

Science and Religion

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Preacher: Chris Jones

[0 : 00] Let me pray. We thank you, Lord Jesus, for being able to gather around your word. And we pray it helped me as I speak it tonight that you would speak to us by your spirit and grow us in Christ to your glory.

And we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. Now I got to choose a hobby horse tonight. And so I've gone back away to something that I have preached before. And for a time, read quite a bit about this, although not as much recently.

But in the 1990s, or before the mid-1990s, when you start talking about science and religion, it was either like you're a creationist or you're a Darwinian evolutionist, and there was no ground in between.

And both camps pushed one another into different corners. And a man came along called P.E. Johnson, who was a professor of law in the United States, and he broke new ground.

Because what he did, he looked at evolutionary arguments and the arguments of evolutionary scientists. And rather than think science, he thought law and the nature of arguments and the way arguments are won and lost.

[1 : 08] And he's also a very gracious man. I think he's still alive, but a very gracious man. And so he would work with people who believed and thought things that were very, very different from himself.

And rather than being in a combative way with them, he'd come alongside them, go away on weekends, talk to them, submit what he was thinking to them to test against their thinking.

And I think relationally, probably modelled something for us that we could all learn from in terms of how we engage people when we disagree with one another. And rather than try to prove God, he came from a different point of view and worked in a way to show the deficiencies of the arguments for Darwinian evolution.

So some stuff that we get in university and school is just taught as a given and maybe not reflected on in the way that it should be reflected on and subjected to us thinking about it in ways that would be good for us to think about it.

So often if you said you're a Christian, you just get put in a basket case rather than listened to and debated properly. So the whole notion of intelligent design is the idea that maybe the earth is designed without actually having to...

[2 : 24] So working in a secular field, you can bat for the idea that the earth is designed without having to necessarily prove what sort of a person or an entity or a creator or a God brought it into being.

You could discuss that part of it without pushing further. And I think it was a really clever thing to do. It was done with a great deal of grace and it's been run on with a lot since then and sometimes with grace and sometimes with a total lack of grace which hasn't helped the cause at all.

Pastors and preachers like me encounter all sorts of people in ministry and very early in my time of ministry I was doing marriage preparation with one of my relatives, my cousin who was a great friend but also she was my cousin and she was a teacher and she was marrying a guy who...

and he's married still to a guy with a PhD in geology and now a professor in geology at a major Australian university. And he said as we did the marriage preparation, he's not a Christian but he said he respected me as a Christian and I said and I respect your knowledge of geology.

And guess where the discussion went to? It got into a discussion about creation and evolution and how the world was formed and for my friend, naturalistic evolution was an absolute given.

[3 : 56] Of course that's how the world was formed and how we've come about. He was a Darwinian evolution man, he still is through and through. He said that he believed in God but it wasn't all that clear where God fitted into his belief system.

It was a little bit like, oh well maybe God kicked the world into being and then stepped away and allowed it to follow its evolutionary course. Now when my friend talked geology and the details of his science, guess what happened to me?

I floundered. Couldn't compete with him. I could not presume to speak with him on his level or with his expertise.

And it was like being an absolute minnow at the foot of a giant. And I threw a few ideas forward and he mashed me.

And if he was sitting here tonight and I did it again, he'd mash me again. And so I said things like, I just tried things out like, well what about the huge fossil fuel deposits in the world?

[5 : 07] All the oil and the gas and the coal that we're now burning to our peril and creating climate change from. Weren't all those things once living creatures and organisms, massive forests destroyed by some sort of cataclysmic event in our past?

Where did they come from? Could they be the result of a worldwide flood? What about the missing links in the fossil record? What about the Cambrian explosion where the geological record shows that all of life arose in a relatively short geological time frame?

How does that sit with the long time frames that Darwinian evolution needed to occur? So I could ask some questions, but I couldn't compete with his knowledge and his understanding of geology.

There was no way that I was going anywhere in a creation-evolution discussion with him. I was the preacher that he was having on toast. That is until our discussion turned to Christ.

And I'll talk about that a little bit more as we get towards the end. So I called this talk, it's just a talk, and I called it Science and Religion, Mortal Enemies or Helpful Friends.

[6 : 41] Science and Religion, Mortal Enemies or Helpful Friends. I heard a talk a while back on science and Christianity. The speaker was Christian, he saw no conflict between the two. Heard some great stuff last year, or the year before, from John Lennox when he was in Sydney.

He's worth listening to and reading. But God is creator, and the discipline of science is merely a process of discovering the wonder of a creation that God designed and brought into being in the first place.

So for him, science describes and explains what God thought up and brought into being. And in this system of thought, whatever science discovers is no threat to God, because we're just discovering things that are part of the magnificence of his creation.

Francis Bacon discovered the scientific method over 400 years ago. You've probably been taught it if you've done science at school. And Bacon had a two-books understanding of the world.

He said, And he encouraged us to learn, he encouraged people back then, to learn as much as they could from the Bible, but also to be learning as much as they can from creation or nature.

[8 : 04] Michael Faraday lived in the 19th century, and he's regarded as the greatest experimental scientist of all time. He discovered benzene. Is that petrol?

Close. And electromagnetic induction. So he was the guy that invented electric generators and motors. And as he lay on his deathbed, a friend asked him, What speculations do you have now?

And he replied, Speculations? Man, I have none. I have certainties. I thank God that I don't rest my dying head upon speculations, for I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed to him against that day.

And so there is no shortage of scientists over time who have had a clear faith in a creator God. Science and religion?

Mortal enemies? Friends? Or helpful friends? The easy answer is that they're very helpful friends. Many significant scientific and brilliant medical discoveries have been made as people have sought to use their inbuilt creativity to search out and understand this universe that we live in.

[9 : 23] If the creator God is true, then seeking to understand this wonderful world that he has made should be no threat to any of us. In fact, it is something that we should pursue with energy and with vigour.

Do science at university and at school. None of my life. Have my last three kids done any of it? No. Certainly not following the footsteps of an engineering father.

But the harder answer may be determined by your own prejudices. Because matters other than science might prejudice your view about these things.

And I think some of our troubles begin when we move away from describing how the world is to saying why the world is the way it is.

One of the world's leading evolutionary biologists has written, if Darwinism is true, there are five inescapable conclusions.

[10 : 38] There is no evidence for God. There is no life after death. There is absolutely no foundation for ethics. There is no basis for right and wrong.

There is no ultimate meaning for life. And people really do not have a free will. The respected ABC science commentator, the late Robin Williams, wrote a little book which was very popular for a while and probably still on the shelves of ABC shops.

And it was called Unintelligent Design. And it was subtitled, Why God Isn't As Smart As She Thinks She Is. And so he was refuting this growing interest in the intelligent design movement and he was tenaciously defending his views on science.

And he said things in it. He said, I find it gobsmackingly outrageous that intelligent design can be allowed to pretend that our state of knowledge is inadequate. It's incomplete, certainly, but expanding at a ferocious rate.

And he also said, the science, the Darwinian naturalism, it's endlessly fascinating. It's also rigorously tested. Why buy a vehicle from dodgy brothers when there is one tested and retested by the best firm in the business, which is Darwinian evolution.

[11 : 58] And so what he does, he takes this high moral ground and he effectively slanders intelligent design as dodgy without interacting with the issues. Play the man rather than the ball.

On the other hand, this is one for Adam after the surface. Edwin Erwin Schrodinger.

I'm just reading a quote from a book at this point. Was perhaps the most important founder of wave mechanics and the originator of the most important equation in science.

Schrodinger's equation. Who knows what it is? Do you know? Yeah, he does know. Ask him later. I've never heard of him.

I did physics at uni and I've never heard of him before. Quantum physics. I probably switched off at that particular moment. But more than 60 years ago, he wrote, I am very astonished that the scientific picture of the real world is very deficient.

[13 : 10] It gives a lot of factual information, puts all our experience in a magnificently consistent order, but it's ghastly silent about all and sundry that is really near to our heart.

And that really matters to us. It cannot tell us a word about red and blue, bitter and sweet, physical pain and physical delight. It knows nothing of beautiful and ugly, good and bad, God and eternity.

Science sometimes pretends to answer questions in these domains. But the answers are very often so silly that we're not inclined to take them seriously. For more than 3,000 years, 2,000 years, the Bible has said that there is a contest in the world over truth.

We've been there the last few weeks with Romans. Romans 1, the wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of people who suppress the truth by their wickedness.

Since what may be known about God is plain to them because God has made it plain to them. For since the creation of the world, God's invisible qualities, his eternal power and divine nature have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made so that people are without excuse.

[14 : 33] For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him. But their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened.

And although they claimed to be wise, they became fools. And they exchanged the glory of their mortal God for images made to look like mortal men and birds and animals and reptiles.

So the Bible is asserting that the imprint of our Creator is there to be seen in his creation. I'm going to say more about that in a moment.

But the passage also asserts that we are culpable in rejecting the truth. We put our fingers in our ears and we close our eyes because we do not want to know about it.

You see the words, we suppress the truth by our wickedness. The creation clearly bears the markings of its creator and we have chosen neither to glorify him as God or to give thanks to him.

[15 : 39] So we break the second of the Ten Commandments all the time. We live in a material world and are so obsessed with what has been made or what God has made that we have turned away from him and we have turned to these things that he has made or that we have made.

And the Bible passage says that that makes us culpable. We are as guilty as sin. Who are we to sit in judgment on God?

The physicist Max Planck, who I don't think was a believer, at least had a humility as he went about his science. He said that science cannot solve the mystery of nature and that is in part because in the last analysis we are part of the mystery that we are trying to solve.

You almost need a bigger look from outside to see what's going on. And I think I want to say to all of us that we need a return to humility. We need to be able to gasp at the wonder of the world in which we live.

There's a wonderful little... Not an easy book, not too hard a book, but it's a great book, Case for a Creator, written by Lee Strobel.

[17 : 04] You'll find that at Coorong. But he summarises the thinking of many recent scientists in terms of some of the things that we're talking about tonight. But he's got some great information in here as well.

He said things like, do you know that if the surface of the earth was flat, so if you brought all the mountains down and all the valleys are, the entire world would be covered with water to a depth of two kilometres?

Do you know that the earth exists in a place in the Milky Way galaxy that protects it from huge amounts of radiation from gamma bursts that come from exploding stars? Do you know that Jupiter's circular orbit, which is the largest planet in the solar system, helps the earth maintain a circular orbit that gives us steady temperature and predictable climate?

That Jupiter, Saturn and Uranus have tremendous gravitational pull that draws in comets and asteroids and helps minimise the number that strike the earth? That if the earth's distance from the sun moved 5% either way, we would die.

Oceans would boil off or they would permanently freeze. The sun is just the right mass and emits just the right amount of red and blue light to sustain our atmosphere.

[18 : 31] The moon stabilises the earth's tilt at 23.5 degrees and this is what gives us very mild seasons. And I read tonight that liquid iron surrounds the earth's core, molten iron surrounds the earth's core and its heat is driven by radioactive isotopes going on inside the centre of the earth all the time.

And they create this sort of a dynamo that generates the earth's magnetic field. It's a huge machine. And the magnetic field of the earth protects us from dangerous radiation coming from outer space.

And it stops the solar winds from the sun stripping away our atmosphere. If the solar winds from the sun could touch the earth's atmosphere, the water vapour would just disappear.

We'd be gone. And he's got this wonderful quote. He says, We are, by astronomical standards, a pampered, cosseted, cherished group of creatures.

Our Darwinian claim to have done it all by ourselves is as ridiculous and as charming as a baby's brave efforts to stand on its own feet and refuse its mother's hand. If the universe had not been made with the most exacting precision, we could never have come into existence.

[20 : 00] It is my view that these circumstances indicate that the universe was created for people to live in. Or we turn inward.

That's the macro picture. That's outward. The enormity of the universe and our place in it. If you turn inward and you go, you look at the complexity of life, the molecular biologists who are looking further and further into our cells and they're dazzled by what they see.

They're finding machines in our cells. See, you know, Darwinian evolution, everything builds a little bit on everything else and they're looking into our cells and the tiny detail of our cells and how our molecules look and they see organisation there which needed to be complete for it to work in the first place.

It couldn't have just happened bit by bit. They're blown away by it. It's called irreducible complexity. We are so complex that it couldn't have been like that. That it couldn't have just evolved.

They said that, did you know that every cell in the human body contains more information than 30 volumes of Encyclopedia Britannica? I think in today's terms that's like a gigabyte of information in every cell.

[21 : 16] The late astronomer Fred Hoyle, guess what his theory was? He coined the phrase Big Bang. Big Bang Theory.

And he wrote that it is as likely that life began from random mutations as it is that a tornado blowing through a junkyard could assemble a 747 jumbo jet.

The psalmist looks at creation and he is blown away. The heavens declare the glory of God. The skies proclaim the work of his hands.

Day after day they pour forth speech and night after night they display knowledge. And there is no speech or language where their voice is not heard. Their voice goes out into all the world.

In the heavens he's pitched a tent for the sun which is like a bridegroom coming forth from his pavilion like a champion rejoicing to run his course.

[22 : 19] It rises at one end of the heavens and it makes its circuit to the other and nothing is hidden from its heat. So he looks at creation as we can look at creation tonight and see it as reflecting the work and the glory of its creator.

Some I shouldn't say scientists but some philosophers look at a Bible reading like this and go oh how simplistic. Haven't we come to understand how foolish this is.

The sun going around the earth we all know that the earth goes around the sun. And so you ridicule the scriptures in a way but you've got into taking into account that the Bible writer is like a scientist.

Three thousand years ago he's observing the world and he's using the tools which are available to him. He didn't have satellites he couldn't go away from the earth's surface and observe things from afar.

He described what he saw and it was awesome. and so that the regular daily march of a blazing sun rising across the heaven giving light giving heat to all and going down at the end and he gives glory to our maker.

[23 : 41] Sure his science back there had to be modified along the way but he gave a true description of what he saw at the time. But he goes further because he drew attention to the fact that the creator does not just reveal himself by what he does.

He speaks words and for those with ears to hear he has very specific things to say. It's the second half of this psalm. He changes from talking about creation to talking about the word of God.

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. They give joy to the heart.

The commands of the Lord are radiant. They give light to the eyes. The fear of the Lord is pure enduring forever. The ordinances of the Lord are sure and altogether righteous. They are more precious than gold than much pure gold.

They are sweeter than honey than honey from a cone. And so God is a God who speaks and he speaks through his word the Bible. Francis Bracken's two books he speaks a specific word through the Bible and a more general word through creation.

[24 : 52] If you haven't read the Bible you can see something of what God is like by the creation that he's put us in and who we are and how we're made. But we need to come to the scriptures to find out what God is really like.

Now I've spoken in a really generalised way tonight and some of you may have very detailed learning about some of the things that I know very little about. I'm sure some of you guys and girls have done much better at science than I did at science at school.

You asked me a few questions and you soon find them out of my debts. That's why if you ask me about Schrodinger's equation, I'm doing that. And I said at the beginning that I was unable to talk on a level playing field with my PhD in geology relative who is deeply committed to Darwinian naturalism.

but I was back in the fray when I was able to turn the conversation to Jesus Christ.

See most people will say that Jesus was a good bloke and my friend did but he was quickly out of his depth when I asked him to grapple with who Jesus is.

[26 : 07] So the Bible makes huge claims about Christ and they are closely linked to what I've been talking about tonight. Christians, we have all sorts of debates and arguments about how the creator created it.

But when he comes to Christ, when it comes to Christ, who he is, is not negotiable. John chapter 1 verse 10 says, Jesus was in the world and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognise him.

Huge claim. The creator God stepped into the world and we did not recognise him. It's not the only place in the New Testament that says such a thing.

Colossians chapter 1 verse 15 16. Jesus is the image of the invisible God. the first born over all creation. For by him all things were created in things in heaven and things on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities, all things were created by him and for him.

Very bold claim that Christ is number one in the universe, the creator of everything and everything wonderfully made for his pleasure.

[27 : 45] It's a far bigger claim than Jesus is my mate and just a good bloke. world. And so the Bible over and over affirms an intelligent and awesome creator who has shown his face in the person of Jesus Christ.

And you cannot hold to the majesty of Christ and believe in a world that happened by accident. The ideas are completely incompatible. The Bible makes a huge claim about Jesus Christ.

He was in the world and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognise him. And that's either true or it's not. And if it's not, you can sleep soundly tonight in the knowledge that at the end of your days your molecules will be dust in the ground with no further existence.

But if it is true, you need to know what follows. He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him.

Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, to come into his family.

[29 : 05] And it is through believing in the Lord Jesus Christ that we come into his family and we can be called his children. Not everybody is a child of God. Those who have believed in God's Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, are invited into the family and called his children.

And we inherit all the safety and security that goes with it. We are invited to be much more than creatures of the Creator. We are invited to become his children.

So science and religion, mortal enemies or helpful friends? From a Bible point of view, in the end it depends on where you stand in terms of relationship with Christ.

If you are in the family, science gives us deep appreciation for the work of the Creator. And if you want to stand apart from Christ, we leave ourselves in a position where the Creator holds us culpable for ignoring what is plainly true about him.

Friend or enemy of the Creator comes down to where you stand with Christ. Christ. And you do not need to be a clever scientist to understand that. Amen.