

GOD, are Science and Scripture at odds?



As some of you may know, CBS television launched a new situation-comedy in 2018 called LIVING BIBLICALLY. It's the week-by-week story of Chip and Leslie Curry, who live and work in New York. Recently, Chip lost his best friend in a tragic accident, and at the same time, his wife Leslie became pregnant with their first child. Suddenly, more life was happening to Chip than he could handle, and so he took a bold step. He decided to live his life "100% by the Bible." When he told his priest in the confessional, the priest burst out laughing...and as you might imagine, there have been different reactions to Chip's watershed decision.

Not the least of which was the reaction of Leslie's mother, Diane, who (1) is a scientist and (2) an atheist, (3) doesn't really like her son-in-law. In last week's episode entitled "Let Us Pray," Diane makes a much-dreaded-by-Chip visit.ⁱ Diane arrives and finds 9 Bibles around the apartment, and one in the bathroom! ☺ And when they sit down to talk, after chiding Chip for not being able to turn water into wine or curing leprosy, the exchange goes something like this:

DIANE: I'm just curious. How old do you think the Earth is?

CHIP: Well I'm still on board with the whole four and a half billion year train.

DIANE: And Chip do you really believe that the Earth only took 6 days to create? I mean, they've been building a Walmart behind my house and it's taken over 9 months.

CHIP: Diane we can spend the whole night having you grill me and mock my faith but I know it's hard for you to accept the fact that I found faith in something bigger than myself. It's made me a better person so maybe be a better husband to your daughter and someday it'll make me a better father to your grandchild

DIANE: Well, I believe that faith is what people turn to when they have given up on science.

CHIP: (whose reply begins kindly) "No, I still have faith in science too." (pause) "But tell me Diane what do people turn to when their mother-in-law is a real...!" [... and then Chip's wife (Leslie) awkwardly and funnily halts the conversation...before it gets out of hand!]

The show can be funny, but this recent episode – "Let us Pray" – *which wonders if God is really there, and does He actually supernaturally intervene in the natural order of things* -- draws a highlighter over what many of us both feel and have experienced. That there is a battle (a war!) going on between science and Scripture, as if the two cannot be reconciled, as if the two are enemies...and eventually one is going to lose and the other win.ⁱⁱ

So is the battle necessary? Is the battle happening because science and Scripture actually contradict each other?

But it wasn't always so...even in the so-called "modern" era of scientific inquiry. Many of the most brilliant scientists since the time of Christ have been passionate theists (i.e., God exists) and ardent supporters of what is revealed in the Scriptures.

Take, for example, the work and conviction of **Louis Pasteur** (1822-1895) – the brilliant professor of chemistry and dean of the science faculty at the University of Lille (France), also elected as an associate member of France's prestigious Académie de Médecine

- a scientist who tirelessly who successfully researched causes and developed vaccinations for diseases such as anthrax, cholera, TB and smallpox, and rabies...ⁱⁱⁱ
- who said "**Science knows no country, because knowledge belongs to humanity, and is the torch which illuminates the world.**"
- Pasteur was also a man of uncompromising faith, unashamed to insist: "**Science brings men nearer to God**" ("La science qui rapproche l'homme de Dieu").

Since this is true, why do we hear Science and Scripture so frequently pitted against each other?

Let's ask the Spirit of God to help us sort this out.

1st – (Let's observe) **The opening chapters of Scripture** (i.e., *Genesis*) present a clear call from God (himself) to **worshipful scientific discovery and development**

Genesis 1:28-30 biological multiplication... "**subdue/dominion**"
...agriculture

Genesis 1:28 (p.1 ESV) And God blessed them. And God said to them, "Be **fruitful** and **multiply** and fill the earth and **subdue** it, and **have dominion** over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth." 29 And God said, "Behold, **I have given you** every plant yielding seed that is on the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit. You shall have them for food. 30 And to every beast of the earth and to every bird of the heavens and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything that has the breath of life, I have given every green plant for food." And it was so.

Genesis 2:5,15 placed in Garden "**to work it and serve it**"

Genesis 2:5 (p.2 ESV) When no bush of the field was yet in the land and no small plant of the field had yet sprung up—for the LORD God had not caused it to rain on the land, and there was no man **to work** the ground...
Genesis 2: 15 The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to **work it** and **keep it**.

Please note the key Hebrew words you find in these passages: be **fruitful**, **multiply**, **subdue** and have **dominion** over the physical earth and the animal kingdom, **work** ("serve") the ground (so that it brings forth successfully what it is capable of) and **keep** it (i.e., *samar* tend to it as an *obedient* act before God). All this learning, developing, working, serving language is both "scientific" and is describe by the Spirit as "spiritual service to the Lord."^{iv}

Think about this! Having children, managing well the earth, discovering and developing its resources – all of it is in God's sight are acts of worship! Or consider

Genesis 2:18-20 “God brought them (animals)
to Adam to see what he would call them.”

[an “authority over” and a “observation-based designation process]

Naming in the context of Old Testament, Jewish understanding had at least two purposes. First, the one who named had authority over the one being named. Second, “naming” was to give a “designation which reflected the nature or character” of the person or thing named.

Quite frankly, the Scriptures do not present Adam as an upgraded animal who finally just happened to stand up more straightly and had a few more wits about him. No, the Spirit of God describes Adam as a brilliant, capable individual who had keen powers of observation, and creative ability to make appropriate designations within the animal kingdom.

Centuries later, inspired Psalmist would echo what Adam was doing, “Great are,” Psalm 111:2, “the works of the Lord, *studied* by all who delight in them.”

2nd (Let’s acknowledge) **All truth is revealed by God, and by definition/reality is coherent.**

Truth through **GENERAL revelation**: *what we know by interacting with our physical world through sense observation and rationale thinking*

* *all of nature points to its Creator/Designer (Romans 1:19-20)*

Truth through **SPECIAL revelation**: *what we know by interacting with God’s Word (Scripture), which makes clear/understandable who God is and His plan for His creation*

* *all of Scripture points to God’s Son, Jesus Christ*

(Luke 24:27, John 5:39, Hebrews 1:3^v)

All TRUTH is God’s TRUTH

All that which can be known through “general revelation” and “special revelation” should be and is in harmony. Truth, by its very definition, is congruent. When we accurately know something in one area, it will align with what we accurately know in another area

Man does not independently discover nor create truth.

Any and every scientist is absolutely dependent upon God for discovering/knowing anything.

(Job 38-41, cf. Job 33:4, Is 42:5, Acts 17:25)

3rd (Let’s be humble) **While some truth is conclusively understood/verified, we ALL are on a journey of discovery and reconciling what we see.**

This is true with what we have discovered and know from GENERAL REVELATION, and it is also true about what we have discovered and know from SPECIAL REVELATION. If I may put it

more simply, both in SCIENCE and in SCRIPTURE, we absolutely know SOME things, and we are still hypothesizing and theorizing about OTHER things.

Several years ago, a very bright and godly man named Mike Andrus^{vi} unpacked the issue of CERTAINTY about what we know like this:

I believe there are at least 4-5 levels of theological thought (and certainty) corresponding roughly to the categories of scientific investigation. Science has historically distinguished between...



We speak of the **LAW of gravity** because gravity partakes of the highest degree of certainty as a fact. Whether there is life on other planets is clearly a matter of speculation.

Similarly (Andrus continues) there are 4-5 levels of theological thought and certainty... "dogma" corresponding to scientific law (existence of God, the deity of Jesus Christ)... "animal immortality" is (from a Biblical standpoint) clearly a matter of speculation.^{vii}

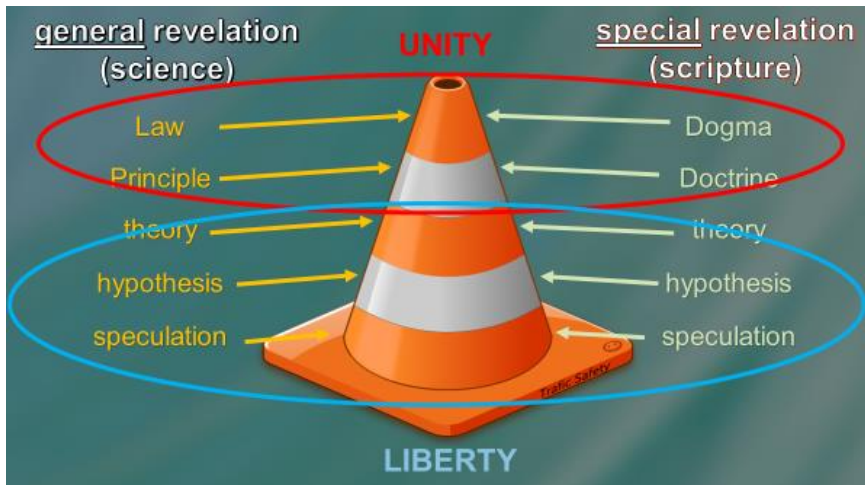
Mike Andrus' approach is important, especially for Christians. It points to a longstanding **Motto** that is used (or should be used) within Church...and also (I would content) even in the scientific community.

Motto for differences/Jesus' body

In essentials, UNITY
 Existence of Triune God, responsible for creation and revelation of truth, man's need of salvation, person/work of Christ, faith in Christ, the future of history

In non-essentials, LIBERTY
 How God brought about and developed creation, young earth/old earth, positions on hypotheses and theories that are yet to be understood/reconciled

In all things, CHARITY
 A mutual attitude of respect and listening, honoring one another as "made in God's image" persons, humbly on journeys of discovery



In her book TALKING WITH YOUR CHILDREN ABOUT GOD, Natasha Crain puts it like this:

The problem is that when most of what the public hears about science and Christianity concerns the conflicts...it's as if there's a large group of children playing nicely together, except for two kids who keep screaming at each other. Who gets all the attention? The loud ones...even though science and Christianity play beautifully together in many important ways...^{viii}

So, since all truth is God's truth...since we are under the authority of a God who urges us to study all his works...since what we know BOTH from general revelation (science) and special revelation (Scripture) brings us nearer to the God who gives us breath and life every moment, *let's humbly admit* that we are all still on a journey of discovery. Those things which we are theories or hypotheses or even speculation should not be argued for as if they are established laws and principles, dogmas and doctrines.

Here is a final truth to help us sort out this science vs. Scripture battle.

**4th – (Let's be honest) Most of the key “differences” between what Scripture describes and what “scientific inquiry” are a matter of conflicting approaches:
Naturalism (only, and there's nothing else) vs.
Supernaturalism (also, there's something beyond the natural)**

What is **Naturalism (only)**? Here are its principles

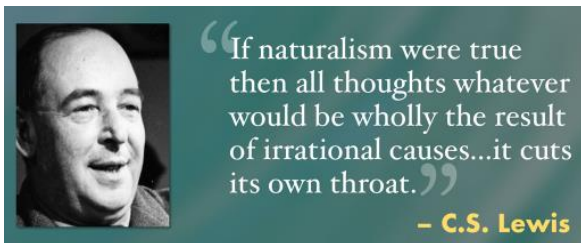
<p>Principles of Naturalism</p>	<p>Has <i>naturalism</i> actually proven it can adequately explain both the origin of all things and the development of the complexity of life?</p>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Nature alone is the entire reality. 2. Material world is the real world. 3. Physical world is a closed system. 4. Laws of nature are unchangeable. 5. Mind is subordinate to matter. 6. Senses are the gateways of knowledge. 7. Matter is the ultimate reality. 	<p>The truth is it hasn't</p>

The famous astronomer Carl Sagan, expressed it, “The cosmos is all there is, or ever was, or ever will be?” Of course, there is no way to scientifically verify his statement, but that is the essence of naturalism. In 1995, here was the official Position Statement of the American National Association of Biology Teachers:

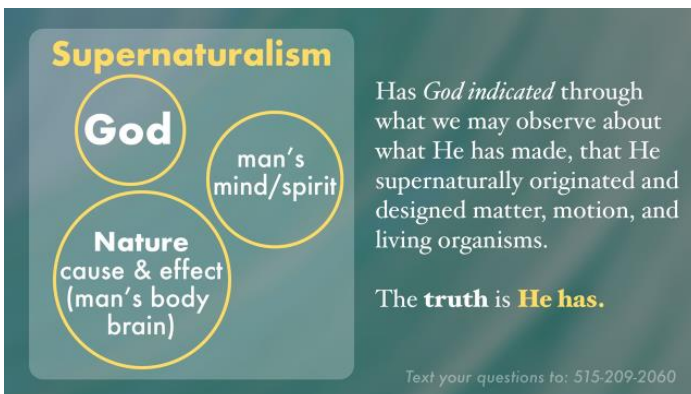
The diversity of life on earth is the outcome of evolution: an unsupervised, impersonal, unpredictable, and natural process of temporal descent with genetic modification that is affected by natural selection, chance, historical contingencies and changing environments.^{ix}

Or in the words of famous evolutionist George Gaylord Simpson, “Man is the result of a purposeless and natural process that did not have him in mind.”

Of course, the key question is: Has the evidence “naturalism” actually proven that it can adequately explain both the origin of all things and the development/complexity of life? The truth is it hasn’t.^x Sagan’s statements, Simpson’s statements are *hypothesis* at best, and border on speculation. The naturalistic explanation for all things comes up woefully short.



A rational and reasonable approach to what we see and how it came to be must include **Super-naturalism (also). Supernaturalism** recognizes a God who is by nature supernatural, and has indicated through what He has made, that He has made the natural order but has also made regular intrusions into that natural order. One cannot adequately explain all that we see in reality without a supernatural, unfathomably brilliant, creator-designer God. There’s room at the table where



rigorous science is conducted for Him.

CONCLUSION

There need NOT be a war,
nor even a battle...

**“Science brings men
nearer to God”**

- #1 We've been called to **worshipful, diligent discovery** by our Creator
- #2 The **truth** about all things, based in God's revealing, is by definition and in reality, **coherent**.
- #3 Our accurate understanding of scripture and science is **yet a journey ...let's be humble, listening**
- #4 **Naturalism** is an incomplete approach to understanding what we see. We should also embrace a **supernatural** framework/approach

Text your questions to: 515-209-2060



Philip E. Johnson

Darwin on Trial &
Defeating Darwinism
by Opening Minds

I put this simple proposition on the table for discussion:
God is our true creator.

I am not speaking of a God who is known only by faith and is invisible to reason, or who acted undetectably behind some naturalistic evolutionary process that was to all appearances mindless and purposeless. That kind of talk is about the human imagination, not the reality of God.

I speak of a God who acted openly and who left his fingerprints all over the evidence.

Text your questions to: 515-209-2060

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ⁱ In the *Living Biblically* episode "Let Us Pray," film critic Chip (Jay R. Ferguson) and his wife Leslie (Lindsey Kraft) are visited by Leslie's mother Diana. Over a glass of wine in the living room, Diana, who's a scientist, spars with Chip about the power of prayer. Based on the photo above, it looks like Diana wins an argument or two.

<https://2paragraphs.com/2018/04/who-is-leslies-scientist-mother-diana-on-living-biblically/>

ⁱⁱ "No one today can deny that there is a popular 'warfare' framing between science and religion," said the study's principal investigator, Elaine Howard Ecklund, founding director of Rice University's Religion and Public Life Program and the Herbert S. Autrey Chair in Social Sciences. "This is a war of words fueled by scientists, religious people and those in between."

ⁱⁱⁱ "First worldwide survey of religion and science: No, not all scientists are atheists" AMY MCCAIG – DECEMBER 3, 2015 [HTTP://NEWS.RICE.EDU/2015/12/03/FIRST-WORLDWIDE-SURVEY-OF-RELIGION-AND-SCIENCE-NO-NOT-ALL-SCIENTISTS-ARE-ATHEISTS/](http://news.rice.edu/2015/12/03/first-worldwide-survey-of-religion-and-science-no-not-all-scientists-are-atheists/)

^{iv} <https://www.biography.com/people/louis-pasteur-9434402>

^v Allen P. Ross, *Creation and Blessing: A Guide to the Study and Exposition of Genesis* (Baker, 1988), 111-129. Ross's explanation of the interaction between God and man in the earliest moments of human history is stunning, and incredibly helpful.

^v NOTE: Hebrews 1:3 informs us that God the Son, Jesus Christ, "is the radiance of the glory of God, and the exact imprint of God's nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of His power."

^{vi} Mike Andrus, a graduate of Dallas Seminary and Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, has been a Senior pastor in EFCA churches located in St. Louis, MO and Wichita KS.

^{vii} Michael P. Andreus, "Drawing Doctrinal Lines: Where? And How?" In EFCA Ministerial Forum

^{viii} Natasha Crain, *Talking with Your Kids about God: 30 Conversations Every Christian Parent Must Have* (Baker, 2017), 103.

^{ix} Quoted in Philip E. Johnson, *Defeating Darwinism by Opening Minds* (InterVarsity Press, 1997), 15.

^x "Why and How the ENMITY must cease" (a statement by David A. Staff) On the one hand, the observations, investigations of science will not discover all the answers to the causes of what we see in our natural world if the only approach and explanations it will accept are exclusively natural ones. The laws we've discovered, the evidences in the archeological record, and the physical, chemical processes we are observing – all of them put together – do not provide a sufficient enough nor comprehensive enough, rational explanation for all that we see. A random, chance-guided mechanism – no matter how many billions of years are added to the equation – cannot account for either the irreducible complexity required for life to have occurred on our planet, nor for the biological development of higher, more complex species and life forms.

Some of "science's conclusions" in past centuries have been wrong, and more careful and capable research has demonstrated what the Bible in fact asserted to be true

Rather than dismissing all supernatural (or intelligent design) explanations, a rigorous science discipline does well to admit and allow for the supernatural...especially when you consider that it is far more rational to acknowledge God's existence than deny it.

Conversely, the observations and investigations of those who carefully interpret the language of the Bible must also have a humble posture toward what excellent scientific inquiry is discovering. Historically – just as has been true of science – so some of the church's interpretations about the structure of our solar system, and the causes for physical phenomena on our planet and in our experience, have in the past also been wrong. Too often the authority of the church, seeking unnecessarily to guard its traditional understandings, has been out of step with the verified evidence that scientific minds have presented.