

First Things First: In the Beginning – God! Genesis 1:1

Growing up in my family and community we had a popular saying in common usage whether it was at home, school, scouts or on a sports team that went, “First things first.” Do you know this one and have you used it too? If anyone was rushing off on a tangent or not doing what they were supposed to say or do the phrase “first things first” was used to either bring to order in the first instance or to bring a person or group back to where it was supposed to be and what it was supposed to be focused on before it got ahead of itself in a process, a conversation, at a meeting or activity. So for us today as a group of God fearers, Christ followers and spiritual seekers gathered together to hear the word of God, this morning I say to you, “First things first - the first thing is God!”

Our passage from Genesis begins this way. It says, “In the beginning God . . .” God’s word the Bible begins with ‘God’. In one simple single sentence it begins with God and the account of God who created the heavens and the earth and everything else.

So as God fearers, Christ followers and spiritual seekers there are a lot of things in life that you and I will not understand unless we go back to Genesis or the beginning because that is where we find out who we are for it is here we begin to discover our true identity in God. What could the possible connection be between Genesis, the beginning and my Christian journey of spiritual transformation today? Well, the past is always the key to the present as in when we are applying for a job and are asked for a reference so that our perspective employer might learn who we are from the past. In the New Testament the apostle whom Jesus loved wrote one for his risen Messiah, living Saviour, teacher and friend.

John 1:1-3 (NIV) In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made.

This more than just an echo, it is a direct reference to Genesis 1:1. John was helping us to understand that...

Everything in Scripture Begins with God (Or Is God Centred) And therefore it is going to have a bearing on our lives today. The apostle Paul built on this reference when he said in **Colossians 1:15-17 (NIV)**

¹⁵The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation.¹⁶ For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him. ¹⁷ He is before all things, and in him all things hold together.

The writer to the Hebrews [1:10-12] said: "In the beginning, O Lord, you laid the foundations of the earth, and the heavens are the work of your hands. They will perish, but you remain; they will all wear out like a garment. You will roll them up like a robe; like a garment they will be changed. But you remain the same, and your years will never end."

So, **Everything in Scripture begins and ends with God.**

But hold it preacher, you're getting way ahead of yourself, First things first – it's the beginning we're interested in today! That's where we start.

In the beginning- God! Let's not get ahead of ourselves in anyway. Genesis doesn't start out: "In the beginning, the earth was without form and void." Or "In the beginning, Adam and Eve walked in the garden"

Or "In the beginning when the sun and solar system existed" Or "In the beginning in a land or galaxy far far away" It simply says "In the beginning- God"

And this first name of God mentioned in the Bible is *Elohim* proclaiming the aspect of his nature as the one true supreme God, the plural of majesty and of potentiality as far his link with mankind is concerned which is as 'The creator', the God of Creation who was to be the God of the Fathers and of the Covenant of Sinai beginning with Adam, Shem, Noah, Abraham, and all the way to Moses who received God's covenant for his people Israel atop of Mount Sinai. Oops, there I go leaping ahead again, First things first.

I read a paraphrase of the first verse of Genesis the other day which said this: A long time ago when nothing else existed the God who had always been there brought into being the entire universe, everything in outer space and planet earth.

The God of Mystery who was in existence before everything is important because the proper context for understanding this verse is not only the whole book of Genesis but the first five books of the Bible called the Books of Moses

or the Pentateuch and then of course, the whole Bible itself which is the full counsel of God's word. By identifying Elohim as God the Creator, a crucial difference, a huge distinction is made between the Mysterious God of the Fathers, and the gods of the nations and their associated idols, for they were peoples with their own pagan myths and stories of who their gods and idols were and how creation came into existence. In the Bible's first few words, "In the beginning God", it explains clearly the origin of the universe along with all that is set up and exists in the universe including the dimension of chronological time, the beginning of time itself. And these opening words of the Bible affirm to one and all that God alone is eternal and that all else owes both its origin and existence to God.

The first word or opening term of the bible 'bereshith' "in [the] beginning' marks for humanity a starting point of a specific duration, not just the obvious one of the creation of the heavens and the earth, but namely, the beginning of the story of God and his people. So as humankind when we come to reading, understanding and relating to God through these opening words you need to know that the Bible always assumes, and never argues, God's existence. You see, although everything else had a beginning, God has always been...

Which is something that humankind seems to struggle with a great deal both outside and even inside the church as a part of the Christian faith. This being the case, the question then that remains for many to think and ask in relation to this mystery is- Who created God? Or similarly 'Who made God?' or Where did God come from? Or even, Who designed the designer? A question that the atheist or scoffer regularly asks along with those seeking answers as a part of their Christian faith. So this is a popular and important question for both sceptics and believers alike.

The first thing we need to know to answer the question is this:
 God by definition is the uncreated creator of the universe, so the question 'Who created God?' in itself is actually an illogical question because it is like asking, to whom is the bachelor married?
 ... Well, No one of course!

Another approach to answering this type of question goes like this:
 Suppose I asked you, who wrote this book? [The God Delusion]
 You would tell me, first things first preacher use you eyes,
 it's on the cover, there we read none other than Richard Dawkins.
 But then suppose I replied, "That's not good enough for me!"

Well that kind of statement clearly doesn't bear on the question at all. Even if I don't know who made Richard Dawkins I can know that he made or authored this book right? You see you don't need to know who made the creator to know who made the universe. The creator made the universe, whether or not the creator was created is another question, he wasn't, but it's an irrelevant question to 'who made the universe?'

But I acknowledge that even after this kind of answer the question remains: If God Created Everything – then who made God?

The Biblical View: The view regarding God that is set forth consistently in the Bible beginning in the Old Testament is this:

God did not come from anywhere. No one made the Creator of the universe. For God had no beginning, and will have no ending. And here is what the Bible says about who made God;

God is eternal For God is eternal, God is everlasting in nature (Isa. 40:28), which is to say, God is eternal as to his very essence. God's existence is "from everlasting to everlasting." Before the material creation was spoken into existence, God always was (Psalm 90:2); and

God is self-existing, a self-existing Being. The Lord revealed himself to Moses at the burning bush as the "I AM WHO I AM" (Ex. 3:14). The "I AM" expression is related to the Hebrew name for God, Yahweh (LORD, or Jehovah). This was the most sacred name for God. The term Yahweh occurs nearly 7000 times in the Old Testament. The word is believed to be a form of the verb hayah, which signifies "to be," ultimately meaning "the eternal One" or "self-existing One." So the Bible states that God's existence is underived which means that- No one made God!
God simply always was.

The New Testament references and answers to the question of 'Who made God?' First things First, all relate directly back to Genesis 1:1 the verse which informs us that God was acting before time when He created the universe. The apostle Paul tells us a number of times in his writings that God was acting before time began, so therefore it was God who created time, along with the other dimensions of our universe. Listen to what Paul wrote and said:

No, we declare God's wisdom a mystery that has been hidden and that God destined for our glory before time began. (1 Corinthians 2:7)

He has saved us and called us to a holy life – not because of anything we have done but because of his own purpose and grace. This grace was given us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time, (2 Timothy 1:9)

The hope of eternal life, which God, who does not lie, promised before the beginning of time. (Titus 1:2)

And then there was Jesus' brother Jude who in the NT wrote:

To the only God our Saviour, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen. (Jude 1:25)

So the idea that **God created time**, along with the physical universe, is not just some wacky modern Christian interpretation of the Bible. When we look back in history to Justin Martyr, a second century Christian apologist, in his *Hortatory Address to the Greeks*, he said that the Greek philosopher Plato got the idea that time was created along with the universe from Moses:

"And from what source did Plato draw the information that time was created along with the heavens? For he wrote thus: 'Time, accordingly, was created along with the heavens; in order that, coming into being together, they might also be together dissolved, if ever their dissolution should take place.' Had he not learned this from the divine history of Moses?" Moses first words in Genesis being "In the beginning God..."

But just how does God acting before time began get around the problem of God's creation?

Since God, by definition, is the creator of the whole universe, he is the creator of time. Therefore He is not limited by the time dimension He created, so has *no beginning* in time God is the High and Exalted One that inhabits eternity living forever according to Isaiah 57:15. Therefore He doesn't have a cause. God has no need to have been created, since He exists in a realm outside of our own, but relates to us in our world. God's realm is outside of time as we know it in our world where cause and effect do not operate. Hence God is eternal, having never been created.

To begin wrapping up I would like to share the wisdom of the prominent British pastor and preacher David Pawson who said “Genesis 1 was given to us to give answers, not to start arguments... conflict... If the first sentence of the bible is a lie then the whole of the rest of bible is a lie. For the whole bible hangs on the first sentence and if that is not true you can't rely on anything else it says. It is the basic presupposition on which God says everything else is built. Let that go and you've lost a lot. That's why it's such a fierce controversy.”

First things first, as the bible tells it, In the Beginning God intentionally created the universe, the heavens and the earth and everything in it.

Genesis therefore orientates us. If we are ever wondering what comes first, Genesis tells us. If we ever find ourselves wondering, where do I begin or where do I start in my own life, Genesis gives us the starting place: God. That is where we begin or at least should start because this scripture tells us that life begins with God. God was in the beginning – and, in fact, God was prior to the beginning of creation. God has been on the scene long before we arrived and will be around long after we're gone. God has always been and always will be. He is eternal. Life begins and ends with God. He comes first, not us.

To Conclude: In the introductory section of the paraphrase version of the bible known as the Message the author Eugene Peterson introduces the book of Genesis by saying this:

“First, God. God is the subject of life. God is foundational for living.

If we don't have a sense of the primacy of God, we will never get it right, get life right, get our lives right. Not God at the margins; not God as an option; not God on the weekends. God at centre and circumference; God first and last; God, God, God.”

He is trying to hammer home a point as I have that we often find it hard actually to believe, let alone live out: “First things first- God.” Or as Genesis says... In the beginning- God!

So the challenge remains from Genesis 1:1 for you and me to see and apply: that God comes first; that God is before everything else back then and there; and therefore in our life and faith of the church today - right here and now!