

God, does science disprove faith?

Today we talk about science and religion; two unlikely bed fellows. Religion isn't allowed to be talked about at high school and in most universities the departments of religion and science aren't even in the same building, much less in conversation with each other. But, then we step out of the education system and move into the reality of daily life the once academic distinctions become practical challenges.

- We listen to our doctor describe a life threatening diagnosis in scientific terms and then walk to the hospital chapel where we pray for divine intervention.
- We listen to a sermon at church on creation and wonder how it fits with the latest David Attenborough doco.
- We are dazzled by the discoveries about tiny DNA or massive galaxies and are humbled by the simplicity of the Bible's opening line that "God created the heavens and the earth".

As laypersons we wonder if we know enough about science or religion to ask the right questions, let alone have the answers.

As scientists they welcome serious conversations, but wonder if others err more toward tradition than truth.

As pastors we often keep silent on science, because we don't know what to say or because we don't want to engage or escalate unwanted debates within the church.

We are in the midst of a series called, God, I have a question! We asked you to give to us question that you or your unchurched friend might ask God and today we're looking at 'God, does science disprove faith?' Has the rise of modern science shown that faith is actually irrational? It's a really important topic, and while we ask this question generally, often within the church the focus of the discussion is around the area of Creation and evolution.

This is not a new question. C.S. Lewis' in his book Mere Christianity writes, "Ever since men were able to think, they have been wondering what this universe really is and how it came to be there."

We are going to look at this by considering a number of key questions.

Firstly I need to say; I am not a scientist. I am not sure I would want to call myself a theologian either but I have read some stuff, and over recent years gathered some perspectives, and yes over the year my perspective has changed but I am still convinced that, to quote a brilliant little song from the Lads; my best friend's the creator of the universe.

I have drawn on a little book called When God and science meet, and from various other places.

1. **Is science the only way to reliably know about something?**

Science has great 'mana' in our day, so this is a really important question. Are there any other kinds of knowledge besides scientific knowledge? The short answer is yes, and if we don't recognize it, it really limits what we have to know to be able to live.

A lot of us remember in school learning about something called the scientific method. It has to do with the idea that we make observations, and they lead to theories, and then there will be a hypothesis designed to test the theory, and then we'll run an experiment, and we'll be able to measure stuff, and then the outcome will either confirm or fail to confirm the hypothesis. That is science.

Because science has made such amazing progress in certain fields like medicine and technology, some people conclude that this scientific method is the only way to reliable knowledge. That is like science saying, *'I am the way the truth and the life and nobody comes to knowledge but through me!'*

But that would mean there is no such thing as moral knowledge or spiritual knowledge or personal knowledge. This view that the only scientific knowledge counts is sometimes called scientism. Not science, but scientism.

There is a guy named Sir John Polkinghorne. He is a Cambridge physicist, an Anglican priest and generally clever bloke. Some have said that he may be the greatest thinker about faith/science issues in our day. He has a really helpful illustration. He says imagine somebody asking, "Why is water boiling in that kettle?" One person answers, "Because the electricity is heating the water," and another person answers, "Because I want a cup of tea." Which answer is right? Well, they're both right. One person is talking about non-

personal causes, mechanical forces. That's what science tends to do. The other answer talks in terms of a person and purpose and intention.

Science is enormously useful to investigate large chunks of reality, but it is not the only way to know truth.

- Human life is of great value. That's true, but you can't put it in a test tube.
- It is wrong to live for selfish greed. That is true. That is moral truth.

Is science the only way to reliably know something? No, it's not. It's important, but it's not the only way.

2. **Has science proven the universe has no purpose; it's just a random machine?**

This is a claim that the field of evolutionary biology has established. *"There are no gods, no purposes, and no goal-directed forces of any kind. There is no life after death. There is no ultimate foundation for ethics, no ultimate meaning in life, and no free will for humans."*

These are huge claims however none of these claims fall in to the discipline of science or can be investigated by those methods. Yet there's this idea out there that somehow something has been discovered that has discredited faith.

Here's another quote from an atheistic scientist *"We find that we live on an insignificant planet of a humdrum star lost in a galaxy tucked away in some forgotten corner of a universe in which there are far more galaxies than people."*

Notice there are all of these really loaded words: *insignificant, humdrum, lost, tucked away, forgotten*. Those are not scientific terms, but they're weighted with meaning. The idea of statements like these, is that somehow science, by showing us how immense the size and the age of the universe is, has shown us that little tiny human beings do not have unique dignity or value or worth in ways that faith has taught. Again, this kind of thing tends to get spread.

The idea that there's a contrast between the immensity of nature and the tininess and brevity of human life... yet the psalm says, *"Yet you made them only a little lower than God and crowned them with glory and honour."* (Ps 8:5) Human beings are invested with a divinity, a divine image. They have this capacity to learn and create. They have the responsibility that comes with being a moral agent, being able to make decisions and be responsible for them, being able to care for creation. It's staggering.

That's why we respond to people the way we do when we see them.

Does anybody here have any grandchildren? Raise your hands really high like you're really proud. How many of your grandchildren are smarter and better looking than any other grandchild you have ever seen? None of your grandchildren are as clever as mine, look he's already a pilot!

Why do we have those kinds of feelings? Because when we look at a little human being, we know this is not just a blob of tissue. It's not just a collection of jiggling atoms. We know this. Any worldview or system of thought that cannot account for the inescapable weight, dignity, and value of human beings is found wanting by any sane, rational evaluation. You have to decide what you think about that. I just think that's obvious, that's not scientific knowledge, that grandfather knowledge!

3. **Haven't science and religion always been at war with each other?**

This warfare view is a very common one. The classic example of this was back in 1633 when the Catholic Church found the scientist Galileo guilty of heresy because he said that the earth revolves around the sun rather than the other way around.

Christians can and do get into trouble if they treat Bible as a science text book. However, the notion that science and religion historically have been at war with each other is actually a myth. As a matter of fact, historically science emerged primarily from people of faith.

There's this mistaken idea that belief in God actually got started out of our inability to understand things scientifically. That is not correct. Faith in God is not based on gaps that science hasn't yet filled in. The "God of the gaps"

deal is a really bad foundation to build a faith on, because then every time a gap gets filled in, faith gets shaky.

Faith in God is based on observations of meaning and value and order. Interestingly that is also the basis of science, meaning, value and order. Historically, the rise of science required a worldview that involves the understanding our world is orderly and will reward rational investigation. The truth is that the Christian worldview is the historical foundation for modern science.

4. **Hasn't evolution disproved Genesis?** This has become the huge hot topic. Within the church evolution is a really controversial thing, less of an issue outside the church.

A little boy comes to his dad and asks him, "Dad, where did human beings come from?" and his father says, "Well, we descended from apes." The little boy goes to his mom. "Mum, where did human beings come from?" She says, "We were created by God in God's image." The boy says, "But Dad said we descended from apes." Mum says, "Well, I was talking about my side of the family."

I'll say a word first about Genesis and then about evolution. There is a helpful book about the Genesis creation story by John Walton, it's in the church library (the lost world of Genesis 1).

As you know when studying the Bible you always have to begin by asking "how would it be understood by the audience reading it in the day when it was first written" because each of the books of the Bible emerges out of a conversation in its day. People get all kinds of weird ideas if they don't begin by looking at the historical context and asking what the initial readers would have understood this to mean.

I grew up in the church, but before I went to Bible College I didn't really think through about how the bible came about. I guess I just assumed the Bible was this special book and somehow Genesis just got dropped down from God. It was actually kind of weird to find out there was a very significant conversation going on in the time that Genesis was written, and of course the language and concepts of that conversation were part of what God used by the writer of Genesis.

John Walton notes that Genesis 1 and 2 are primarily about the one true God. In the ancient world back when it was written, they weren't particularly concerned about **how** something got here from nothing. They were concerned about all of these little tribal gods fighting back the forces of chaos and very concerned with how order triumphed over chaos. That was the big thing their stories were about.

Let me get technical here for a bit - John Walton argues that primarily Genesis is about how the one true God, the good God, was creating the cosmos into a functioning temple (there's all kind of temple imagery in Genesis 1-2). In this cosmos temple he would take up residence and then send out his image bearers (that's all of us made in God's image) to extend his reign, to exercise dominion, so that all the earth could be ordered (not in chaos and conflict) and become a sacred space where God could dwell with his community.

Of course today different Christians interpret Genesis 1-2 differently. For my part, I believe the best reading of it, just on biblical terms, is that it's not about how, or how long, or the role of natural selection/evolution or not. Those questions were not around back then, they weren't interested. Genesis is addressing questions about God, the character of God, and sets out the identity of human beings, our relationship with God and our place in the cosmos.

Genesis doesn't really address the questions of how and how long, so it's very legitimate for science to explore all of those kinds of questions.

5. **Doesn't the big bang show that the universe didn't need God to create it?** I am sure most of you will have heard about the idea of the big bang, that the universe had a beginning. Actually, back a few years it was almost the opposite. A hundred years ago, scientists just assumed the universe had always existed, only religious fanatics called Christians believed that it had a beginning.

Scientists now believe the universe is actually about 13.798 billion years old and that it was begun with something that has commonly become known

as the big bang. For scientists to come to grips over the last century with this idea that there was a beginning is quite significant.

Francis Collins was the head of the Human Genome Project. By the way, he used to be an atheist, but is now a devoted follower of Jesus Christ. He writes: *"The existence of the Big Bang begs the question of what came before that, and who or what was responsible. It certainly demonstrates the limits of science as no other phenomenon has done. [...] The sense of awe created by these realizations has caused more than a few agnostic scientists to sound downright theological."*

That little phrase, *'in the beginning'*, starts to look a whole lot different than it did a century or two ago. There is something even more staggering than just the existence of the big bang itself. There turns out to be 15 different constants for the world to exist. Like the precise force of gravity, such that if it was altered enough that you'd weigh a 10 grams more or less, the universe and your life could not exist. It is exactly what it needed to be.

This is so striking that Stephen Hawking, who is not a person of faith, writes, *"It would be very difficult to explain why the universe should have begun [the way it did], except as the act of a God who intended to create beings like us."* That's a remarkable statement.

Conclusion

So has science proven that faith is irrational and God doesn't exist? Well, you'll need to think about that one on your own. I would say, not by a long, long shot. Just personally, even thinking, reading, researching about this stuff gives me such a sense of wonder and awe about a God who could do this.

One final thing. John Ortberg mentioned that over the years he has spoken to people, people who are scientifically wired scientifically educated, maybe science teachers, science students, medical doctors, engineers etc. He commented that many of them were spiritually lonely.

They would say, "You know, when I'm at work or with a bunch of science type people, they're really sceptical about my faith. They're suspicious

about me." Then these Christian scientists say, "When I go to my church, they're really sceptical about me because of my science." I feel like I don't have any place where I really belong."

I want to say today, to all of you who 'do science', all of you who teach or research or are involved in engineering or medicine or education or biology or chemistry or physics or whatever, you're doing a good thing, you are doing a God thing. You are thinking God's thoughts after him.

You are reading the big book of creation, while you're reading the little Book of the Scriptures. You are obeying God's command, given way back in Genesis to exercise dominion, to learn about, to be curious and discover and steward the earth. Those of us who are not scientists, we just shake our heads in wonder and confusion. We are grateful and admiring and humbled, and we cheer you on. We are glad you are a part of us.

Would you bow your heads and close your eyes? Listen to what somebody wrote about Jesus 2,000 years ago and be amazed. *"For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible. All things were created by him and for him."*

God, help every one of us to be open and humble before truth. How amazed we are, how humbled we are by this reality in which we find ourselves living. Thank you for Jesus who made it. God, when we think you care about our little lives, you notice us, actually became one of us, died on a cross for us, to give us hope, how grateful we are. We give you our worship. In Jesus' name, amen.