

Defend Your Faith

Lesson 7

IS THERE CONFLICT BETWEEN SCIENCE AND SCRIPTURE?

“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth...” (Genesis 1:1)

I. INTRODUCTION.

A. We Must Be Ready to Give An Answer (1 Peter 3:15).

B. The Importance of This Question.

1. The universe is billions of years old! No, the universe is a few thousand years old! So, which is it? Many unbelievers reject the Bible because they believe it is in conflict with the conclusions of modern scientists who are also unbelievers.
2. Of course, there will always be a conflict between science and scripture when humanistic scientists engage in “scientism” (making philosophical interpretations of the facts apart from the facts themselves) and when theologians try to make the Bible say things it really does not say. In other words, conflict exists between the interpretations of science and scripture, not between the facts of science and scripture. The presuppositions that one brings to the facts, not the facts themselves, often cause conflict. The unfortunate conflict between science and scripture has been great at times. (Consider the Catholic Church’s persecution of Galileo in 1633 for believing that the earth revolved around the sun just like Copernicus had done before him. Galileo was persecuted because the Catholic Church misinterpreted Psalm 104:5).
3. The conflict between some forms of modern science and scripture is unnecessary. There is absolutely no contradiction whatsoever between an accurate interpretation of the Bible and the valid facts of science. When scientists stay within the realm of scientific investigation and when theologians do not force scientific information into the Bible, there will be no conflict between science and scripture whatsoever. There will be harmony and no conflict when complete objectivity is maintained between the facts of science and the facts of scripture.
4. God gave us his **WORLD** (Psalm 19:1-6; Romans 1:20) and his **WORD** (Psalm 19:7-11; Romans 1:16) and there is perfect harmony between God’s world (of science) and God’s word (of scripture). Truth never contradicts truth! True science and true religion are not in conflict.

C. Science and Scripture: Harmony and Conflict.

1. Science and scripture in harmony. Early scientists, from the time of Galileo to Sir Isaac Newton, were actually believers in God and creation. These scientists believed nature to be God’s natural revelation and the Bible to be God’s special revelation. Both nature (science) and scripture were in harmony. In fact, they believed that scripture provided a general foundation of natural history on which scientific discoveries could be made.

- a) Sometimes humanistic scientists promoting the general theory of evolution argue that creation scientists are not real scientists. Consider the following scientists who were also believers in God: Sir Francis Bacon, Louis Pasteur, Sir Isaac Newton, Robert Boyle, Lord Kelvin, Gregor Mendel, Louis Agassiz, Leonardo Da Vinci, Blaise Pascal, John Ray, Johann Kepler, James Joule, Samuel Morse, George Washington Carver, Werner Von Braun, etc.
 - b) Forty-two of the 68 founding members of the British Royal Society of Science were religious Puritans.
2. Science and scripture in conflict. Unlike early scientists, the rise of modern, humanistic science has caused many unbelievers to feel that there is a conflict between science and scripture. Many humanistic scientists of the modern era have removed God and the Bible from their thinking and way of life. Beginning in the 18th Century and growing in the 19th Century, secular humanism replaced Christianity as the dominant worldview. Science, among some, was becoming estranged from Christian theology at this time. Scientists who were secular humanists used general evolution instead of God's creation to explain the origin of life. Charles Darwin (*Origin of the Species, 1859*), was affected by the secular humanism of his day and he popularized the theory of general evolution. Julian Huxley, Darwin's disciple and grandson of Sir Thomas Huxley ("Darwin's bulldog"), was affected in the same way. The humanistic science of the 19th Century spawned "scientism" – worshipping at the throne of scientific achievement.
 3. Today, humanistic scientists no longer believe in God's creation, but follow the popular, general evolution model only. In the minds of many today (scientist and non-scientist alike), science is a god-like figure that is never wrong; it is to never be questioned (scientism, naturalism, scientific materialism). According to men like Richard Dawkins ("Darwin's pit bull"), scientism is the absolute authority. It is the "sacred cow" of the educated. Any evidence (biblical or scientific) contrary to the hypothesis and theories of modern, humanistic science is ignored or suppressed. Once a scientific theory (a paradigm or model by which data is interpreted) like the Big Bang or general evolution has become firmly established in an accepted worldview like secular humanism, it is not easily surrendered. General evolution is now popular because it best fits the atheistic presuppositions of secular humanism which is the popular worldview today. Current educational institutions and the media, in turn, promote and popularize this theory of evolution. The proud and pompous humanistic scientist who bows to the "sacred cow" of scientism would do well to read Job chapters 38-41 and answer the questions posed there. Science in general should neither be rejected as an enemy nor worshipped as a goddess.

D. Science and Scripture: Compromise.

1. Some believers (in and out of the Lord's church) have attempted to remove the apparent conflict between modern, humanistic science and scripture by offering interpretations of scripture that match current scientific beliefs (general evolution, a universe approximately 13 billion years old, etc.). While the conflict is removed, scripture is compromised. Compromise has been exchanged for conflict. The plain text of Genesis 1 and 2 is twisted and distorted to fit modern scientific theory. The text is compromised!
2. Some creation compromises are theistic evolution, the gap theory, the day-age theory, progressive creation, old-earth creationism, the frame-work hypothesis, etc. (These and other creation compromises are well-documented and answered in the book by Bert Thompson, *Creation Compromises*, Apologetics Press, 2000).

II. PRESENTING YOUR CASE.

A. The Aims of Science and Scripture.

1. What is science?
 - a) Science is a human activity. It is the formal study of our observable world, from the complex molecular / biochemical level to the farthest galaxies. Mankind, using the five senses and instruments, seeks to observe and experiment, to measure, to offer hypotheses and theories, and to record their world (the “scientific method”). Science (Latin *scientia*, meaning literally, to know, to understand) is “systemized knowledge derived from observation, study, etc.” (*Webster’s New World Dictionary*).
2. What is scripture?
 - a) Scripture is God’s word (see Lesson 3 in this series) and the study of scripture (exegesis, hermeneutics) is also a human activity – the study of God and his relation to his created world. Scripture is not a book of science. The central purpose of the Bible is not to teach science, but to show how man can be reconciled to God after being lost in sin.
3. The overall aim of science is to understand the observable world for the benefit of mankind. The overall aim of Bible study is to understand scripture for the purpose of obeying God and worshipping God and to take God’s word to lost mankind.

B. The Knowledge of Science and Scripture.

1. Scientific knowledge.
 - a) How does science work? Good science comes from observing phenomena and then describing those phenomena on different levels. Plausible explanations for phenomena come only from processes that are known to operate and a history that has enough evidence to support it. The basic steps of the “scientific method” are: (1) observation, (2) statement and definition of the problem, (3) formation of an hypothesis, (4) deduction from the hypothesis, (5) experimentation, and (6) formation of a theory or a law.
 - b) No one doubts the wonderful benefits and great discoveries of science. However, as great as science is, the scientific method is subject to limitations. What are the limitations of science? Science is limited to (1) what can be observed with the five senses, (2) the present, (3) “how” a process works, not “why”, (4) non-moral matters, (5) timeless, universal, reproducible data (not one-time events), and (6) naturalistic explanations.
 - c) All scientists must avoid pseudo-science or “junk science”. All scientists must avoid “science falsely so called” (2 Timothy 6:20, KJV). For example, doctors practiced “bloodletting” for at least 2,000 years. It was thought that letting a patient bleed was good for him.
 - d) Dr. Philip Abelson, once editor of *Science*, the official journal of the American Association for Advancement of Science, wrote:

“One of the most astonishing characteristics of scientists is that some of them are plain old-fashion bigots. Their zeal has a fanatical egocentric quality characterized by disdain and intolerance for anyone or any value not associated with a special area of intellectual activity” (*Science* 144 (1964): 373).

- e) Dr. Stephen Jay Gould, well-known general evolutionist, atheist, and Harvard Professor of the last century, believed that science and religion should be kept separate. He wrote:

“...science is not an objective, truth-directed machine, but a quintessentially human activity, affected by human passions, hopes, and cultural biases. Cultural traditions of thought strongly influence scientific theories, often directing lines of speculation, especially when virtually no data exists to constrain both imagination and cultural prejudices” (*Natural History* 87 (1978): 25).

2. Scripture knowledge.

- a) This comes from reading a trusted text of Scripture (the Old Testament Hebrew Masoretic text or the New Testament Greek Nestle-Aland text).
- b) What are the limitations of scripture? The pursuit of scripture is limited by context. Scripture is written in human language (Hebrew, Greek) with an historical context. Scripture interpretation, therefore, is limited to grammatical (words, literary genre and style, etc.) and historical contexts.
- c) Theologians must avoid “junk hermeneutics”. The Bible student must avoid twisting the scriptures to “their own destruction” (2 Peter 3:16).
- d) For example, Bishop James Ussher (1581 – 1656), using the Bible’s genealogies, calculated the origin of the earth to the precise date of 4004 B.C. While the Bible’s genealogies are accurate and can be used to calculate a general time for the beginning of God’s creation, no precise date and time like 4004 B.C. can be concluded from scripture.

C. The Relationship of Science and Scripture.

1. Science tells us about the vast, complex, and beautiful universe that we live in. This vast universe causes the astronomer, the geologist, the biologist and other scientists to ask: “What is mankind in relationship to all this?”
2. Scripture answers this question by telling us about the significance of mankind in our universe. We are told the WHAT (we are created) and the WHY (to have dominion over creation) of mankind (Psalm 8:3-6; Isaiah 45:18; Genesis 1:26-31).
3. Science, properly done, and scripture tell us to worship the Creator, not the creation (Romans 1:25; Revelation 4:11). Science, properly done, is actually one way in which mankind carries out God’s command: “subdue it and have dominion over” creation (Genesis 1:28; Psalm 8:6).
4. Science alone cannot aid mankind with all his problems. Science, for example, cannot help mankind with the human spirit or relationships. Only faith coming from scripture (faith in Jesus Christ and obedience to his word) will suffice for this need.

D. The Harmony of Science and Scripture.

1. **Astronomy:** Scientists studying astronomy, including Stephen Hawking (*A Brief History of Time*, 1988), believe the universe to have a “beginning”. Scripture teaches a beginning (Genesis 1:1).
2. **Physics:** Scientists studying physics believe that the total energy of the universe is constant and that all time and space are contained within the material universe (time, energy, force, space, matter); no independent space or time exists. Scripture teaches the same five elements of all things in the universe (Genesis 1:1: In the beginning (time), God (energy), created (force), the heavens (space) and the earth (matter)...).

3. **Chemistry:** Scientists studying chemistry believe that within atoms and molecules there are enormous number of quantities that must have extremely precise values to lead to nucleo-synthesis. Life requires highly complex atomic structures that do not simply spontaneously appear. This was proven by Louis Pasteur in 1862. Scripture teaches complexity of life (Genesis 1; Psalm 104). [Note: God gave man the ability to work with chemical compounds (Genesis 4:22; Exodus 30:25) and chemical reactions (Proverbs 25:30) within the natural world].
4. **Biology:** Scientists studying biology believe in limits to biological change and they believe that the basis of all life is the cell with all its complex parts. Scripture teaches biological limitation (Genesis 1:12,21,24) and biological complexity (Psalm 139:14).
5. **Anthropology:** Scientists who study the history of mankind believe that we came from a common ancestor. Scripture teaches common ancestry (Genesis 1:26-27; 4:2,22; Acts 17:26).
6. **Geology:** Scientists who study the fossil record have failed to find a gradual evolution of animal life from primitive forms to complex forms (one species of animal evolving into another). No transitional forms between major classes has ever been found in the large amounts of fossils recovered over the past 150 years (e.g. between fish and amphibians, between amphibians and reptiles, between reptiles and birds, etc.). In fact, the fossil record shows (1) major groups of animals are distinct from each other and (2) particular characteristics are fully formed and functional when they first appear. (Note: Textbook drawings of a gradual evolution of animal life with all the transitional forms in all the right spots is just an artist' conception what evolutionary scientists think such animals would look like if they did exist.) Scripture teaches the same. There are no transitional forms from primitive to complex. God created all plants, sea creatures, birds, and land animals "after their kind" (Genesis 1:12,21,24).

III. ANSWERING OBJECTIONS.

A. Objection #1: Scripture Contains Many Scientific Errors and Inaccuracies.

1. The belief that the Bible is unscientific and full of errors came about in the 1800's.
2. The Bible is not a textbook on science (you won't find quantum mechanics, the kinetic theory of gases, or the wave theory of electrons in the Bible). However, when the Bible speaks, it does not contain anything that is scientifically false. The Bible writers always speak truth, not error (geography, history, nature, etc.). Consider a few examples from various fields of science...
 - a) Physics: the formation of matter is finished (Genesis 2:1 [Heb. past definite tense]; Hebrews 4:13; the first law of thermodynamics – the law of conservation of mass and energy) and the universe is wearing out and running down (Psalm 102:26; Isaiah 51:6; Hebrews 1:11; the second law of thermodynamics – the law of entropy).
 - b) Biology: life comes from life; non-life cannot give rise to life (Genesis 1-2; the law of biogenesis and the law of genetics) and four kinds of flesh – men, beast, bird, and fish (1 Corinthians 15:39).
 - c) Medicine: the life is in the blood (Leviticus 17:11-14) and rules concerning hygiene (Leviticus 7:4; 11:1 – 57; 14; 17:12).
 - d) Astronomy: the earth hangs on nothing and the northern sky is empty (Job 26:7), the sun is the source of the earth's energy (Psalm 19:5-6), the earth is circular or spherical in shape, not flat (Isaiah 40:22), and the stars cannot be numbered (Genesis 15:5; Jeremiah 33:22).

- e) Geology: the ocean springs (Proverbs 8:28; Job 38:16), ocean currents (Psalm 8:8), and ocean trenches (Job 38:16).
 - f) Meteorology: the earth's wind and water cycle (Job 37:27-28; Ecclesiastes 1:6-7; 11:3; Amos 9:6).
3. Scripture is scientifically accurate but it often speaks with phenomenological language (language that describes nature as it appears; language of everyday speech) or popular language, rather than strict literalism. For example...
- a) The sun "rising" and "going down" (Ecclesiastes 1:5).
 - b) The "four corners of the earth" (Isaiah 11:12).
 - c) The mustard seed is "less than all the seeds" (Matthew 13:32).
4. Scripture often uses words that can be mistranslated and made to mean something that appears to be unscientific. For example...
- a) Firmament (Heb. *raqia*) in the KJV = an expanse, not a solid sky (Gen. 1:6).
 - b) Unicorn (Heb. *re'em*) in the KJV = a wild ox, not a one-horned white horse (Num. 23:22).
- B. Objection #2: The Big Bang and General Evolution Disprove the Bible.
1. Remember, science can neither prove nor disprove the Bible because the Bible's account of creation is non-observable, non-measurable, and non-reproducible (it is miraculous and science does not deal with the miraculous). Science cannot disprove the Bible, just like science cannot disprove that George Washington was our first president.
2. When someone says, "Science has disproved the Bible and religion," your reply needs to be: "Which science? Which discovery? By whom? When? What is the proof of it? Which religion? Which Bible doctrine?"
3. Before the big bang and general evolution theories can disprove the Bible they must first be proved themselves. Remember, the big bang and general evolution are scientific theories, but not scientific (observable) facts.
- a) What do we mean by "evolution"? There is micro-evolution (also called "special evolution," small changes within a certain species) and macro-evolution (also called "general evolution," large changes from one species into another species). Micro-evolution is seen everywhere. Just take a look at the variety in the 6 billion plus humans (shape, size, color, etc.) or the well-known fruit fly experiments of the past. Macro-evolution has never been witnessed in nature and micro-evolution does not lead to macro-evolution as many scientists and atheists are now admitting (see *The Altenburg 16: An Exposé of the Evolution Industry*, Susan Mazur, North Atlantic Books, 2009).
 - b) There are several un-provable assumptions in the theory of general evolution (macro-evolution) beginning with the assumption that non-living things gave rise to living material, or "spontaneous generation". As far back as 1960, G.A. Kerkut (*Implications of Evolution*) set forth 7 assumptions in the general theory of evolution that have remained unproven to this day.
4. There are two types of evidence and general evolution has never been established by either of these types.
- a) Scientific evidence is derived from the scientific method.
 - b) Historical / legal evidence is derived from eyewitness testimony, written documents, and other factual data. Historical evidence, not scientific evidence, is used to support Christianity (Luke 1:1-4; Acts 1:3; 1 Corinthians 15:1-8).

5. God's creation or general evolution: which?
 - a) The Christian stands here: "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth..." (Genesis 1:1; Psalm 33:6,9; 148:4-6; John 1:1-3; Colossians 1:17; Hebrews 11:3).
 - b) Is divine creation possible? Yes it is. God creating out of nothing is not irrational because creation does not claim that things just "pop" into existence without an adequate cause. God did not just "pop" into existence and nature had an adequate cause: God (see Lesson 2 in this series).
 - c) What difference does divine creation make? Creation makes a big difference in three areas of our life. First, our concept of God is affected. If God is Creator, then he is infinitely powerful, immeasurably wise, and completely generous. Second, our concept of nature is affected. If God is Creator, then his creation is intelligible, good, and real. Third, our concept of self is affected. If God is Creator, then we have no rights over our Creator, our existence is meaningful, and we owe God everything, even our very existence.
 - d) Is general evolution possible? Yes and no. No, general evolution (macro-evolution) is not possible with material creation alone and has never been observed in action (there is nothing from which our material universe can evolve from and our spirit cannot evolve from matter). Yes, general evolution is possible with God the Creator, but there is no scriptural evidence that he used such means (no theistic evolution).
 - e) What difference does general evolution make? This kind of evolution makes a big difference in two areas of our life. First, our overall purpose or destiny in life is affected. If this kind of evolution is true, then we have no overall purpose or destiny in life (meaning in life) except for what we invite for ourselves. Second, our moral standard in life is affected. If this kind of evolution is true, then we have no absolute, objective standard of morality only those relative, subjective standards we invite for ourselves.
 - f) Is this kind of evolution in conflict with divine creation? Yes. A "big bang" (with no God) followed by macro-evolution is in conflict with Genesis 1:1.

IV. CONCLUSION.

- A. Is There A Conflict Between Science and Scripture? No, They Do Not Conflict!
 1. What are at odds are unscientific dogmas (theories) and incorrect interpretations of scripture. Unsubstantiated scientific assertions (like the big bang and general evolution) and unsupported biblical exegesis are the cause of the conflicts. And we do not resolve the conflict by choosing one bad position over another.
 2. Valid scientific conclusions and accurate exegesis (interpretation) of scripture should be the goal of everyone who is a scientist, a Christian, or both. Valid scientific observations will always be in harmony with accurate biblical exegesis.
 3. The study of valid science is not a threat to the Christian's faith. The more we discover the creation, the more we appreciate our Creator (Psalm 8:3-9).
 4. I encourage young Christians who are interested in the sciences to go into the field of science. Enter with caution, yes, but enter nonetheless. The areas of physical science (astronomy, physics, chemistry, etc.), life science (zoology, biology, biochemistry, medicine, etc.), and human sciences (sociology, psychology, etc.) are wide open for the taking.
 5. Christians should recognize the following about science: (a) it is an important and beneficial part of our life; (b) it can be either a servant or a master; (c) it can be

either true, false, or a mixture of both; and (d) it can be mutually complementary with scripture.

B. Christians Do Not Need to Abandon the Scriptures In Order to Carry Out Good and Effective Science.

C. Do You Have the Will to Believe (John 7:17)?