God's Word because it's a matter of faith. No science can reveal the miracle of what or how God created.