

6-6 **Where Science is Denied Gen. 1:1-5; 2:4-7; Luke 10:25-27**

Prayer: God, forgive us when we make it more difficult for unbelievers to meet Jesus; and help us overcome those obstacles that unbelievers create for themselves; all for the sake of your kingdom.

Someone dropped off an article at my office this week about an unusual app for the **iphone**. App is short for a computer program that helps you do something quickly and easily, like find what's on at the movie theater or get a look at tomorrow's forecast. There are 150,000 such apps for this computer phone.

The column was about a new app designed for atheists who want to fend off Christians trying to share faith with them. I kid you not. I suppose the same company is producing an app for Christians who want to defend their faith. Clearly, there is a divisive relationship between God-fearers and God-deniers. For today and the next five Sundays, we are going to bridge that gap for the sake of the Kingdom.

I am using the word *skeptic* to describe anyone who isn't interested in knowing God. Skeptics may be ambivalent agnostics, active atheists or those who have had negative experiences with Christians and the church.

From my reading and experience, skeptics don't usually reject the Jesus we know in Scripture; they reject religion; the church; superstition; and people who deny scientific evidence. We need to connect with these children of God instead of writing them off, which is the purpose of this series.

Let's begin by confessing our history. Christians of all stripes have been unwilling to reconsider their understanding of the Bible even in the face of clear evidence. The classic picture of this is the Church's reaction to the findings of Galileo and Copernicus. The Bible was not mistaken when it spoke of the four corners of the earth. Rather, our interpretations were mistaken about the actual meaning of the phrase. We could say the same thing about our past interpretations about women or slavery.

Please don't hear me say that science is always open-minded and honest while Christians are mostly close-minded and in denial. Pharisaic arrogance runs through every human being and institution. Remember James and John, the great disciples of Jesus, that wanted to call down fire from heaven to burn those Samaritans that didn't give Jesus a warm welcome. There are Christian fundamentalists just like there are those on the scientific side of the equation.

We can also celebrate that many prize-winning scientists are also people of deep Christian faith. Who do you think made the following statement? *In view of such harmony in the cosmos which I, with my limited human understanding, am able to recognize, there are yet people who say there is no God. But what really makes me angry is that they quote me for the support of such views.*
—Albert Einstein

I've called this series, *Where Skeptics Will Never Go...and Why*. The title each week identifies one huge barrier for today's skeptics; one that we should attempt to tear down. Let's start by seeing skeptics as humans, like us.

Not long ago I had one skeptic say to me that he would never walk into a church building unless it was for the funeral of a close friend. In the same week a Christian said to me that he would never go into a mosque. I don't see much difference between the two. Skeptics don't want to go places or engage people with beliefs that contradict their own. They don't care to connect with people whose views they do not respect. But isn't this our tendency as well? Rather than condemning, let's explore why skeptics stay away from the church in droves.

Faith has been set aside by many Americans because they cannot reconcile what they have learned about science with what they learned in Sunday School or heard from other believers. For many, science and Scripture are so contradictory, you have to choose one and reject the other. The

Bible does say that about God and other gods. We are not commanded to choose between denominations or interpretations of Genesis.

About 2 months ago, Bruce Waltke, a conservative evangelical OT scholar, was pressured to resign at Reformed Theological Seminary because he made the following public statement: *If the data is overwhelmingly in favor of evolution, to deny that reality will make (evangelicals) a cult ... some odd group that is not really interacting with the world. And rightly so, because we are not using our gifts and trusting God's Providence that brought us to this point of our awareness.*

Here is a very conservative biblical scholar suggesting that denying scientific evidence moves our faith further down the road of irrelevance; that it cuts us off from the world. Skeptics read this story about a Christian seminary and it confirms their belief that Christians live in the Middle Ages. I read some reactions to the story.

The Christians were arguing whether we could be Christian if we did not accept the literal Genesis account of creation. Then some skeptics chimed in, and as you can imagine, they thought the debate was farcical. The scholar had said we need to consider the findings of science and he was fired. One said, ***how can people who won't deal with truth claim to be keepers of truth?***

Now to Genesis and the scientific accounts of origins. They are different, but how much so? *In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters.* Genesis 1.

As used by cosmologists, the term Big Bang generally refers to the idea that the Universe has expanded from a primordial hot and dense initial condition around 13 to 14 billion years ago and continues to expand to this day. –online encyclopedia.

We don't have time to look at Genesis 1-2 in detail, but let me point out a few things in the text that indicate it is not meant to convey precise time.

First, the Hebrew word **yōm**, translated "day," can also be translated *age; day; all; always; full; future; midday; long; period; perpetually; whenever; year; time...* (and at least 20 other variations) Perhaps you've heard of the early Hebrew eating establishment called... **Yom, Yoms.** Bottom line, this is not a precise word so it can't carry precise meaning.

Second, there is not just one creation account in Genesis. There are two. Please look at the beginning of the second account in Gen. 2:4. I'm reading from Young's Literal Translation: ***These [are] births of the heavens and of the earth in their being prepared, in the day of Jehovah God's making earth and heavens.*** Some of your translations say "*these are the generations.*" The main term here is a word normally used to introduce human genealogies. Obviously, this is not about human births but the births of the heavens and earth. It is metaphorical language.

See also that this takes place in the **day** God made earth and heavens. Some of your translations say "when God made the earth and heavens," but this verse contains the same word used in the first creation account which speaks of 6 days. Four corners is not a statement of geography or geometry. It means *the entire earth*. The language of Genesis is the same when it uses *day*.

In none of my high school science classes did we address the distinctive claims of science and biblical faith. Neither did we have any real conversation about these seeming contradictions in Sunday School, which is where they should be discussed. We simply cannot ignore how the Biblical accounts relate to the scientific ones. As you know, *ignoring* is the pathway to *ignorance* and we can't send out kids out into the world with such ignorance.

I took geology in college and we were learning about reconstructing ancient history by fossil records. There have been many fossils of sea creatures found at high altitudes at various places around the world and one of the girls in my class asked the professor if this was verification of a world wide flood like in the Bible.

The professor got pretty animated in his refutation, letting us know that the Bible had nothing factual to contribute to our understanding of the natural world and in fact contradicted the truth of science in many ways. I was not prepared for his lecture. We need to do better for our children and youth in age appropriate ways.

The core difference between a Christian view and a naturalist's view is we affirm that God created the universe where as the naturalist believes the universe came into being without divine intervention.

The only way we will ever engage naturalists or scientists with the truth of Scripture and the person of Christ is by open conversation. Not a blending of the two that denies the differences, but an open dialogue. In the words of God, "come, let us reason together."

I've included in your bulletin an insert I handed out a few years ago in a Wednesday night class. The terms theistic and divine simply mean these interpretations are put forward by people who believe that God created the universe. As you can see, there are 10. Let me do a quick overview and you can take this with you for further study. (insert)

There are Christian theories here that are consistent with scientific evidence and better still, some that can be discussion starters with skeptics. It's not as difficult as you think. Most skeptics are unaware of these God-centered interpretations. Give these to people and ask them for their opinions. You don't have to explain them or defend any of them. Just offer and inquire.

As far apart as we are with some skeptics, we must engage them, just as we ought to engage Muslims. When we can have respectful discussion, we can help them realize that their stereotypes of our faith are just that—stereotypes.

If you are familiar with philosophical arguments for the existence of God, I wouldn't bother with them. They are ineffective. A good naturalist will refute them easily.

I have two other suggestions for how we can discuss science and religion with those who choke on the latter. I have one analogy and one challenge.

The analogy is **dark energy**; an energy that cannot be measured by any of our senses or with any of our technology. This is a scientific metaphor about faith. Scientists know dark energy exists only by its influence on visible bodies in the universe. It's known only by its effect. We know God the same way. We see the impact of Scripture, of faith, of transformation in our lives and the lives of others. We believe in God the same way science believes in dark energy. Science cannot see God or do experiments on Jesus. So invite your skeptical friend to look more closely at the effect faith has on those who believe and follow Jesus.

Another way to open the door to skeptics is with a friendly challenge to read. *Would you recommend a good read to help me understand naturalism? I'll read that while you read this New Testament, then we'll get together and compare notes.*

Most skeptics have read Darwin, Dawkins, Marx, and others. They haven't read the Bible. This approach will give you an education about naturalism; it will show openness on your part which breaks a stereotype about Christians. And best of all, your friend will be introduced to Jesus and what Christian faith is supposed to look like.

No argument is needed. We simply try to connect people to Scripture and to Christ and let God do what only God can do.

Prayer: Lord, we know that you are God of all truth, that you are truth itself. Open our eyes to what we do not see and by that same Spirit, open the eyes of those who have turned away from you and from faith.