

“The Grand Mosaic”

Psalm 19

Series: Wrestling with God Week 2. Does Science Disprove Faith?

The Rev. Dr. Douglas C. Hoggund

The Woodside Church

July 14, 2019

From the moment we enter school, we begin to learn about the wonders of science. From the moment we enter Sunday school, we discover the glories of faith. As we go and grow, through the teen years and beyond, many feel they are living in two different worlds which never intersect nor speak to each other. At times it can even feel like we have a foot on each side of a fault line and the chasm is widening. Science and faith can become so far apart you may feel forced to choose one side or the other.

Ever since the scientific revolution in the 17th century, we've lived with the popular belief that science and faith are fighting one another, that biology and the Bible oppose each other, that one must choose between logical, rational exploration and irrational, wishful belief. History records many famous debates: from the heresy trials of Galileo before the Inquisition, to the face-off between Bishop Wilberforce and Thomas Huxley over Darwin's theory of evolution, the Scopes Monkey trial between Clarence Darrow and William Jennings Bryant, down to court cases over the teaching of Intelligent Design in schools. Like great rams knocking heads, Science and Faith seem perpetually locked in a battle. Yet must there be a debate? Isn't this the result of a mutual misunderstanding on both parts?

Our second question in The Wrestling with God series is “Does Science Disprove Faith?” I've had a personal interest in the interface between Science and Faith since college. Yet my studies are on the Faith side. So, for today, I asked Scott Wills, who holds a Ph.D. in Analytical Chemistry to share how he views the connection between Science and Faith.

I'm what is known as an analytical chemist. We invent and use techniques which measure and understand the atom, molecules, and structure that make up the products we are interested in. For example if I were to try to understand this ceramic tile with the tools and instruments in my lab, I could measure the weight and size of the tile, I could figure out what the ceramic is made of, I could analyze the white layer of paint on top and see what that's made of. But one thing that all the instruments in my lab can't prove is that this tile is actually part of an enormous mosaic. It can't tell me what pictures these tiles form, what patterns they form. They can't tell me who created the mosaic or how I'm supposed to respond to that creation.

Science isn't really set up to answer those questions. The place to get those answers is by studying the Bible. Science has given us great tools for studying God's creation. But it is faith which gives me the tools for understanding the Creator, and how we are supposed to relate to Him and to each another.

Scott does a brilliant job of clearing up the great misunderstanding between Science and Faith. A popular misconception is that Science deals with rational facts and Faith is simply wishful fantasy. Scott points out that these are two different ways to know and discover truth. They study different subjects, they focus on different questions, and they use different tools. What we call Science examines the natural world, it uses laboratories and instruments to test and analyze the natural world. Faith examines the supernatural world, it uses spiritual disciplines such as Scripture, prayer, worship, community and service to know and understand God and His will. The Creation is a grand mosaic and we can use all the tools Science has to offer to analyze every tile in it. Yet why this grand mosaic is here at all, what does it mean and what is our purpose in it requires the tools of faith.

Let me give you another example for a different scientific discipline: Archaeology. Some early archaeologists tried to prove the Bible to be true. Others used archaeology to prove the Bible had errors. Now archaeologists don't do either. They simply want to understand the past. Last week, Paul Stringer and I joined an excavation team working at the spot where the Jordan River enters the Sea of Galilee in Israel. We used lots of tools – big picks, hand held picks, trowels, brushes, dental tools, 3D imagining, drones, ground penetrating radar – well not me – they didn't let me touch those things. Those tools uncovered secrets buried below.

The big question at our dig: is this the real town of Bethsaida mentioned seven times in the Bible (Matthew 11:21; Mark 6:45; Mark 8:22; Luke 9:10; Luke 10:13; John 1:44; John 12:21)? There is a rival spot which claims it is the true Bethsaida. According to the Bible it's the birthplace of Peter, Andrew and Philip, the village where Jesus healed a blind man, the countryside where He fed the 5,000 and the destination He was headed when He walked on water. One piece of evidence we sought was a Byzantine church which commemorates the home of Peter and Andrew. By the end of the week, we did find a mosaic floor from a Byzantine church. We also dug up houses, coins, fishing weights and lots of pottery from Jesus' time – the First Century. It was hot, dusty, sweaty and thrilling. The dig was like a mission trip with endless buckets of dirt. Yet instead of building up a church, we were digging up a church. The science of archaeology is taking us one step closer to locating and understanding a town where Jesus definitely preached, taught, and healed. But archaeology has its limits. It cannot tell us if Jesus opened blind eyes, fed five thousand or walked on water, if He is the Messiah, the Savior, the Lord. That's where we use the tools of Faith.

Obviously, both Science and Faith are extremely complex. Though he did not believe in a personal God, Einstein once said, "Science without religion is lame and religion without science is blind." We need to move beyond debate.

Dr. J. Wentzel van Huyssteen of Princeton Seminary says that instead of a debate or duel, Science and Faith can come together in a **Duet**. In a duet, two voices or instruments create different lines of music in harmony with one another. Science and Faith are two ways to search for Truth which need not compete with each other. In fact, when viewed as a duet instead of a duel they can, together, give us a richer deeper understanding of Truth.

John Polkinghorne is a living duet. In his first career, Polkinghorne worked for 25 years on particle physics at Cambridge University where he was on the team that discovered quarks –

the tiniest particles which make up the atom. He was inducted into the Royal Society. Then, in 1977, he “turned his collar around” and became an ordained priest in the Anglican Church. His desire is to demonstrate how science and religion can fit together.

Underlying all...is the issue of truth. Science doesn't tell us all the truth but it certainly tells us some of the truth. I think our religious insights tell us a deeper, more important truth. And those of us who are seeking to serve the God of truth don't need to fear truth from whatever source it comes.

I very much believe in the unity of knowledge and truth...I want to hold together my scientific insights and my religious beliefs.

[When I] became an Anglican priest and began to think about theology in a serious way my life changed in all sorts of ways...but *not* in relation to the search for truth. “Is it truth?” that's the vital question.¹

So how do Faith and Science begin to play their duet?

First, **Faith Encourages Us to Pursue Science.** Long ago, King David wrote:

The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands. Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they display knowledge. There is no speech or language where their voice is not heard. Their voice goes out into all the earth, their words to the ends of the world. Psalm 19:1-4.

Faith tells us to study the stars, scale the mountains, dive into the deep, delve into the atom because there we will witness God's hand. Creation is speaking to us. The Universe is praising its Maker. Why did the scientific revolution arise in Christian Europe? Believers studied the creation in order to understand the mind of God. The great scientists we revere: Copernicus, Boyle, Mendel, Kepler, Faraday and Isaac Newton were all Christians. Even Galileo, considered by many to be the father of modern science and often pictured as battling a repressive Church, was in fact a devout Catholic. In 1613 he wrote in a letter, “the holy Bible and the phenomena of nature proceed alike from the divine Word”² More recently physicist Arno Penzias, who won the Nobel Prize in physics for confirming the Big Bang, said,

The best data we have (concerning the origin of the universe) are exactly what I would have predicted, had I nothing to go on but the five books of Moses, the Psalms and the Bible as a whole.

So as you study physics, biology or chemistry, look for the hand of God and you will start to understand how your Creator thinks.

¹ Unedited Interview with John Polkinghorne, *Speaking of Faith*, American Public Radio.

http://download.publicradio.org/podcast/speakingoffaith/20080529_quarks_uc-polkinghorne.mp3?_kip_ipx=1023036855-1270844443

² Letter from Galileo to Castelli in 1613, quoted in Ian Barbour, *Issue in Science and Religion* (Harper Torchbooks, New York: 1971) p. 30.

Instead of competing, **Faith and Science Complement Each Other**. Psalm 19 begins by staring in wonder at the starry skies. Then it suddenly shifts from God's world to God's Word.

The law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul. The statutes of the LORD are trustworthy, making wise the simple. The precepts of the LORD are right, giving joy to the heart. The commands of the LORD are radiant, giving light to the eyes. The fear of the LORD is pure, enduring forever. The ordinances of the LORD are sure and altogether righteous. Psalm 19:7-9.

Why this change? David is telling us a truth Galileo discovered centuries later: There are two big books, the book of nature and the book of super nature, the Bible. By studying the book of nature, science helps us learn some of God's work. But there is a limit to what it can tell us. It can tell us *how* plants and planets, animals and atoms are put together and how they work. It cannot tell us *why* we are here. Science is unable to explain our purpose or how we should act. It can unleash the power God put into creation but it cannot tell us how to use it responsibly. Science explains *how*. Faith reveals *why*. That is not something we can discover on our own. It must be revealed to us by our Creator. God does this first through Jesus Christ and second through the Word and the Holy Spirit. David describes God's Word as a treasure.

They are more precious than gold, than much pure gold; they are sweeter than honey, than honey from the comb. By them is your servant warned; in keeping them there is great reward. Psalm 19:10-11.

The Bible gives us both warning and reward. It keeps us on the right path. John Polkinghorne says there is a time when testing must give way to trusting. So Science tells us about life and Faith tells the way to live. We need both. Even the late Stephen Hawking, who was an atheist, confessed his brilliant brain reached a limit here.

Although science may solve the problem of how the universe began, it cannot answer the question: why does the universe bother to exist? I don't know the answer to that. But God does. He tells us the answer in His Word. I find many Christians have a very sophisticated knowledge of science and technology but their knowledge about Scripture and theology is still fuzzy and foggy. Perhaps this is due to the fact their understanding of their faith is still back in Sunday School. Let me encourage you to sharpen your knowledge of faith by reading Scripture daily and by getting into a Growth Group. All around me I see adults deepening their faith. It's wonderful to see the growth.

Third, **Faith and Science Both Need Humility**. David ends his Psalm,

Who can discern his errors? Forgive my hidden faults. Keep your servant also from willful sins; may they not rule over me. Then will I be blameless, innocent of great transgression. May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be pleasing in your sight, O LORD, my Rock and my Redeemer. Psalm 19:12-14

Sometimes David knowingly gave into temptation. At other moments his faults were hidden from him. Yet either way, the powerful King of Israel humbly confessed his sins to the Lord, His Rock and His Redeemer. During the four hundred year conflict between Faith and Science there has been a great need for humility. Galileo was not criticizing the Bible. Yet the Church became defensive and went on the offensive instead of listening to Galileo. In that sad moment, Christians used power instead of humility. On the other hand some scientists loudly proclaim that Faith is a myth, the Bible a bunch of legends and Christianity is about to disappear. When Science throws off humility it begins to play god. When Science plays god it can damage the environment and unleash a holocaust beyond its control.

God can be known by you no matter what your IQ. John Polkinghorne concludes, If working in science teaches you anything, it is that the physical world is surprising. Now if the physical world surprises us it wouldn't be very odd really if God also turned out to be rather surprising.

I'm a Christian and the heart of Christian belief is that God – the mysterious, invisible God – has acted to make God's nature known in the clearest possible terms by actually living the life of a human being: Jesus Christ.

That's an extraordinary, exciting idea and I happen to believe a true idea.

Stephanie Hermesmeier, one of Directors of Child Discipleship, also holds a Ph.D. in Electrical Engineering. This is what she has to say:

I've never had any problem with science and faith co-existing... although many of my closest friends during my years as an engineer gave up on religion and became proud atheists. Why did I continue to grow in my faith while they walked away? We all received the same engineering education and we grew up in the same strong Christian culture.

I believe it comes down to control... do you believe is God in control or is nature in control? Do we put our faith in what we cannot see and measure versus what we can?

I worked as an electrical engineer which is a field that requires A LOT of abstract thinking. We cannot see electromagnetic fields or electrons moving but we have total faith that when we plug in our phones, they are going to charge up. We don't see electricity but we know it's there and we rely on it for practically every aspect of our lives.

Electricity has been around since the creation of the universe but we only opened our eyes to it and harnessed its power in recent centuries. And the way it was done was not by sitting at a desk and coming up with brilliant mathematical equations on electricity. It was done by experimentation... trial and error... thinking of an idea and testing it out... mapping out the effects of electricity and drawing conclusions We owe SO much of this to Michael Faraday he was a man of great faith.

God is invisible to us as well but we can see the effects He has on the lives of those who believe in Him. But our lives with God can feel a lot like trial and error sometimes... we pray and hope something will work out, but God has other plans. Sometimes things just seem to fall into place But, just like in the middle of an experiment, if we take what we learned, reflect on God's word, pray and test out a new hypothesis, we can find our way in life. Living a life with God is the greatest and most worthwhile experiment of all.