

Science and Faith

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How do science and faith relate? There are a variety of ways to answer that question.

At the beginning of this series I asked the question **What do we all have in common?** Answer: **God loves us.** Our response to God's love is **to love like God loves and to live like Christ lived.** One Sunday I asked you how you thought certain groups of people would feel coming into Heritage Green. For instance, an atheist, an agnostic, a biologist, astronomer, astrophysicist, or geologist?

Atheists hold an absence of the belief in the existence of God. **Agnostics** cannot be certain that God is knowable or is identifiable as a personal God.

Christians are happy to have the advantages provided by science that afford us health care, medicine, technology, travel, entertainment and personal comforts, but many set up a wall between our personal faith and full interaction with sciences such as biology, astronomy, astrophysics and geology. The wall is porous enough to let in what we want to hear and benefit from.

One reason Christians build a wall **between science and faith** is because they don't want to deal with the challenge of reconciling faith and science. If you have understood the bible to say certain things about how God created and then biology, astronomy, astrophysics and geology gives evidence to a different way of how God created – it takes mental and emotional energy to wade into the discussion. Some just choose to partition science off into a separate realm. That is acting like people in the 1700s who refused to accept Copernicus model that the earth orbited around the sun. The church wanted to hold on to the concept that the sun orbited around the earth. If we live in a bubble isolated from the world we will look like a cult trying to control and manipulate people. Skepticism and often outright hostility– towards science can create a crisis for our children and grandchildren unless we begin to engage the faith-science issue with honesty, humility, and constructive self-criticism.

Another reason for the wall between science and faith is because of a sole focus on what God does for me rather than God's grand narrative. We have read the bible to get just what is in it for me rather than what and how God is revealing about God. Our creator God is bigger than just me and Jesus.

Another reason for the wall between faith and science is that well meaning people feel that they must protect God's glory by refuting evolution or discoveries in biology, geology, astronomy, or astrophysics. They feel that anything less than a literalist reading of every word would detract from God's glory and undermine the faith. There is an unfounded worry about going down the proverbial slippery slope.

As western readers, in particular, we are not very practised at reading ancient literature and have a tendency to interpret with a wooden literalism. This is because scientific literature has become so dominant in our culture, influencing the way in which we instinctively read even those texts that come from a pre-scientific age. This can be a significant problem when we come to the biblical text, not only because of its antiquity, but also because it is set in cultures with which we may not be familiar.

We need to be on our guard against reading one type of biblical literature as if it were another. This point becomes clearer when we consider that the types of literature used in the Bible include prose, historical narrative, poetry (in many different styles), prophetic writing, parables, apocalyptic writings, correspondence, theological essays, biography, genealogy, legal discourse, census data, hymns, descriptions of dreams and visions, and much else besides. We can be seriously misled if we treat one kind of narrative as if it were another, missing the main point of the passage altogether.

Reading the Bible's creation narratives requires interpretation, and interpretation requires sensitivity to how meaning-making in the ancient near east works. A challenge for all of us is being able to step out of our past and appreciate the metaphors. The grand narrative of the bible begins in Genesis describing idyllic life in a garden with humans enjoying fellowship with God. Revelation, the last book of the Bible describes a future idyllic life with humans enjoying life with God in a renewed heaven and earth.

The metaphors of the beginning and end give us a way to grasp what is beyond our capacity to fully comprehend. In between these two stories in Genesis and Revelation is the reality of Jesus Christ who is fully God and fully man redeeming and restoring not only people but all of creation. The account of Jesus is in real space and time and we can know the reality of his presence. Jesus is not a metaphor or just an example of how man should live or an inspiring account of a hero.

There are beliefs and doctrines that have been held since the time of the apostles and early church. We covered these when we examined the Nicene Creed. God is creator, God is one in three persons, Father Son and Holy Spirit. It is by God's grace that we are redeemed, it is through Jesus Christ who is both God and man that we are reconciled to God. The story of creation is completed in Christ.

The church has not always believed that Genesis 1 is an account of God creating in six twenty-four hour periods. Augustine one of the early theologians who lived 354- 430 believed the Bible has a spiritual purpose to lead us to God not to teach cosmology. The great reformer John Calvin said that you should look elsewhere than in the bible for astronomy.

When reading scripture, we need to rediscover imagination for metaphor and what God is communicating. I am often guilty of looking for a metaphor as an illustration that I could use to illustrate a point, or a fact about God and Jesus. In my thinking first I find the fact then look for a metaphor to help explain the fact. Most metaphors actually work the other way. Something

in nature points to or reveals God. God communicates himself to us beyond mere facts about himself. Since the enlightenment of the 1500s and the scientific age an emphasis has been on examining facts. We so often read the bible solely looking for facts about God, rather than approaching a mystery allowing the metaphor to reveal God. Both the mystery alluded to in metaphor and the rational mind go together. The imagination intuits reality that we cannot see. Mystery is not illogical. Mystery is beyond our capacity to comprehend as humans.

Psalm 19:1-14. The Psalmist identifies the metaphor of the heavens declaring God's glory. There is beauty, order, and regularity in creation that is everywhere at all times. The metaphors we discover in creation point to the creator.

Psalm 19:1- 14

Heaven is declaring God's glory;

the sky is proclaiming his handiwork.

2 One day gushes the news to the next,

and one night informs another what needs to be known.

3 Of course, there's no speech, no words—

their voices can't be heard—

4 but their sound extends throughout the world;

their words reach the ends of the earth.

God has made a tent in heaven for the sun.

5 The sun is like a groom

coming out of his honeymoon suite;

like a warrior, it thrills at running its course.

6 It rises in one end of the sky;

its circuit is complete at the other.

Nothing escapes its heat.

7 The Lord's Instruction is perfect,

reviving one's very being.

The Lord's laws are faithful,

making naive people wise.

8 The Lord's regulations are right,

gladdening the heart.

The Lord's commands are pure,

giving light to the eyes.

9 Honoring the Lord is correct,

lasting forever.

The Lord's judgments are true.

All of these are righteous!

10 They are more desirable than gold—

than tons of pure gold!

They are sweeter than honey—

even dripping off the honeycomb!

11 No doubt about it:

your servant is enlightened by them;
there is great reward in keeping them.
12 But can anyone know
what they've accidentally done wrong?
Clear me of any unknown sin
13 and save your servant from willful sins.
Don't let them rule me.
Then I'll be completely blameless;
I'll be innocent of great wrongdoing.
Let the words of my mouth
and the meditations of my heart
be pleasing to you,
Lord, my rock and my redeemer

Verses one to six are observations of the natural realm, there is order, symmetry, and even while nature has no speech or words it's voice can be heard through out the world. Starting in verse 7- the Psalmist points to the beauty, consistency and faithfulness of God. God gives life, sustains life, he is consistent, he reveals himself, and forgives on a daily basis. The metaphors of creation point to God. the order and consistency, the patterns, and beauty all point to God's nature.

God reveals himself through creation to the premodern world in ways that they could understand. God reveals himself through creation to the modern world in ways that we can understand. John Calvin said that God accommodated himself to man and communicated in baby talk so that man could understand. I think that God still accommodates himself to us even though there is so much more understanding and knowledge.

Psalm 19 talks about the order and logic. This order of natural laws applying at all times in all places allowed Einstein to propose the theory of general relativity. One hundred years ago Einstein proposed gravitational waves. If you have been following the news in the last two weeks, you know the huge thing in astronomy is the detection of gravitational waves. My understanding is limited to synopsis but here is a simplified simple account. Two black holes, with density many times greater than the sun, collide to form a denser black hole. Gravity waves emitted from the collision compress the space time continuum one way and stretch it the other way. (hand gestures) The event detected just last year by the instruments occurred a billion years ago but the light has just reached the earth.

When I say a billion years that may cause some concern for people. I believe like other orthodox Christians that **God created** the universe. Christians who believe that God created have different convictions of how God created. **Young earth** creationists believe that God created in six 24 hour days less than 10,000 ago. Some **Old Earth** creationists believe that the earth is very old, but that God has intervened at various stages of creation, for example to bring about new species. This view typically maintains that the days of creation in Genesis 1 each refer to long periods of time. There are challenges to this view. Previously we could say there

are many gaps in the scientific explanation and that is where God stepped in. Now those gaps are smaller and smaller. God's part seems to be less and less with this view.

Evolutionary creation maintains that the scientific evidence from many branches of modern science would make little sense apart from common ancestry and evolution. The cultural and theological contexts in which Scripture was written are key for determining the best interpretation of the creation accounts. Evolutionary creation believes that God created with purpose and design. God could have packed all the potential for the universe he planned, all energy, all life, all being and the laws by which it would unfold in a pinpoint of probability smaller than a proton. Evolutionary creation maintains that we are not just the product of random mutation or survival of the fittest. God breathed into humans the breath of life that gives us the image of God, being self-aware and able to relate to God. God can still act in ways what we call miracles. God does not explain how he created. Science cannot tell us why there is something rather than nothing.

I believe that Genesis 1 is theological treatise—the one true God created. Just to let you know there are eight different interpretations of Genesis among people who love God and believe that God created. They disagree with how God created.

What we discover through scientific study still points to our creator God. God is not intimidated by scientific discovery any more than if a contemporary of the psalmist had looked at nature and not discerned God from the evidence of nature. Some scientists may not recognize God as the efficient cause of creation and come to a wrong conclusion.

Where science oversteps its bounds is making moral judgments and saying that science has eliminated the need for God or proved that there is no God. Ways of knowing in the spiritual realm are legitimate ways of knowing. Theological truths revealed in Scripture are eternal infallible truths valid for the whole of humanity. What is clear in scripture is that we are in need of God's grace and redemption by God through Jesus Christ.

No matter what our understanding of Genesis there are still many questions to ponder. There is still the question of original sin. From where does sin and Satan originate? What are we to make of the fall and how we strayed so far from God? Do we sin because we are sinners or are we sinners because we sin? Perhaps some of this will remain a mystery to us for eternity.

What is not a mystery is that we need God's grace. The apostle Paul wrote in his letter to the churches in Rome; People who do by nature things that God requires show that God's requirements are written on their hearts, their consciences also bearing witness, and their thoughts sometimes accusing them and at other times even defending them. We are all in need of becoming fully human like Jesus Christ. God's story is a grand narrative about the self-giving love of God. God did not choose to communicate in lofty scientific language about nature. He chose to communicate to us himself. Jesus Christ the Word made flesh.

We continue to learn from both of God's books **The book of special revelation the bible and the book of nature. Both are from God for us.** Let's continue the conversation to glorify God, for the good of all of us, young or old, who are reconciling faith and science. Let's continue the conversation so that an atheist, agnostic, a biologist, astronomer, astrophysicist, or geologist would know they are loved by God and could find a spiritual family at Heritage Green.