

Reason For God 6 – Hasn't Science disproved Christianity? SN, 2.21.10

Timothy Keller begins ch. 6 in [The Reason for God](#) with these quotes:

"My scientific training makes it difficult if not impossible to accept the teachings of Christianity," said Thomas, a young Asian medical resident. "As a believer in evolution, I can't accept the Bible's prescientific accounts of the origin of life."

"And the Bible is filled with accounts of miracles," added Michelle, a med student. "They simply could not have happened."

Keller adds: "THE bestselling books by Richard Dawkins, Daniel C. Dennett, and Sam Harris assume that science in general, and evolutionary science in particular, has made belief in God unnecessary and obsolete. Dawkins said very famously that "although atheism might have been logically tenable before Darwin, Darwin made it possible to be an intellectually fulfilled atheist." [Timothy Keller, The Reason for God]

One angle we could take tonight would be to challenge science head-on with the claims of Creationism or Intelligent Design. I have three DVDs that I recommend (and would be glad to loan you) that do this – *The Privileged Planet*, *The Case for a Creator* and *Unlocking the Mystery of Life*. But since this lesson series has been about dealing with skeptics, we'll take a different route, because such materials are widely dismissed out-of hand by skeptics as junk science.

The approach Keller takes is to show the tremendous amount of faith it takes to say as Carl Sagan did that the Cosmos is all there is and all there ever was and all there could ever be (my paraphrase).

Do you have enough faith to be an atheist?

What is faith? **Hebrews 11:1** - **¹Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.** How else would you define it?

Science is the measuring, testing, and exploring everything that can be measured, tested and explored by our senses. For a year in GLOW on Wednesday nights, we did science experiments every week as a way to talk about the wonders of God's creation or to illustrate spiritual and Scriptural ideas. We put Mentos in Diet Coke to watch it blow out of the bottle like a geyser. I can't remember the spiritual lesson for that, but you can always find something! The science part of this was: Here's why this happens, and here's how it would be different with different kinds of mints and off-brand diet cola.

When you get to the question of God and the question of miracles, you enter a different land. We can't find God with our scientific instruments. And if something happens that is truly outside the normal order of creation, we cannot predict or explain it. If Lazarus really rose from the dead, if the decay of his cells reversed and his brain started working again after four days, that can't be predicted or repeated in a lab (at least not today). And if there is a God who stands outside the Cosmos because the Cosmos is his creation (after all), we cannot measure him from within.

Does it follow that he doesn't exist? No. The question of God's existence is and has always been a philosophical one rather than a scientific one. Richard Dawkins, the out-spoken atheist, is an expert in evolutionary biology, but in philosophy he is a layman, like us.

What I want you to see is that it takes great faith (and that is exactly the right word, being certain of what we don't see) to go from "I cannot observe God" to "I'm willing to bet my soul that God doesn't exist". Science ultimately cannot address the question of cause or purpose or the existence of anything outside the created order. The late paleontologist Stephen Jay Gould had it right when he said that science and religion occupy different magisteria, different kingdoms. When Dawkins speaks with assurance that there is no God, he is expressing a great faith that what he can see and measure is everything.

An obvious contradiction is that we cannot define some of the most important things in life and they are difficult to measure. Love. Peace of mind. Friendship. Loyalty. Freedom. It's true that these can all be studied, but only by measuring the results of such qualities. Love itself is impossible to pin down in a single definition and impossible to measure in a scientifically valid way. But like the wind, we see its results and we know it exists.

Or do we? From the perspective of the strict naturalist, love is a chemical reaction within us that helps protect the species. So is our reaction to what we call evil. Love and evil do not in fact exist from this perspective, and the enlightened naturalist merely plays along because such concepts are useful.

Except that nobody really lives that way. Dawkins himself thinks that religion is the root cause of much evil, but there again he has left science and entered philosophy. Now in a way it is a hopeful sign that people still believe in love and good and evil even if they don't believe in God. It means that they can still step out on faith and trust that something that is not measurable is still valid.

It's funny to watch science films from the 1950s which promise a glorious future when all your food will come safely from a can, diseases will be eradicated with vaccine, and all pests can be eliminated with chemical spray. We don't have that kind of faith in science anymore. That processed food turns out to be missing too many things and containing too many other things. But in a way, to declare that science has disproved God is to take that view to its extreme.

"John Macquarrie writes: "Science proceeds on the assumption that whatever events occur in the world can be accounted for in terms of other events...just as immanent and this-worldly. [So]...Miracle is irreconcilable with our modern understanding of both science and history."4", [Timothy Keller, The Reason for God]

Christian philosopher Alvin Plantinga responds: "Macquarrie perhaps means to suggest that the very practice of science requires that one reject the idea (e.g.) of God raising someone from the dead.... [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 insist that because the keys would be hard to find in the dark, they must be under the light.", [Timothy Keller, The Reason for God]

Are science and religion in conflict? Are they mutually exclusive?

For most of the last 2,000 years, this wasn't an issue. Much is made of the conflict between Galileo and the Catholic Church, but many great scientists were believers and saw their work as mining the depths of God's wisdom.

Psalm 19 - For the director of music. A psalm of David.

**¹ The heavens declare the glory of God;
the skies proclaim the work of his hands.**

**² Day after day they pour forth speech;
night after night they display knowledge.**

**³ There is no speech or language
where their voice is not heard.**

As Dawkins points out, it took Darwin to make atheism intellectually fulfilling.

Dawkins and others speak as if the conflict between science and faith is so strong that practically NO world class scientists claim any kind of faith. Dawkins cites a study that puts the number of religious scientists at 7%, but Keller notes many problems with that study, which you can follow up on yourself. Keller points out that the relationship between science and faith actually takes four forms: **Conflict, Dialogue, Integration and Independence**. Independence takes what Gould said about different kingdoms and applies it to the extreme – science is about the concrete world, faith is personal and private, walled off from real life. Not OUR faith, but that is one way that some scientists hold on to both.

Which of these four gets the most press? Conflict! Stem-cell research, global warming, H1n1 vaccines, creation v. evolution. Conflict generates ratings and readers, and if one side is religious, all the better.

And when conflict is the most popular presentation of an issue, you and I are pressured to pick sides. Are you going to be faithful to the Bible or listen to man's science, maybe even the devil's science? And on the other side, Dawkins, Hitchens, Philip Pullman, etc. are saying: "Atheism is the only tenable and responsible position. Are you going to be rational or follow ancient tribal superstitions?"

I think it is highly dangerous to frame the debate this way because it give us (especially our young people going off to college) a false choice between faith and science.

Here I tread on dangerous ground because some of us have accepted the conflict stance as the faithful one. But let me give you some examples of Christians who see it another way. I show you this not to change your position about creation, but to show you that sincere Christians can trust God, believe the Bible and not relate to science in conflict:

C. S. Lewis, in his writings, makes it clear that evolutionary theory has a lot to commend it (in his opinion) and yet his writings on faith are beautiful and profound and (in my judgment) are responsible for several generations of people either finding God or holding on to God and loving him with all their minds.

The Catholic Church, especially under John Paul 2, has stated that evolutionary theory is compatible with the Christian faith, but philosophical naturalism is not! (Philosophical naturalism is the view that it all happened by accident...the view that Dawkins equates with science).

Francis Collins, director of the Human Genome Project and current head of the National Institutes of Health is an evolutionist who actually has no use for Creation Science or Intelligent Design, and at the same time he is an out-spoken evangelical Christian who came to Christ after reading Lee

Strobel's *The Case for Christ* as well as many books by C. S. Lewis. Collins wrote a book called *The Language of God* about how our genetic code declares the glories of our Creator.

Now I'm not an evolutionist and I'm not asking you to become one. What I am doing is showing you that the conflict between science and faith is not the only game in town, although you might think so from the media. You might say that Collins is converted but like Apollos he needs to learn the way of God more adequately. Fine. But he is an example of someone raised in nominal Christianity who rejected it, became an atheist and then found Jesus and everything changed.

Stephen Jay Gould, evolutionist and atheist, once wrote: "*Either half my colleagues are enormously stupid, or else the science of Darwinism is fully compatible with conventional religious beliefs—and equally compatible with atheism.*", [Timothy Keller, *The Reason for God*] Much to his credit, Gould didn't conclude they were idiots and even supervised [Kurt Wise](#), Christian paleontologist and young-earth creationist, as a doctoral candidate.

Do you really think miracles can happen?

Skepticism is understandable. **Matthew 28:16-17** ¹⁶**Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go.** ¹⁷**When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted.** Even for these followers and friends, belief was unnatural, supernatural. We tend to think that belief was easy for pre-scientific people, but they knew that dead people don't come back. This is yet another verse that would not have been included in propaganda.

But this same verse shows the ultimate goal of the miracles: Worship. Which is more unnatural to us than faith.

Earlier I spoke of miracles as reversals of the natural order, but that isn't actually how the Bible presents them. Jesus actually spoke of them as instances of the Kingdom of God breaking in. Miracles are actually examples of God restoring things to the way he meant them to be at the beginning, a return to an order against which creation has departed.

Maybe the most fundamental verse to believe is **Genesis 1:1. After that, nothing is impossible for God.**

Next week: Something different

A worship on creating God Space (not a new social network).

David Pryor and I will involve you in learning how to talk about God to others.

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