

A Perspective on Science and the Gospel

from the Potomac Baptist Church Elders

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From a lay perspective, science is a word that has come to be endowed with persuasive power in our culture in our time. If someone says, “I am science,” it is for purposes of establishing his credentials. To be told in whatever fashion that science says ‘X’ is to be told effectively that we ought to believe ‘X’. The culture today has allotted the word ‘science’ to have a sense of authority. As followers of Jesus, (which would include many well-known and capable scientists,) we acknowledge God’s ultimate reality as presented in the gospel and embodied in Jesus himself. How might this Truth enlighten our approach to the science of our time?

Science is a method for understanding and describing the content and behavior of the physical universe. Science is not reality, but provides a description of aspects of reality. As such, that description has over the years enabled technological advances that have allowed us to live safer, healthier and more comfortable lives. It has also allowed us simply to marvel at the design, complexity and sheer beauty of God’s creation at scales unimaginably large and small compared to those of our day-to-day lives. The atom, the living cell, the stars, the Milky Way and the largest galactic superclusters, all point to the glory of God. It is the realm of the sciences that has relieved physical suffering, connected us globally both physically and electronically, enabled some to travel beyond the confines of the Earth, and provided countless other benefits through its discoveries.

While science relies on an honest approach to achieve valid results that faithfully describe reality, science itself does not come packaged with its own morality. Valid science can create weapons that in immoral hands can destroy innocent lives, just as it can create medicines to save lives. Our agenda-driven culture today is capable of manipulating the realm of science for its own ends, sometimes clouding the truth that ought to be communicated. **Very briefly, then,** what ought we as followers of Christ keep in mind as we engage with a world increasingly dependent on science for its decisions that may have broad societal implications?

The Gospel of Jesus Christ affirms a number of truths that would both encourage and guide one’s participation in science. First, God created the world and all that is

in it (Genesis 1:1, Psalm 19:1). He sustains the world he created (Colossians 1:17). Therefore, the study of the natural world is the study of God's rational, ordered, specially designed creation. This belief in a fixed and ordered world is actually the logical basis for scientific inquiry. If everything is random and chaotic, then science is pointless. Secondly, man was created in God's image (Genesis 1:27) and therefore has the ability to observe, reason and classify aspects of the natural world. God's command to "subdue the earth" (Genesis 1:26) requires understanding how things work (the essence of science). In a sense, then, science stands firmly on a Biblical foundation, but the work of science is not what one would call a theological endeavor.¹

Science is a way to know stuff, but it is not the only valid way to know stuff. Revelation and intuition, for example, are other possible ways, but today's western culture bends toward the sensory observation and logical reasoning inherent in science and its experimental methods.² Some would go so far as to say that, other than logic or mathematics, only the method of modern science is capable of seeking knowledge. However, such an assertion itself is not established by modern science, math or logic. Thus, is the assertion true?³ In fact, other disciplines continue to thrive.⁴ (Prov 1:7, Prov 9:10)

It is true that science is very much an evidence-based inquiry. From the facts in evidence, human reason is applied to develop hypotheses and theories based on the evidence. It is at this step, however, that the worldviews and presuppositions of the investigators may play a role in the conclusions that they reach. An investigator that believes no God exists now or ever and an investigator who believes the biblical description of God in His word to us may reach different conclusions about the same evidence, depending on the investigation underway. This is not a collision of science versus religion, but rather clash of biblical and naturalistic worldviews.

Science done well is a gift from God, the Giver of all good things, who does not change and continues to sustain the world. His charge to mankind to have dominion and subdue the earth therefore must include understanding the created natural world and working with it. Although fallible in our fallen state, we are created in God's image with the ability to think, to reason, to learn and to love, albeit imperfectly. Using human intellect and motivation in the realm of the sciences is certainly biblical and should cause us to be grateful for the benefits

science has provided, while noting that science is not an idol to be worshiped, (nor would it claim to be.) As Isaiah tells us, “For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways and My thoughts higher than your thoughts.” (Is 55:9) Science, in providing a sense of how high the heavens are, helps drive home the glory and majesty of the thoughts and ways of God. May it always be so.

¹ S. Joshua Swamidass notes the following about theologically motivated questions: “A possible objection arises from a commitment to keep science secular, free from religious agendas. In science, we do not take religious claims as unquestioned facts. Still, the spirit of science is curiosity. We take questions seriously. We study them rigorously and answer them honestly. Theological concerns should never dictate scientific conclusions. At the same time, there is not good reason to ignore questions from theology.” S. Joshua Swamidass, The Genealogical Adam and Eve, IVP Academic, 2019, p 27.

² “The earliest of the pre-Socratics were investigating and seeking to understand natural phenomena; among them were men who used mathematical notions for this purpose. Even experimentation is not new; But faith in the experiment as an exclusive method is a modern manifestation. The experimental method has won such clear and convincing victories that it is now regarded in some quarters not only as the sole method of building up scientific knowledge, but also as the sole method of obtaining knowledge of any kind.” Robert M. Hutchins, The Great Conversation, The Great Books of the Western World, Vol1, p 32

³ “Thus we are often told that any question that is not answerable by the empirical methods of science is not really answerable at all, or at least not by significant and verifiable statements “Consider, for example, statements about God’s existence or the immortality of the soul. These are answers to questions that cannot be answered—one way or the other—by the experimental method. . . . If modern man, accepting the view that he can claim to know only what can be demonstrated by experiment or verified by empirical research, still wishes to believe in these things, he must acknowledge that he does so by religious faith or by the exercise of his will to believe. . . .” Robert M. Hutchins, The Great Conversation, The Great Books of the Western World, Vol1, p 32

⁴ “Because of experimental science we now know a very large number of things about the natural world of which our predecessors were ignorant. In this set of books [The Great Books] we can observe the birth of science, applaud the development of the experimental technique, and celebrate the triumphs it has won. But, we can also note the limitations of the method and mourn the errors that its misapplication has caused. We can distinguish the outlines of those great persistent problems that the method of experimental natural science may never solve and find the clues to their solutions offered by other disciplines and other methods.” Robert M. Hutchins, The Great Conversation, The Great Books of the Western World, Vol1, p 40