

WHY...THE CONFLICT BETWEEN THE BIBLE AND SCIENCE?

Romans 1: 19-23, Ps.104 Why? Questions for Christians

◆**Intro:** It was June 22, 1633. It took place at the Santa Marie Sopra Minerca, a Dominican convent in Rome, built on the ruins of an ancient temple dedicated to the goddess of wisdom.

Dressed in a white robe of a penitent, Galileo Galilei knelt before 10 judges to hear his sentence. His best selling book *Dialogue*, had been banned by his Church! He was being forced to recant. Galileo's words that day were thus:

◆"I, Galileo, son of the late Vincenzion Galilei...have been pronounced by the Holy Office to be vehemently suspected of heresy, that is to say, of having held ...that the sun is the center of the world and immovable and that the earth is not the center and moves...with sincere heart and unfeigned faith I abjure, curse, and detest the afore said errors and heresies."

◆Today most everyone agrees that Galileo was right all along. Mistakes like this have sometimes made people think that church and schooling do not fit together. Mark Twain once put it crassly: faith is believing what you know ain't true (utter nonsense really). My goal this morning is multiple: 1) to set your mind at ease by correcting the popular myth that there is such a conflict, 2) to challenge Christians to continue their heritage of excelling in education and learning thereby bringing glory to God. 3) to encourage anyone who wants to make decisions about spiritual things, but wants to base them on facts. 4) to encourage those who have put their faith in the God of the Bible to be ready and

WHY...THE CONFLICT BETWEEN THE BIBLE AND SCIENCE?

Romans 1: 19-23, Ps.104 Why? Questions for Christians

open to discussing all manner of questions raised, to not be afraid to engage in debate because Faith has it's reasons.

◆1. The Christian faith has historically been the cultural leader in science.

◆A. People often assume that there is incompatibility between what the Bible teaches and what science (I use this broadly as "study" or "education") teaches because there are differences of opinion between Bible-reading people and earth-reading people. People often assume that education will only lead us away from religion and vs. But this is a mistaken assumption.

◆1) As a matter of historical fact, it is Christianity's worldview (belief system) that gave us the rise of modern science. The rise of institutions of higher learning began almost completely from within the Christian faith. As examples, Yale, Harvard, Princeton -in our country, though your wouldn't guess it today, all began as seminaries, schools of biblical theology training preachers and pastors! You heard me rightly! Everywhere you find the Christian Church, you also find schooling. Several biblical teachings stand behind this phenomena:

◆a. that man ought to rule over the earth (Cultural Mandate): this has led God-followers to rightly investigate God's world.

◆"God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the

WHY...THE CONFLICT BETWEEN THE BIBLE AND SCIENCE?

Romans 1: 19-23, Ps.104 Why? Questions for Christians

sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground.”” Genesis 1:28, NIV.

◆b. that the world is orderly and can therefore be confidently investigated. Consider such texts as:

◆””As long as the earth endures, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night will never cease.”” Genesis 8:22, NIV.

◆*He set the earth on its foundations; it can never be moved. You covered it with the deep as with a garment; the waters stood above the mountains. But at your rebuke the waters fled, ... they flowed over the mountains, they went down into the valleys, to the place you assigned for them. You set a boundary they cannot cross;” Psalms 104:5-9, NIV.*

◆c. that the materials of the created world are not themselves gods, or spiritual powers as pagan religions held.

◆””And when you look up to the sky and see the sun, the moon and the stars--all the heavenly array--do not be enticed into bowing down to them and worshipping things the LORD your God has apportioned to all the nations under heaven.” Deuteronomy 4:19, NIV.

◆d. that the book of nature actually points to the true God.

◆””For since the creation of the world God’s invisible qualities--his eternal power and divine nature--have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse. For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools and exchanged the

WHY...THE CONFLICT BETWEEN THE BIBLE AND SCIENCE?

Romans 1: 19-23, Ps.104 Why? Questions for Christians

glory of the immortal God for images made to look like mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles.” Romans 1:20-23, NIV.

- ◆2) As a consequence of the Christian worldview, it follows that many of the greatest scientific minds of history were Christian people! Copernicus, who first introduced the idea of a heliocentric solar system said, “the universe has been wrought for us by a supremely good and orderly creator.” Johannes Kepler, who showed the planetary orbits to be ellipses and not perfect circles said, “O God, I am thinking your thoughts after you.” Isaac Newton, famous for understanding gravitational laws and motion said, “no sciences are better attested than the religion of the Bible.” Gregor Mendel, called the father of genetics, was a Christian clergyman. I could go on: Sir Frances Bacon, George Washington Carver, Samuel Coleridge, Samuel Morse, Blaise Pascal, Louis Pasteur...
- ◆Even in our own day! Paul Davis who wrote a book *The Mind of God*, says it was actually his study of physics that led him to belief in God. The acclaimed mathematician-physicist from Cambridge University, John Olkinghorne, said that science and faith are “intellectual cousins under the same skin.”
- ◆**B.** The Christian approach has been to assume that Nature and Scripture do not contradict each other because God is the author of both books! Ps.19 speaks of both nature (v1-6) and scripture

WHY...THE CONFLICT BETWEEN THE BIBLE AND SCIENCE?

Romans 1: 19-23, Ps.104 Why? Questions for Christians

(v7-11) as revealing God. So where do the seeming conflicts between science and the Bible come from? Science is a human attempt to interpret and understand the natural world. Theology is the human attempt to interpret and understand the God's revelation. Conflicts can arise because our human understanding of one or both the book of Nature and the book of Scripture may be in error. For example,

- ◆1) Some deny the existence of dinosaurs because we don't find them mentioned in the Bible, though we can go look at their bones still lying on the ground in Colorado! This would be a misreading of the Bible since it is not a catalogue of animal life, and there are many species of birds, or fish, or mammals that the Bible does not mention yet we see them!
- ◆2) In Galileo's day, some felt that the earth must be the center of the solar system. This was a misreading of science, based on the greek scientist Ptolemy's observations around 200 AD., long before the telescope was invented. It was also a misreading of the Bible, which said things like
 - ◆"the earth cannot be moved" (Ps.93:1), and the sun "rises at one end of the heavens and makes it's circuit to the other." (Ps. 19:6)
- ◆If you read it literally then you would think the sun is moving around the earth. But this is not a scientific statement. It is merely a common way of speaking that all our meteorologists still use: They say, "the sun will rise at

WHY...THE CONFLICT BETWEEN THE BIBLE AND SCIENCE?

Romans 1: 19-23, Ps.104 Why? Questions for Christians

6:24 tomorrow” and we don’t call them up and accuse them of being behind the times!

◆3) Furthermore, it is true that in some ages folks considered the earth to be flat. Even some Bible readers accepted the theory. Still Greek thinkers had posited a round earth already 300BC. And the Book of Isaiah, written around 600BC observes that same thing!

◆“He sits enthroned above the circle of the earth...”

Isaiah 40:22, NIV.

◆Our lesson? Be very cautious about declaring that the Bible and scientific knowledge are not compatible, and go out there and investigate them both!

◆**2. Faith and reason are used in both science, and in the Christian Faith!** Both the believer and the scientist operate using facts and faith assumptions. So lets not be too arrogant about one having just facts and the other just faith.

◆**A.** Christianity requires facts and truths just like science. Paul, one of the NT writers, says himself that if our faith isn’t based on historical fact, we are in fact the most miserable of people.

(1Cor.15:13-19) When defending his faith to King Agrippa, he said, ““I am not insane, most excellent Festus,” Paul replied.

“What I am saying is true and reasonable.” Acts 26:25, NIV.

◆What I want you to notice in this historical account of Paul’s testimony before the Jewish king, is he was not asking Herod/ Agrippa to believe something that wasn’t based on established

WHY...THE CONFLICT BETWEEN THE BIBLE AND SCIENCE?

Romans 1: 19-23, Ps.104 Why? Questions for Christians

fact that everyone in town had seen! There is nothing about Christianity that requires us to check our minds at the door. If it were not reasonable we would not believe it for all. This is a basic Christian principle that assumes the world is reasonable, because the God who made it has shown himself to be orderly. Yes faith is involved, but faith has it's reasons.

◆**B.** The opposite is also true: science requires faith and world views just like religion.

◆1) By definition, science is only the most recent consensus. It is our best attempt to understand the evidence.

Aristotle's views were held up as the truth for 1500 years, until Copernicus came along and then the "scientific" truth as abandoned.

◆2) Science is also by definition a description of what we observe, not a prescription of what can be. Science cannot say that miracles don't happen. It can only say what we usually see. So it is a faith statement for a scientist to declare that Jesus didn't turn water into wine. When the famous philosopher David Hume in the 18th century ruled out the possibility of miracles because they violate the natural laws, he was making a faith-statement.

◆Science takes it by faith that so called laws are the same on every square foot of the world. It's a good assumption but it requires faith based on a christian view of a usually very consistent universe. Pagan religions did not think of

WHY...THE CONFLICT BETWEEN THE BIBLE AND SCIENCE?

Romans 1: 19-23, Ps.104 Why? Questions for Christians

the universe as consistent, one reason scientific learning did not arise in pagan nations. We make the very Christian assumption that gravity is the same in Mongolia as it is in Wyoming. But no one has measured gravity in every spot on the face of the earth. So we take it on faith, just as we take it on faith that there really was a George Washington, while there is not a person alive who has ever seen him!

Even the science of **history** while based on good reasons, also exercises faith.

◆Ily: Many years ago a bishop on the east coast paid a visit to a small, midwestern religious college. He stayed at the home of the president who also served as professor of physics and chemistry. After dinner the bishop declared that the end of the world couldn't be far off because just about everything about nature had been discovered and all inventions conceived.

◆The young president politely disagreed. When challenged to name just one discovery yet to come, he replied that certainly within 50 years men would be able to fly.

◆“Nonsense,” sputtered the bishop, “only angels were meant to fly.” That incredulous bishop's name was Bishop Wright. He had two boys back home named Orville and Wilbur.

◆(application) Just as people of faith had no right to say man could never fly, - people of science have no right to say, for example, that God could not have created a young but

WHY...THE CONFLICT BETWEEN THE BIBLE AND SCIENCE?

Romans 1: 19-23, Ps.104 Why? Questions for Christians

old-looking earth. We can say, the evidence looks this way or that way. Or the scripture looks like it says this or that.

◆ I've heard Christians say "I don't care to talk about evolution, or physics. I'm only interested in the Bible." But that is an unbiblical approach! The Christian is not free to cast aside discussions of stars, or genetics. As we've seen Biblical theology actually throws us into the study of all other disciplines! So young people, college students, go on out there and do responsible study of both the Word and the World. It is our Christian obligation! As Galileo put it, "I do not feel obliged to believe that the same God who has endowed us with senses, reason, and intellect has intended us to forgo their use."

◆ **Conclusion:** Not so many years ago, 1992 to be exact, the Catholic Church withdrew its condemnation of Galileo. Already in 1822 his book *Dialogue* was taken off the list of banned material. In 1891 the Roman Catholic Church actually founded the Vatican Observatory and began funding cutting-edge astronomical research! Pope John Paul 2 wrote, "Science can purify religion from error and superstition; religion can purify science from idolatry and false absolutes. Each can draw the other into a wider world, a world in which both can flourish."

◆ The Christian faith and scientific learning are not enemies at all. However they both have significant places. The Bible is not a medical manual, or even a biology book. And science cannot tell

WHY...THE CONFLICT BETWEEN THE BIBLE AND SCIENCE?

Romans 1: 19-23, Ps.104 Why? Questions for Christians

us about meaning, or morality, or purpose or destiny. Maybe you or a friend are **wondering** about the veracity of the Christian Faith. You want facts. Maybe you are already a believer but you don't know how to answer people's questions about your faith. Well, dig in! Ask. Search. Faith has its reasons. But let me summarize the bottom line: The essence of biblical revelation: namely the empirical fact that God came to this earth in time, in history, in the person of his Son Jesus, to pay a spiritual price of death, that human creatures both boys and girls, men and women, might live beyond this material existence, by having their spiritual sins forgiven. This supernatural message, also grounded in historical reality (the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, which we will get to soon). -is also the very fulcrum of our existence, and the hope of eternity.

WHY...THE CONFLICT BETWEEN THE BIBLE AND SCIENCE?

Romans 1: 19-23, Ps.104 Why? Questions for Christians

“The day is yours, and yours also the night; you established the sun and moon. It was you who set all the boundaries of the earth; you made both summer and winter.” Psalms 74:16, 17, NIV.

“Who shut up the sea behind doors when it burst forth from the womb, when I made the clouds its garment and wrapped it in thick darkness, when I fixed limits for it and set its doors and bars in place, when I said, ‘This far you may come and no farther; here is where your proud waves halt’? “Have you ever given orders to the morning, or shown the dawn its place, that it might take the earth by the edges and shake the wicked out of it? The earth takes shape like clay under a seal; its features stand out like those of a garment.” Job 38:8-14, NIV.

“The moon marks off the seasons, and the sun knows when to go down. You bring darkness, it becomes night, and all the beasts of the forest prowl. The lions roar for their prey and seek their food from God. The sun rises, and they steal away; they return and lie down in their dens. Then man goes out to his work, to his labour until evening. How many are your works, O LORD! In wisdom you made them all; the earth is full of your creatures.” Psalms 104:19-24, NIV.