

Is Christianity Anti-Science?

Good morning everybody. It's great to see all of you here. My name is Eric and I'm a pastor in training here, and if I haven't had the chance to meet you I would love to do that at some point! Go ahead and turn in your bible to [Psalm chapter 19](#), we'll end up there in a little while. As a refresher for everyone, whether you've been coming around for a while or you just started coming around, we are rounding out the end of a series called *Question Everything*. We've been working through some different topics and questions people often have in regards to the Christian faith. Sometimes it's within the church from people who are trying to evaluate and analyze their beliefs. Sometimes it's outside the church from people who see some things Christians do and say and wonder why. And these aren't just questions that we've *heard* people ask, but are questions we have also asked, worked through, and continue to wrestle with in our own spiritual journeys. And today is no exception. As we wrap up the series, I'm excited to dive into this last topic because it's one I've spent a lot of time personally thinking about and working through. So today, we're going to be looking at a question I feel like a lot of people ask: [is Christianity anti-science?](#) Now remember, I said I'm a pastor *in training*. And they gave me "is Christianity anti-science." Maybe a little bit of a "baptism by fire leadership development route," but I'm here for it. And depending on where we end up at the end of this, I may or may not have to have some super awkward conversations with about half my LifeGroup who currently work in STEM fields.

I feel like before we really dive into this I do need to add a bit of a disclaimer. I don't think I'm intentionally doing it this way, but there may be parts of today's teaching that come across as a little more academic or "lecturey," and I think some of that is just due to the nature of the topic. That is *not* to say today's teaching will be boring (hopefully), but I just figured I'd give you that heads up at the beginning. Also, with all of our series and teachings, we spend a lot of time reading and researching, gathering information and ideas from a wide variety of sources to teach as effectively as possible, and this week is certainly no exception. That being said, I will be referencing different thoughts from a variety of people and camps, so if you have any questions later about who said what or where I got something, feel free to ask.

Maybe some of you have wrestled with this question personally, like I have. Others of you may inherently understand the need to address a topic like this one, whether you've personally wrestled with it or not. You still very much understand why it's important for

us to talk about it. But some of you may not understand or be thinking about the need to address it, and no matter where you are, bear with me because I feel like this is a helpful way to go about it. The first thing I want to do is try to zoom out a little bit and paint a broad picture. The conflict, or at least the perceived conflict, between science and faith is one that has been around for a while. Sometimes it seems as if that's just the baseline: conflict. As far as we can tell, this perceived tension between science and faith goes pretty far back, but most notably to a man you may have heard of named Galileo. [Show of hands?] Galileo is really famous, among other things, for making improvements on some of the early telescope designs and hypothesizing that the earth revolved around the sun. Seems pretty obvious to us, but at the time of his hypothesis, a large majority of people believed the opposite: that the sun revolved around the earth. Most notably, the Catholic church believed it. What's interesting is that they didn't believe that because it was anywhere explicit in the bible, but simply because they reasoned that if the earth was so important (i.e. earth is the planet that Jesus came to), it must be the center of everything. So they pieced together some bible verses to try to justify their idea. Imagine what those people would've thought when they found out someone was saying they were probably wrong. I can only imagine how those same people would have felt if they could see just how small our entire *galaxy* is in comparison to our closest neighbors. But I digress.

So when Galileo came onto the scene and proposed his alternate way of viewing things based on his studies, the Catholic church was certainly not a fan. Some people were so vehemently against his propositions, they even took the stance of saying he was actively trying to threaten the very foundations of the church. For example, the Dominican father Caccini said in a sermon directly aimed at Galileo, "geometry is of the devil," and, "mathematicians should be banished as the authors of all heresies." Which sounds *startlingly* similar to my sentiments when I took AP calculus. Some Catholic priests said he wasn't being heretical since he *clearly* had to be atheistic to believe such nonsense. Others said, "his pretended discovery vitiates the whole Christian plan of salvation," and, "it casts suspicion on the doctrine of the incarnation." Apparently if the sun is in the middle of the solar system, sadly none of us can have a relationship with Jesus. If you didn't know, now you know. That's quite a leap if I've ever heard one. Can you imagine how confused they would have been when we discovered pluto then kicked it right back out not too long after? Galileo also received criticism from John Calvin and Martin Luther who are renowned theologians. Eventually all his publications were banned and he was placed under house arrest for the last 10 years of his life.

There was massive tension between these groups, but I'd say it wasn't a *legitimate* tension. It was fabricated and based on a misinterpretation and false assumptions about the bible. And one of the most interesting things about this whole ordeal in my opinion is that Galileo was and remained a strong believer in Christ until he died. He argued his whole life that scientific exploration was not only permissible for a believer, but a noble cause. He said, "I do not feel obliged to believe that the same God who has endowed us with sense, reason, and intellect has intended us to forgo their use." Keep that idea in mind for later.

But I think that spirit, the spirit of science vs. faith, can be traced all throughout the ages up to today. Look at open school board meetings any time the topic has anything to do with COVID or vaccines or even science textbooks. Look at conversations surrounding climate change, or evolution, or the historical validity of Genesis 1 and 2, or carbon dating, or fossil records, or stem cell research. Or if you're totally confused by any of that, I'm only saying there are plenty of specific topics where it seems like science and faith are pitted against each other. Simply taking a broad survey of global conversations on a number of different topics, it's easy to get the impression that science and faith are two different teams. And I think a lot of tension comes down to an inherent belief by many people that there *are* two teams. There's *science* and there's *faith*. And you have to pick one of those teams. And by default, at least in some capacity, you are in opposition to the other team. And to be fair, it hasn't always been religious people stoking this debate. Sometimes it has also come from within the scientific community. For example, Richard Dawkins, a well known biologist and author said, "I am against religion because it teaches us to be satisfied with not understanding the world." Also, "I don't despise religious people, I despise what they stand for." There's also the famous physicist, Stephen Hawking, who said, "We could call order by the name of God, but it would be an impersonal God. There's not much personal about the laws of physics." There's also quotes I could go on with from other famous scientists like Neil deGrasse Tyson or Bill Nye, but you get the picture. And listen, I'm by no means trying to attack these people, my home internet network is called Bill Wi the Science Fi, I'm a big fan. I'm just trying to show you my point that, if we are truly honest, both sides (science and faith) have done their fair share to stoke the fire on each side of the debate. . And I really think there's something interesting worth noting on all of this. I think the level of this tension is more perceived than it is widespread. In fact, in a recent study, only 16% of Christians say their religious beliefs often conflict with science. That's only about 1 in 6, so the loudest voices claiming conflict are really a minority. They're just the loudest. And

I think it's really important to remind ourselves that while there are loud voices that make the headlines with their angry tirades, it's actually a really small percentage of Christians. So it may not necessarily be helpful to paint with broad brushes.

But what I want to do with our time today is to try to show from the Scriptures that these two "teams" are actually false dichotomies. I want to try to show that it isn't actually necessary to force anyone to choose between science and religion or reason and faith. *Are there tensions to navigate?* Sure there are. I'm not saying tensions never show up. There's tensions between all kinds of disciplines and vantage points in the world. And we're going to work through some of that, but I want to just simply show that they aren't outright competing forces. We don't have to ask questions like, "if I trust scientific research and discovery, do I have to write off spirituality?" Or, "if I agree with science, does that mean I'm a bad Christian and don't trust God?" People don't have to reject the claims of scientific communities because of their faith, often without really knowing why that's the case, and people don't have to reject faith in Jesus because of their respect for science. What a heartbreaking position for anyone to be in to feel like they have to choose between the two.

Hopefully you've had time to get to Psalm 19 by now, so look with me starting in verse 1:

"The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands.

"The heavens" was the way ancient people referred to everything that could be seen up in the skies, day or night. The sun, the moon, the clouds, the stars, even weather patterns. All of it was included in what they called "the heavens." And here, the psalmist says all those things, everything that happens up there, is *declaring* the glory of God. Keep reading:

Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they reveal knowledge. They have no speech, they use no words; no sound is heard from them. Yet their voice goes out into all the earth, their words to the ends of the world.

Then they talk about how our observable world tells us things about God and his nature. It says they "reveal knowledge." Meaning there are things we can learn and draw out from them. With no speech, no words, no sound.

In the heavens God has pitched a tent for the sun. It is like a bridegroom coming out of his chamber, like a champion rejoicing to run his course. It rises at one end of the heavens and makes its circuit to the other; nothing is deprived of its warmth."

Then he gets specific and mentions the sun in particular. This is an ancient person who, with no telescope technology or satellites to take pictures, observes the masterful and craftful design of the sun. It hides during the night (in his mind, like it's in a tent), and then it appears in the morning, and runs its course to the end of the day. And because of that, he says, "nothing is deprived of its warmth." Even without all the technology we have to observe it, he notices that because the sun, from our perspective, moves from one side of the skies to the other throughout the day, it brings warmth to everything that needs it. He's noticing that there is a design to that, an intentionality with which God has made that all to work. And all of that, to him, communicates the glory and beauty and intelligence of a creator. So what we see is the Psalmist making several observations. They're making observations about God and his glory, while at the same time making several observations about the natural world in which they live. There's this incredibly interesting and beautiful tension that exists in their mind. And their observations about the natural world are tied directly to God. How beautiful of a picture is that?

That's just six verses. There are plenty of psalms that contain these same ideas and similar ones. All I'm trying to help you see is how the psalmist views the phenomenon of the world he lives in. He sees nature itself, and the things that happen in it as opportunities to *recognize* God's presence, not as reasons to reject it. He sees God's design as *reasons* to notice and appreciate and study natural phenomena, not as reasons to *resist* those things. In his mind, there isn't a competition. There's a deep, rich, profound harmony. Understanding the way things work in our world isn't a way to avoid giving praise and glory to God for it, it's a way to ascribe God even more glory and worth for having designed those things in that way.

This harmony exists in other parts of scripture as well. Romans 1 says God's existence and work is *evidenced* by creation. Ephesians 2 talks about how we are God's *handiwork*, created with care and attention. Psalm 139 talks about the intricacies of how we are "knit together" and formed as babies: that God's intention and design can be

seen specifically in the intricacies and detail of the human body. The Bible does not require a person of faith to reject the realities of the natural world around us. In fact, faith may even be reason to study them further.

One person who takes this perspective on it all is Francis Collins. Collins is a follower of Jesus and a world-renowned scientist and was selected to be the director of the Human Genome Project. If you're unfamiliar, it was the largest collaborative biological project in history, funded by the National Institutes of Health among other international groups, and spanned 20 different universities in 7 different countries, and gave us our current understanding of how human DNA works. I say all that to show you that Francis Collins is not some religious crackpot that sits in his basement coming up with conspiracy theories to blast on social media. He can and does speak authoritatively on the international scientific stage—perhaps more than most anyone else. He is someone who put this harmony between science and faith incredibly well in my opinion. And as a heads up, he is a brilliant guy, but sometimes he can get a little wordy. So there's a lot going on in his quotes, but try to pay close attention because it's super helpful. He said, "If God created the universe, and the laws that govern it, and if He endowed human beings with intellectual abilities to discern its workings, would He want us to disregard those abilities? Would He be diminished or threatened by what we are discovering about His creation? By no means. If God's existence is true [...], and certain scientific conclusions about our world are also true [...], then they cannot be in opposition to each other. Not even a little bit. I cannot fathom any circumstance where the God who created us and communes with us would ask us to disregard the minds he has given us and our ability to learn and grow just to prove our love for him. And Scripture doesn't advocate that either."

So why do so many people throughout history and in our world today seem to be at such great odds with one another over the conversation of science and faith? I think a lot of it comes down to a misunderstanding or a misapplication of both sides to some degree. Obviously social tensions exist and historical context matters for part of the conversation, but in general, I think people look for the right answers in the wrong places. I think it happens in a couple specific ways that I want to point out. First, **the Bible is not a scientific textbook**. We often try to ask questions of things that were never meant to give those specific answers. You wouldn't grab a Vogue magazine to try to fix your car. You wouldn't look through an English cookbook to learn Spanish. You wouldn't read a Nicholas Sparks novel, just in general. Different things can serve

different purposes because they were intended to serve different purposes. The Bible is not as was never meant to be a science textbook. It just wasn't. When you look to the Bible to be something it was never intended to be, you end up creating more of a conflict between science and faith than there actually is. And second, **science cannot authoritatively determine morality**. Science and everything it encompasses is able to serve many incredible purposes and give us amazing answers about creation around us, but there are also many things it will never be able to do. Science can help answer questions like, "how does biological life work? Why do things function the way they do? What makes up the things around us?" But science cannot give us answers to questions like, "what is life *for*? *For what purpose* are we here?" And especially, "how should we live?" Science cannot give us answers to questions of morality. And when we try to pretend as if it does, sometimes we end up sounding a little silly. I've heard some people say things like, "well monogamy isn't naturally occurring in most other organisms, so humans shouldn't feel the need to be monogamous." But that's using science to dictate morality. That's not what science was intended to do. Plenty of animals also eat their mate after mating with it. Plenty of animals murder their mate after mating with it—I don't see anyone making the argument that humans should adopt either of those practices. Because science can't authoritatively determine morality. That's not what it's for.

Here's the way many scientists have put it: you can't derive "ought" from "is." Science can do a great job telling us how things are, but not how things *ought* to be. Science works best as a way to *explain* why things are the way they are, not as a means of insisting on how things should be. You can't say, "because these things are this way, it is therefore morally right and good for things to be this way. If for no other reason, much of science is actually focused on giving us ways to *change* life for the better. Medicine, exercise science, discoveries about nutrition all help us contribute to human flourishing. They help us make people healthier and live longer and have a more full life. Science, at its best, is when people, guided by ethics, use science to improve life—not to insist that because something *is*, it should be. And moreover, science can't determine morality because science is constantly changing and evolving. Just like we mentioned earlier, prior to Galileo, many scientists were *certain* everything revolved around the Earth. Before that, many felt sure the Earth was flat. A recent article I saw in a reputable scientific journal was titled, "If You Say 'Science is Right,' You're Wrong." And this is not some hyper-conservative publication, it's a real scientific journal. In it, the author talks about how, fortunately, science is constantly changing. They say, "Science is a *process*

of learning and discovery, and sometimes we learn that what we thought was right is wrong.”

Now, I know I just said several things, but here’s the point I’m trying to make: We can’t and shouldn’t be trying to use science *or* the Bible in ways they were never intended to be used. But at the same time, we shouldn’t be pitting them against each other as if they are mutually exclusive camps which must be constantly at odds with one another. Francis Collins puts this beautifully. Again, buckle up for some wordiness, but it’s so good. In his book *The Language of God*, he says, “will we turn our backs on science because it is perceived as a threat to God, abandoning all the promise of advancing our understanding of nature and applying that to the alleviation of suffering and the betterment of humankind? Alternatively, will we turn our backs on faith, concluding that science has rendered the spiritual life no longer necessary, and that traditional religious symbols can now be replaced by engravings of the double helix on our altars? Both of these choices are profoundly dangerous. Both deny truth. Both will diminish the nobility of humankind. Both will be devastating to our future. And both are unnecessary. The God of the Bible is also the God of the genome. He can be worshipped in the cathedral or in the laboratory. His creation is majestic, awesome, intricate and beautiful - and it cannot be at war with itself. Only we imperfect humans can start such battles. And only we can end them.”

So the next time you see a scientific advancement. There's no reason you should automatically see it as a threat to your faith, or to faith in general. It may even be a cause for deeper worship *within* your faith. It may be that the thing that person invented or discovered or unearthed is just one more way we can stand in profound awe and wonder at the meticulous, intentional, beautiful care of the creator God. Where we can say with the psalmist, “I *praise* you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your *works* are wonderful, I know that full well.”

And the next time a follower of Jesus raises a legitimate moral or ethical concern about a particular scientific advancement or discovery, it may not mean that they’re a backwoods, sheltered bigot who fundamentally opposes science or progress. It might be that there should be a higher authority in the universe than just what *is* or *could be*—maybe we also need to be guided by what *ought* to be and what *should* be.

There is a beautiful complementarity, a beautiful dance between science and faith. Are there difficult tensions between them to navigate? Of course there are. But they don't need to be enemies. So I want to wrap things up today by bringing us all back to just how highly I think Scripture and God view the realities of the natural world in which we live. Yes, we worship a God who is outside of our natural realm, who sees and works outside the constraints of our world. But we need only look to the gift of Jesus to put all of this in perspective. Jesus coming to Earth, being born as a human, flesh and blood, was the ultimate picture of an all-powerful spiritual God working through natural means to achieve something that transcended anything we could ever imagine. He demonstrated his understanding of and his authority over all things, both physical and spiritual. He did not discount either, he did not cut either out. He fully embraced and fully lived on both sides.

The incarnation, which we're going to spend some time looking in detail at leading up to Christmas, is a perfect example of just how integrated the natural and the spiritual are. Jesus was transcendent enough to work through natural means: a human body, a life, a cross, a tomb, to accomplish things that go well beyond the natural world: redemption, hope, life and purpose for humanity. And as followers of Jesus, we should have no problem following in those footsteps.