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Sermon
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“Beware of Bad Arguments Against Evolution!”

Text: Ecclesiasticus 42:15-25

Dear people of God, when I was a kid, I loved dinosaurs. I had several sets of those plastic colored dinosaurs and I would play with them almost daily. I had several books about dinosaurs. I remember attending the New York World’s Fair in 1964. One of the pavilions was devoted to dinosaurs. It even had a giant, moving replica of Tyrannosaurus Rex that scared even a dinosaur-loving six-year-old like me. I purchased a dinosaur book from that pavilion’s bookstore. When my parents took me to the Museum of Natural History in Manhattan, I purchased a set of dinosaur cards that had a picture of the dinosaur on the front and the facts about the dinosaur on the back. Some of you are old enough to remember the old Viewmaster 3-D disks. Among those I owned included a series about dinosaurs. One of the earliest memories I have is receiving a dinosaur coloring book when I was four years old. I was so happy that I just about finished coloring the entire book in one day. When my mother saw that I had colored every page except the last one, she suggested that I leave

that one for the next day. I told her that I was saving that last page for my favorite color: red orange or was it orange red? The Crayola 64 Pack had two separate colors, red orange and orange red, and I always got the two confused, but I knew that one of them was my favorite color. In the 6th-grade, I did a report on dinosaurs on which I not only received an A+++, but it won a city-wide award for the best project done that year by a 6th- grader.

When I started attending a fundamentalist Protestant church during my high school years, one of the first things they taught me was that evolution is a lie. Not only is it a lie, but dinosaurs and humans lived simultaneously and just about everything written about dinosaurs is false. I showed my Youth Group leader the award-winning project that I had done in the 6th-grade. After reading it over, he advised that I should throw it away. My first reaction to that was, “Are you kidding?” He said that the project was full of lies and, therefore, it was dishonoring to God. He further looked me straight in the eye and told me, “You cannot believe in Jesus Christ and in evolution. Your report assumed evolution through and through, stating that dinosaurs lived hundreds of millions of years ago. That’s a direct insult to the Bible, which is God’s holy Word.”

His words finally convinced me. And so I threw away my award-winning report. I have regretted that decision for the past 35 years.

Bad Argument Against Evolution Number 1 is, “You cannot believe in Jesus Christ and in evolution.” Tens, if not hundreds, of millions of Christians believe in evolution and do not see a contradiction between their Christian faith and the findings of evolutionary theory. Christians should not be put on the defensive, being made to believe that we are not faithful followers of Christ because we also believe in evolution. And it’s not irrelevant that the more learned Christians in the world tend to believe in evolution while those who possess less education do not. One disturbing trend today shown by a recent poll is that just 43% of those who identify with the Republican Party say they believe humans have evolved over time, plunging from 54% just four years ago. 48% of these Republican-leaning voters say they believe “humans and other living things have existed in their present form since the beginning of time,” which is up from 39% in 2009. What’s going on here? We’re going backwards in this country. I’m just at a loss to explain this poll taken in December 2013. But there’s no doubt that these Republican voters believe as they do because somehow they think their Christian faith demands that they do.

Now let's focus on some bad arguments against evolution that supposedly deal with the theory itself.

Some of you have probably heard the argument that one of the keys to evolution is the idea that lots of time is all that's necessary for it to work. These Creationists argue that you can take all the parts of a watch and shake them up in a bag for the rest of your life and they will not assemble into a watch. Your children and grandchildren and great-grandchildren can do the same for their entire lifetimes and the parts still will not assemble into a watch. In fact, these people argue, you can shake that bag for a billion, zillion years and the parts will never finally assemble themselves into a functioning watch. Well, the Creationists are absolutely right. The parts in their randomness will never assemble into a watch.

But that's no analogy to evolution. Lots and lots of time does not explain evolution. Evolution does not depend upon mere time for its results. A very important part of the theory is natural selection. Natural selection is the opposite of randomness. Natural selection does indeed take place over large stretches of time, but it's not the duration of time itself that brings about evolution.

Charles Darwin discovered that certain traits were selected in order

to help a species survive within a particular habitat. For example, stubby-beaked finches on a particular island in the Galapagos were able to survive much better than longer-beaked finches on the island next to it. Why was that? Because the stubby beak was better for cracking a particular seed. Stubby-beaked finches mated, and over time a multitude of them covered the island. The habitat on this particular island in a sense selected stubby-beaked finches, so-called natural selection. Darwin's view was vindicated in 1953 with the discovery of DNA. We now know that there are slight genetic variations with each new birth, giving rise to slightly different characteristics of each species. These genetic variations more or less fit to adapt to a particular habitat. The various species that exist on the planet today--including humans--are those that have adapted best to the environment by means of genetic mutation.

In the case of human beings, there were many, many steps along the way that led to humans looking the way we do today. Each of these steps changed the species. And so, long durations of time are one of the preconditions of evolution, but time by itself cannot explain evolution. The thousands of changes that took place during those long durations of time are the explanations for why humans look the way we do today.

And so Bad Argument Against Evolution Number 2 is, "All the time in

the world cannot explain evolution.” That’s right. But no one who understands the theory would ever say that. A lot more is needed to bring about the various forms of plant life, animal life, and human life than just time. Creationists use this argument to show how foolish it is to postulate a world that is billions of years old. But they miss the point. The long stretches of time through which humans evolved do not explain evolution; rather, evolution occurred through these long stretches of time.

When Creationists reply by arguing, “What a waste of time for God to wait billions of years before the main act arrives in the form of human beings on the stage of history,” that seems to be the height of arrogance on their part. Who are they to say that it was a waste of time for God-- who is timeless--to endure trivial forms of life and creatures before the real action starts with humans? Who are they to say that God must have been bored for billions of years before humans entered the arena of history? Is all subhuman life, not to mention the inanimate elements of creation, pointless to God? Was all subhuman life, including the inanimate elements of creation, made only for human use and enjoyment? Were all the beautiful flowers never beheld by human eyes meaningless? Were all the animals never to have been gazed upon by

humans worthless? Who are we, mere mortals, to say that God has not enjoyed the creation for billions of years before humans appeared? And that all those prehistoric creatures did not enjoy their lives according to their ability without humans being aware of them?

Many of you own pets. Don't your pets enjoy their lives apart from you? Do your pets need you in order to find a purpose to their lives? As a pet owner myself, I would testify that our pets have brought Miss Linda and me much more joy than we have brought to them. They find delight in their life in their own way aside from human interaction. For dogs and cats, human interaction is a bonus in their life, for sure, but it's not necessary for them to find fulfillment. Prehistoric creatures found their niche in life without the need of human beings. God has taken pleasure in all his creatures for billions of years before humans ever existed.

Bad Argument Against Evolution Number 3 is, "No missing link has ever been found between the highest form of ape and the lowest form of human being." And to add to this bogus argument, Creationists often throw in the few scientific frauds, such as the Piltdown Man, ignoring the fact that for every one of those frauds, there are literally millions of fossils that are genuine. Even in the case of the notorious Piltdown Man, it was other scientists who uncovered it as a forgery, consisting of the

lower jawbone of an orangutan deliberately combined with the cranium of a fully developed modern human; it wasn't Bible-thumping Fundamentalists who uncovered it as a fraud. The mainstream scientific community is self-correcting, which is why they must be left alone to do their work with integrity and not be taken hostage by outside interest groups that don't like their findings.

The idea of the "missing link" is not necessary to validate evolution. A popular interpretation of evolution today is known as "emergent evolution," which rejects the need for a "missing link" that's a unique transition between two species. Dramatic change could have taken place very rapidly within the same species, so that there would not be left behind a "missing link" as a transition between two different species. We must understand that every living thing is a transition between its ancestors and its descendants. In that sense, each of us is a link between the past and the future. If any of you have ever visited a historic house built around the time of the Revolutionary War, what is immediately striking is how low the ceilings are and how small the door frames are. People who lived 200 and 300 years ago were several inches shorter than we are today. We know that proper medical care and adequate nutrition are the main reasons for humans growing taller today. In that sense,

humans are still evolving; we're growing taller. Who knows what humans will look like 1000 years from now? Judging from the preponderance of the use of iPhones, I think maybe our thumbs will grow much smaller to use them more easily.

Finally, and I will be brief with this one, Bad Argument Against Evolution Number 4 is, "Evolution is not a fact because it cannot be observed." Creationists often say that no one can observe a species actually evolving as we are looking at it. Well, that's true. But neither can we observe electrons in their present location and movement. Do we believe in those? We better. If we don't, we might as well throw out all contemporary physics, which is based on the model of the atom with a nucleus of protons and neutrons in the center and electrons spinning around it at different energy levels. But if we can't see them, you might ask, how do we know they're really there? Because the assumption of their existence explains a whole lot of stuff that cannot be explained in any other way. In fact the modern explosion in scientific knowledge that started during the first third of the 20th-century is based on quantum theory and the assumed existence of electrons. In the same way, the assumption of evolution explains a whole lot of stuff that cannot be explained in any other way.

Christians have nothing to worry about believing in the theory of evolution. It's simply sound science. God has allowed us to find out some of the mysteries of the universe through our scientific observing, testing, and measuring. God doesn't expect us to remain ignorant in regard to how the universe, especially the diversity of life forms, have come to be. It's not just a theoretical matter for ivory tower academics. There are many practical benefits in believing in evolution. The simple fact that we need a different flu shot every year informs us of the truth of evolution, because in the influenza virus, mutations are constantly taking place guided by natural selection.

Evolution is our friend. Let's not be afraid of it. Amen.