

Is there a Conflict between Faith and Science?

Romans 1:16-25 HCSB For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is God's power for salvation to everyone who believes, first to the Jew, and also to the Greek. (17) For in it God's righteousness is revealed from faith to faith, just as it is written: **The righteous will live by faith.** (18) For God's wrath is revealed from heaven against all godlessness and unrighteousness of people who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth, (19) since what can be known about God is evident among them, because God has shown it to them. (20) From the creation of the world His invisible attributes, that is, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what He has made. As a result, people are without excuse. (21) For though they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God or show gratitude. Instead, their thinking became nonsense, and their senseless minds were darkened. (22) Claiming to be wise, they became fools (23) and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man, birds, four-footed animals, and reptiles. (24) Therefore God delivered them over in the cravings of their hearts to sexual impurity, so that their bodies were degraded among themselves. (25) They exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served something created instead of the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen.

Introduction:

How do you explain miracles to a scientist? How do you explain science to a Christian? Can it be done, and is there a conflict between the two? How do we use objective critical reasoning and still believe in things like the parting of the Red Sea, a virgin giving birth to a child, shriveled hands and blind eyes being restored, a man walking on water, a dead person emerging from the grave?

ILL: For William Lane Craig, a Ph. D. who has written for the Journal of the American Scientific Affiliation and other scholarly publications, the virgin birth was the main sticking point in keeping him from the Christian faith. He said,

"When the Christian message was first shared with me as a teenager, I had already studied biology. I knew that for the virgin birth to be true, a Y chromosome had to be created out of nothing in Mary's ovum, because Mary didn't possess the genetic material to produce a male child. To me, this was utterly fantastic. It just didn't make sense." But as he continued to study the life of Christ and his teachings, he became overwhelmed by the attraction of Christ's life. He says, *"I guess the authenticity of the person of Jesus and the truth of his message were so powerful that they simply overwhelmed any residual doubts that I had."* When he was asked how he got past this problem, he said, *"Well, I sort of put that issue aside and became a Christian anyway, even though I didn't really believe in the virgin birth. But then, after becoming a Christian, it occurred to me that if I really do believe in a God who created the universe, then for him to create a Y chromosome would be child's play!"*

The same can be said for the resurrection. If God can create life out of nothing, raising someone from the dead would not be a problem.

Many thinking people over the years have struggled with the supernatural events of the Bible. It seemed impossible to them that there could be reconciliation between faith and objective rational thought. In an attempt to respond to that I want to bring up three points for people to consider who are seriously searching for truth.

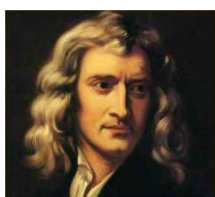
I. Christianity largely birthed modern science.

The first is this: The Christian faith birthed modern science. Many people think that Christianity and science have been enemies from the beginning, a fact that is simply untrue. The truth is that the earliest scientists were almost all Christians, and the Christian faith is what made scientific investigation possible. The reason for that is that in the not too distant past, and even in many places today, people tended to worship nature. If a tree is sacred you dare not take the tree apart just to study the tree. The ancient religions believed in something we call Pantheism — the belief

that God is not only in everything, everything is God. This belief has been revived in our culture, and was popularized by the Walt Disney movie Pocahontas. We hear this idea as many people today talk about the earth as a living being. Pantheism hindered scientific research because it considered the natural world objects for worship rather than objects to study.

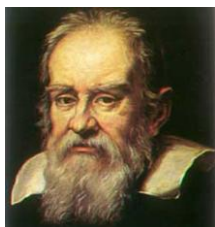
The ancient Greeks went the other direction and equated the material world with evil and disorder. They believed it was futile to try to make sense of it. But the early Christians began to introduce a new thought into the minds of people. They taught that nature is good, but it is not a god. It has design because it was created by an intelligent Being. There is intelligence and order behind the universe. The universe is friendly, not hostile and capricious. Nature is not sacred, but is to be used as a gift from a good and loving God. The natural world is not God, or the same as God, it is his creation and is separate from him. He is not the “soul” of nature. In effect, these Christians “de-deified” nature; that is, they taught that nature was not sacred in itself and could be studied without fear. The laws of nature were predictable because they were the laws of a dependable and orderly God.

The earliest scientists were people of profound faith. People like Copernicus, Galileo, Isaac Newton, Kepler and many others were men of deep personal faith and conviction.



Isaac Newton¹ wrote that the world arose from “the perfectly free will of God,” and that we must investigate the world by “observations and experiments.”

Copernicus² was convinced that the world, which the God he loved had made, was mathematically precise, and before telescopes were even invented he theorized that the planets orbited around the sun rather than the earth, because it fit the mathematical formulas better.



Galileo, who held to the theory of Copernicus, was called a heretic by the church of his day, but he claimed that even though his work contradicted popular beliefs of the time, which had been influenced by Greek philosophy, it did not contradict a proper understanding of the Bible. Galileo was a man of deep faith who believed he was revealing the laws of God in his work.

These great men of faith paved the way for modern scientific thinking. They understood that at the center of the universe is a divine Intelligence. Life is not random and chaotic, as the world of that time believed, it is rational and ordered. The world is not subject to the whims of thousands of gods, there is One God who is good. To know him is to know truth. There is design and purpose built into the universe.

II. Miracles do not necessarily contradict natural law.

The second thing that people in search of truth need to consider is: Miracles are not things done against natural law, but according to natural law. It's a law of nature that oxygen and potassium combust when they're combined, but I have oxygen and potassium in my body, and yet I'm not bursting into flames. Does that mean it's a miracle and I'm violating the laws of nature? No, because the law merely states what happens under idealized conditions, assuming no other factors are interfering. In this case, however, there are other factors interfering with the combustion, and so it doesn't take place. That's not a violation of the law.

If you drop an object, it will fall to the earth. But if an apple falls from a tree and you reach out to catch it before it hits the ground, you're not violating or negating the law of gravity; you're merely intervening. Catching the apple doesn't overturn the law of gravity or require the formulation of a new law. It's merely the intervention of a person with free will who overrides the natural causes operative in that particular circumstance. And that, essentially, is what God does when he causes a miracle to occur.

¹ http://www.myclassicyrics.com/artist_biographies/Isaac_Newton_Biography.htm

² <http://ircamera.as.arizona.edu/NatSci102/NatSci102/images/copernicus3.jpg>

Miracles, or supernatural acts as we understand them, are not really miracles in the sense that God sets aside natural law, it is God intervening in natural law in a way with which we are not familiar. So as science advances and offers natural explanations of how some of the miracles were done, we would affirm that God may well have done it that way. It will not explain away the miracle, but offer an understanding of how God used his own laws to perform his will. To us it seemed like a miracle, but to him it was only doing what God in his wisdom can do. God did not create the laws of nature only to break them at will, but he may intervene in some way that we are unfamiliar with at this time. The laws of science are God's laws, observed, discovered, studied, written down, and verifiable, because an all-knowing God created the world and the laws which govern it.

III. To not believe in even the POSSIBILITY of God is unscientific.

The third thing that the person in quest for truth needs to consider is this: To close the door to the possibility of the existence of God goes against the very fabric of scientific inquiry. Some scientists are completely closed to the idea of even considering the existence of God. But if you won't honestly explore the evidence and seal off that option, you are going against the very principles of objective scientific investigation.

ILL: Cuckoo Clock - I love cuckoo clocks. I find their intricate works and fine carvings fascinating. What if I refused to believe that such a clock was made by a clock maker, but instead was a rather curious assortment of parts that just happened to come together? I could take it apart and investigate how it works. I could weigh the weights and measure the chains. I could open the back and see the gears and mechanisms that make it work. I could investigate the carving on the clock's face and try to figure out how it took on the shape of leaves and birds by itself. I could see the little cuckoo bird come out on the hour and half-hour and wonder why it evolved that way and chose over time to cuckoo at those particular times. I could observe the spacing of the Roman numerals on the front and consider how they happened to be at exactly the same distance from each other and how they got aligned in a perfect circle. I could study the clock completely and in great depth, so that I could understand how it worked. But if I was never willing to consider the fact that the clock was made by someone, I would be missing a very important piece of information, and I would be making many assumptions that would not be true — all because my mind was closed to the possibility of a clock maker. I would observe the design while refusing to consider the possibility of a designer. I would study the mechanics of the clock and miss its purpose. If I approached my clock like that would I be a scientist or a fool?

ILL: Patrick Glynn, a Harvard-educated scholar, abandoned his atheism to become a Christian because of his study of the intricate balance of the universe. For him, it all pointed to an Intelligence — a magnificent intelligence — the magnitude of which we cannot even imagine. This Intelligence has designed the world in infinite and exquisite detail. Glynn wrote:

"Today, the concrete data point strongly in the direction of the God hypothesis. . . . Those who wish to oppose it have no testable theory to marshal, only speculations about unseen universes spun from fertile scientific imagination. . . . Ironically, the picture of the universe bequeathed to us by the most advanced twentieth-century science is closer in spirit to the vision presented in the Book of Genesis than anything offered by science since Copernicus."

Phil Yancey, in his new book *Soul Survivor* writes:

". . . religion, and not science, at least proposes an answer to two questions. (1) Why is there something rather than nothing? (Or, as Stephen Hawking put it, Why does the universe 'bother to exist'?) (2) Why is that something so beautiful and orderly?" The burden of proof is on those who see order and try to explain how it came from chaos; they see intricacy and say there is no Artist; they see design but refuse to admit even the possibility of a Designer; they see beauty and intelligent life forms and say it all came from randomness; they see a world packed with pleasure, goodness and joy and say it was all an accident; they see the sky but do not see heaven; they see a tree but do not see the hand of God. As someone said, "Pity the poor atheist who sees a beautiful sunrise and has no one to thank."

ILL: St. Paul's and Haiti's Voodoo Church - In England there is a beautiful church building called St. Paul's Cathedral. Worshipping in that great cathedral your eyes are drawn to the great dome. It is actually three domes, one on top of the other, with the highest and smallest dome having windows, making you think they are the very windows of heaven. Standing that great place, surrounded by exquisite art and architecture, can make you believe in God. Are you somewhat taken back by my statement that a physical, man-made building could make me believe in God? What else could inspire such a sense of transcendence and create a feeling of otherworldliness — a world of unspeakable beauty and holy purpose? These glorious monuments to God are all over England and Europe — countries which were strongly influenced by the Christian faith. Name me one monument to transcendence and wonder that was inspired by atheism. I can't think of one.

But there actually is a monument to the devil. It exists in a country whose national religion is Voodoo, or devil worship — the country of Haiti. It is the center for Voodoo worship — a large mud hole where chickens are strangled and their blood poured into the pool. Rumors are that there are even secret rites where human sacrifices are offered to the devil, and their blood becomes a part of the mud as well. There are unspeakable acts of evil performed there. Worshipers come to cover themselves with the mud of that cursed place. So there is one country whose religion worships Jesus Christ, and another country whose religion is devil worship. The monument to Jesus Christ is an exquisite cathedral, and the monument to the devil is a mud hole. One is transcendent in its themes and beauty, and the other is vile and ugly. One inspires noble thoughts and holy lives, the other arouses perverse thoughts and evil acts. One is elevating and the other degrading. One makes you look up and the other makes you look down.

I believe the Bible when it says, "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth" (Genesis 1:1). Not because I want to believe it, but because all the evidence points to it.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Why do some people have such a problem believing in miracles? Are there some miracles that you have trouble with?
2. How would you answer someone who wants to believe in God, but is hung up on things that seem to be against rational processes?
3. What is the difference between Pantheism (everything is God) and Christianity?
4. When we understand that God works through his own laws and not against them, is something like the feeding of the multitudes a miracle in the sense we often use the word?
5. Consider the illustration of catching an apple that was falling to the ground as intervening in the law of gravity, though the law of gravity remains unchanged. Is this a way God operates in what we call miracles?
6. Why are some people absolutely closed to the concept of the existence of God? Is this an intellectual problem or a moral one?
7. How do people without faith answer the following questions: 1) Why is there something rather than nothing? 2) Why is this something so beautiful and orderly?
8. If you found a rock in your yard with the carving of a face, would you assume it evolved or someone had carved it? Explain your reasoning.