

6/6/2021

Adams Center Baptist Church

“Has Science Disproved Christianity?”

I really wanted to talk about Peter’s message on the Day of Pentecost from Acts, chapter 2. But, as I was praying about it, I realized that I was motivated more to talk about one of my favorite topics in theology — eschatology, or the study of last things. Some day, we’ll do that, and it will be fun! But what I believe is most pressing for us as a congregation is to continue to develop knowledge and skill to be able to answer the objections people have about Christianity. The most pressing thing in our day is the need people around us have for the Gospel of Jesus Christ. For people to be rescued from their sin, for people to be set free from the chains that bind them. Our highest calling is to share this good news with the people around us.

So, this morning, we turn to another big objection people have against Christianity, “Has Science Disproved Christianity?” There are still many people today who assume that science in general, and evolutionary science in particular, has made belief in God unnecessary. Richard Dawkins, in his book *The God Delusion* argues that you cannot be an intelligent scientific thinker and still hold religious beliefs. To support his claim he points out a study in 1998 showed that only about 7% of American scientists in the the National Academy of Sciences believe in a personal God. This is proof, he says, that the more intelligent, rational, and scientifically minded you are, the less you will be able to believe in God.

Is Dawkins right? Has science essentially disproved Christian beliefs? Well, I’m not in anyway, shape, or form — a scientist. Some of you here today or perhaps some watching this on-line are likely more in-tune with what’s happening in science today. What I am is a theologian and somewhat of a philosopher. So, what I want to do today is talk about three reasons people think science has disproved Christianity. #1. Aren’t Miracles Scientifically Impossible? #2. Isn’t Science in Conflict with Christianity? And #3. Doesn’t Evolution Disprove the Bible?

Before we get into the philosophical answers to these questions, let me first direct you to John 20, starting in verse 24.

24 Now Thomas (also known as Didymus[a]), one of the Twelve, was not with the disciples when Jesus came. 25 So the other disciples told him, “We have seen the Lord!”

But he said to them, “Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe.”

26 A week later his disciples were in the house again, and Thomas was with them. Though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you!” 27 Then he said to Thomas, “Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe.”

28 Thomas said to him, “My Lord and my God!”

29 Then Jesus told him, "Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."

Thomas is very much like the skeptics today who says that Science Has Disproved Christianity. Thomas here confronts something that seems "improbable" to him... the news of Christ's resurrection. It doesn't fit his worldview, because in his worldview, Messiahs don't suffer humiliating deaths at the hands of the Romans; and dead men don't rise from the dead. As such, the news about Christ's resurrection is "unbelievable" to him, and so he doubts it.

I want you to see first that doubt is nothing new. We have this idea... everybody back then was some gullible, mental midget who of course believed whatever wild tale you told them. The Ju-Ju monster at the bottom of the sea? Christ risen from the dead? Sure! And we think, today, today we're just starting to come of age and now people know better than to believe fairy tales. No, see, Christianity has always exploded people's worldview, and even back then Jesus' closest disciples struggled with doubt...

So, what do you do when you doubt? Here's a principle I want to teach you, (I'm going to borrow a phrase from Tim Keller: Doubt your doubts. Let me explain that: Every doubt comes because you have faith in something else. Thomas doubts that Jesus could rise from the dead because he believes in his worldview, which says that in the real world people don't rise from the dead. So, he won't believe that Jesus rose from the dead because he's never seen someone rise from the dead. But is that a correct assumption about the world? According to this account, no. So, the message of this story is that Thomas should doubt his worldview when he encounters evidence that won't fit into it. Be willing to doubt your doubts in the face of compelling evidence. (Or, doubt the faith commitment that causes you to have those doubts.) Make sense?

The reason I say this... People who believe the objection "Science Has Disproved Christianity" will often say that they only will believe what they can see with their eyes. So, when we talk first here about the question, "Aren't Miracles Scientifically Impossible?" People won't accept miracles because they can't be tested or replicated. But is that wise? I will suggest to you that it is a faith commitment to say that all truth in the universe can be discovered by science.

The doubts you have about miracles come from a confidence, or faith, you have in the power of science to uncover all truth. (People say, "I don't have faith. I believe in science and the power of reason.") That's faith, too! You have faith that men, using science and reason, can accurately deduce truth. That's exactly what Richard Dawkins says in *The God Delusion*. He says that he won't believe anything that science can't prove because ultimately science is the way we'll uncover all truth. But see, that is a faith commitment, too!

But is it reasonable to assume that all the truth that there is in the world can fit under a microscope, and is it reasonable to assume that just because you've never seen a miracle, that

they never happen? I would say to you that if you see me right now, you've seen a miracle, but that's a story for another time.

Is it reasonable for Thomas to insist that just because he has never seen a man raised from the dead that it never happens? In this case, obviously not! And, if you refuse to doubt your doubts when evidence surfaces that really ought to make you question it, you may miss a really obvious point. I'm currently working through an issue with a friend of mine, trying to doubt my doubts about my views on a certain political issue. We've got to doubt our doubts, and see where the evidence leads us.

In Thomas' case, seeing the resurrection of Jesus is what destroys his assumption that miracles don't happen. Some of you are like, "I know. If only that would happen to me all my questions would be over too."

The Apostle John, at the end of this chapter dealing with Thomas, says, "Jesus did many other miraculous signs in the presence of his disciples which are not recorded in this book. But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name."

That's why this book is so important for your life. These things are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believe that you may have life, abundant life, Zoe life, in His name.

All right, "Aren't Miracles Scientifically Impossible?" A miracle is a surprising and welcome event that is not explicable by natural or scientific laws and is therefore considered to be the work of a divine agency. The argument against miracles is that science has proven that there are no such things as miracles. But, can you see how that is a giant leap of faith?!

It's one thing to say that science is only equipped to test for natural causes and can't speak to any others. It is quite another to insist that science proves that no other causes could possibly exist. Think about this for a minute: there is no experiment that can be performed to test the statement, "No supernatural cause for any natural phenomenon is possible." The statement itself is a philosophical presupposition and not a scientific finding. Basically, anyone who says this is saying "science can't discern or test for supernatural causes, and therefore, supernatural causes can't exist."

The Christian philosopher, Alvin Plantinga says about this:

"[This] argument . . . Is like the drunk who insisted on looking for his lost car keys only under the streetlight on the grounds that the light was better there. In fact, it would go the drunk one better; it would insiste that because the key would be hard to find in the dark, they must be under the light."

Do you see how silly that is?

All right, point #2, “Isn’t Science in Conflict with Christianity?”

It turns out that most of the fathers of modern science—you know, the guys with laws named after them—were Christians.

Francis Bacon, the guy who developed the scientific method, he was a Christian. Johannes Kepler, you know, the brilliant scientist who discovered the laws of planetary motion, a committed Christian. Galileo, the scientist who convinced the world that the sun is the center of the solar system, not the earth, a Bible-believing Christian.

Robert Boyle, he founded modern chemistry. Yep, also a Christian. And Gregor Mendel, he monkeyed around with pea plants and founded genetics—he was a monk, for goodness sake. And what about Louis Pasteur? You got it, a Christian. Lord Kelvin (hey, can you turn up the heat in here)—Christian. You get the idea.

Virtually all the founders of the disciplines of modern science—most of them Bible-believing Christians—believed that the world they were studying was God’s world. Those are the facts, and we’re supposed to believe that Christianity is in conflict with science?

Now, you might be thinking, well, nearly everyone was a Christian back then, so big deal. That’s true, but it misses the point. Well-known sociologist Rodney Stark says that not only was there no inherent conflict between religion and science, but Christian theology was essential for the rise of science. Why? Why did modern science develop in Europe, for example, and not in Africa, or Asia, or India? Stark says it was because of the unique features of Christian theology.

Award-winning author Tom Holland (the historian, not Spider-Man) says this: “Without Christianity, we would not have science.” The Christian convictions of the founders of modern science led to the birth of modern science because these Christians saw the world in a very particular way. Holland attributes the rise of modern science to what he called the goldilocks qualities of the Christian God. Not too cold, not too hot, but just right for the development of science. Well, what are these qualities?

First, they believed in an orderly creation because they believed in a God of order who made it. Science relies on an orderly universe that behaves in a particular, regular way. But why would the universe behave this way? Well, the early scientists believe that an intelligent God made it that way. C.S Lewis says, “Men became scientific because they expected Law in Nature, and they expected law in nature because they believed in a Legislator.” Makes sense.

Second, to do science, you need smart people using their rational minds to study the world. And where did rational minds come from? A rational God. They were convinced that they were thinking God’s thoughts after him (Kepler said that). So, not only is the world governed by rational laws, but we can discover those rational laws by using our rational minds.

Third, they believed that studying the acts of creation was actually an act of worship. Kepler wrote, "I had the intention of becoming a theologian...but now see how God is, by my endeavors, also glorified in astronomy." And Copernicus said, "To know the mighty works of God... must be a pleasing and acceptable mode of worship to the Most High."

So the history of science is filled with Christians, and they saw no conflict between their work and their faith. In fact, it was their faith that led to their work as scientists. The big issue today that prompts people to think that "Science is in Conflict with Christianity" is evolutionary science. So, we come now to our third big question, "Doesn't Evolution Disprove the Bible?"

Evolutionary science assumes that more complex life-forms evolved from less complex forms through a process of natural selection. I don't know what you believe about this, you may believe this is totally false. That's okay. But I can tell you that there are Christians all over the world that believe God brought about life in just this way. Here's the thing, it is possible as a Christian to believe in evolution as a process without believing in what is called "philosophical naturalism." Philosophical naturalism is the view that everything has a natural cause and that organic life is solely the product of random forces guided by no one.

Like I said, I'm not a scientist. I honestly am not that interested in the actual science. But as a pastor, as a theologian, as a philosopher, I can tell you that philosophical naturalism is false teaching. Christians universally believe that God is the Creator of the Universe and of every life form in it. Life came into being not by random forces, but by Creator God.

At the same time, there are many different understandings of how God relates to the development of the life-forms we see today. Ian Barbour, in his book *When Science Meets Religion: Enemies, Strangers, or Partners*, says that there are four ways that science and religion may be related to each other: Conflict, Dialogue, Integration, and Independence. At the one end of the spectrum — the Conflict mode, are proponents of "creation science," and atheist thinkers like Richard Dawkins. They bring the warfare model to their relationship between science and faith. Many of my friends are creationists, and their view of Genesis 1 makes any kind of evolutionary process impossible. At the other end of the spectrum — the Independence mode, are those who think faith is mainly a private, subjective thing and doesn't speak to the scientific realm at all. In this view, science and Christianity have nothing to say to each other. Personally, I agree with Ian Barbour in his view that we need to be somewhere between these two — in a place where science and Christianity recognize their respective spheres of authority.

So, "Does Evolution Disprove Christianity?" Well, it depends on how you interpret Genesis 1 and 2. And it depends on how much faith you put in evolutionary science. Because that's what evolutionary science has become. It has become faith. In my view, Genesis 1 and 2 is not in conflict with science. Genesis 1 and 2 and science are speaking different languages. Come back next week, and we'll talk more about this one.