

**“The ‘What’ and The ‘Why’”
Christianity and Science: Part 1**

Texts: Psalm 8

7/26/09

Introduction

One of the advantages of living in Denver, Colorado was that we were a bit closer to heaven than most people...by about a mile. So on a clear night in the hills outside of town, you really could see forever.

The cosmos was on display like a flatlander from humid places could scarcely imagine. You would lie on your back and watch planets, meteors, satellites and the occasional comet with incredible clarity. Depending on who you are you might find yourself thanking God, or full of wonder, or struggling with a cosmic inferiority complex. It was hard to feel nothing.

So imagine while you are doing this someone bent down next you and said, “You see that comet right there? It’s really a loose collection of ice, dust, and small rocky particles, ranging from a few kilometers to tens of kilometers across. And the tail is the effect of solar radiation upon the comet’s nucleus.”

Now once you got over the sense that that is like reducing the magic of a really good kiss to a discussion of lips and teeth you’d have to admit that this is a truthful answer to the question of “what”? But was that the question you were wondering about? And is it the one you most need to answer?

1. Welcome to the answers of a scientific age, which excels in breaking down complex things in small parts. Never before have people like us known more about “what” the world is and “how” it works.

As we'll see in a minute Christians have their concerns about the ways and claims of science. But we'd better start by acknowledging our debt.

Just this past week many of us were asked to remember where we were on July 20, 1969 when Neal Armstrong set foot on the moon. I suspect you remember. The triumph of science that day looked like a miracle. All the careful calculations, endless testing, preliminary spaceflights...resulted in something that lived only in sci-fi movies a generation before.

Any of us who have vaccinated our children, downloaded stuff to our IPODS, talked on our cellular phones, or traveled further in day than people 100 years ago might have traveled in year owe it to the carefully controlled method of figuring stuff out we call science. Even as I get ready to criticize science, I have to admit I used the technology of the internet, in order to do it.

How much spiritual stuff happens today because of a website, telephone or email? So let's get honest. Unless we want to join the Amish, we're sold out to science.

And that's not all bad. God put us in a world of asteroids, microbes, and mountain peaks and invited us to discover what science does best: what they are and how they work. God did not create a random universe in which every day is toss up. The sun rises and sets with amazing consistency. Gravity doesn't take a holiday. And water seems to be H₂O every time we check. Science lays hold of the deep laws of creation, and allows us to harness them for our own good.

Is it too much to say that science is God-given way of knowing?

2. But there's something bothering a lot of us. Many a Christian parent who has spent 18 years making the case for God in the lives of their children packs them up for the university with a small bit of dread. It seems at times that science, and some scientists, don't have much room for God.

Many times science is practiced with a faulty assumption. The only facts that count are those that are empirically verifiable, rational, and can be confirmed by so-called objective observers. That which we can all find sitting at the bottom of a test tube is “true”. That which we can't is a personal preference. And that includes God, miracles (like a risen Christ), religion, values, morals, art, music...much of what religious people say really matters.

It doesn't help when an angry atheist like Richard Dawkins, who wrote the bestseller *The God Delusion*, takes things a step further. Since God doesn't fit his science, God doesn't exist. In fact, belief in God among the world's people is largely responsible for the human misery of our time. If only we could extinguish the idea that people anything greater than the product of evolution; if only we could confine ourselves to what science can see, and touch, and perceive, then we could make some progress.

There is so much wrong with this way of thinking that I can't begin to unpack all the objections. Let me simply say that this isn't science; this is scientism. This is science overreaching and deciding that it is able to not answer not only the "what" and "how" questions of life, but also the "why". This is science playing God.

I don't have an easy answer for the problem of scientism. Its assumptions are as unscientific, non-objective, and as irrational as the most rigid and zealous religion. Rest assured you will run into it, and its converts are passionate. It is a powerful tool for evading and avoiding the question of God.

What appears to be an intellectual problem is at its root a spiritual one. The fool, according to Scripture, is not the one who failed to take physics, chemistry, and biology. *The fool says in his heart, "There is no God."* (Psalm 14:1) It takes some courage for a Christian to stand their ground in the face of fool.

3. Psalm 8 can help us here. It says that studying the night sky won't answer our deepest questions. People don't just need the answer to "what" the world is and "how" it works. We need to know "why".

In verse 3, when the psalmist stares into the vast wonder of the night sky, he doesn't wonder about the chemical composition of a comet. He anxiously wonders about himself...*what is man that you are mindful of him, the son of man that you care for him?* Creation makes him insignificant. The question isn't what; it's why. Why me, why all this, and for what reason?

That answer doesn't come by scientific analysis. It comes by revelation. *O Lord our Lord how majestic is your name in all earth.* When the cosmos is discovered to be an act of God it becomes a source of praise instead of a source of concern.

Where the name of God is heard – his character, purpose, his future for creation - the man or woman pondering the cosmos finds an answer for their life:

You made him (people) a little lower than God, and crowned him (them) with glory and honor. (vs. 5)

That's me, that's why I'm here. I am loved by God. And not only am I loved I have a purpose in this world. I am God's agent; God's image to guide this creation to live up to its full potential (verses 6-8).

The monumental moments in Scripture are when revelation comes; when the "name" of God becomes known. Moses' desert wasteland is interrupted by the revealing of God's name in a burning bush. To know God's name brings Moses into the service of that name. Life changes. A nation is born. (Ex. 3:6)

Jesus puts the question to his disciples one day. *Who do people say that I am?* And Peter answers with the name; *You are the Christ the son of the living God.* Jesus tells him the name is God's revelation. Life changes. A church is born. (Mt. 16:16)

The "what" of science is always incomplete without the "why" of revelation. And when we take revelation seriously we learn that the most important fact won't be discovered in anybody's laboratory. It's already known – the clue to the way the world is, and how it can change, and where it is headed is summed up in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Science can bring sight to blind eyes and strength to lame legs. But it can't tell people where they should look or which direction they should run.

4. The "What" of science and the "Why" of revelation – two paths in the knowledge of the will of one God. And never has there been a more important time to be a Christian skilled in answering both questions.

"It's a brave new world" has become a cliché. But at no time in history have people been more capable of doing things with science and technology and less capable of knowing what should be done. The bio-ethical questions around cloning, genetic testing, and human embryo research alone are enough to take your breath away.

We need doctors, chemists, biologists, information technology people, engineers, genetic researchers, and high school science teachers who have encountered not only the "what" of science but the "why" of faith in Jesus Christ. People who know not only what can be done but are willing to say what should be done.

Christ-followers can't leave it to science alone to decide what counts as a "fact" and what doesn't.

Looking for something to do with your life? Become a man or woman who takes their faith to work in the lab, in the doctor's office, at the research institution, and in the classroom. People who will bring the knowledge of God to their science and science to their knowledge of God, and help bring all things under the Lordship of Jesus Christ.

God has left us the book of nature and the book of revelation. It's time, it's past time, to be a student of both.

Conclusion

There was a group of scientists and they were all sitting around discussing which one of them was going to go to God and tell him that they didn't need him anymore.

One of the scientists volunteered and went to tell God he was no longer needed.

The scientist says to God — "God, you know, a bunch of us have been thinking and I've come to tell you that we really don't need you anymore. I mean, we've been coming up with great theories and ideas, we've cloned sheep, and we're on the verge of cloning humans. So as you can see, we really don't need you."

God nods understandingly and says "I see. Well, no hard feelings.

But before you go let's have a contest. What do you think?"

The scientist says, "Sure. What kind of contest?"

God: "A man-making contest."

The scientist: "Sure! No problem."

The scientist bends down and picks up a handful of dirt and says, "Okay, I'm ready!"

God replies, "No, no, no ... You go get your own dirt."

The "what" of science requires the "why" of God.