

A Christian View of Science
RMPC Adult Sunday School Class, Fall 2008
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I intend to post the class notes on the class website, as well as links to additional reading and book reviews. The amount of material will depend on the level on interest from class participants.

Lesson 1: Introduction

I. Goals for the class

- (1) To be better equipped to enjoy and understand the glory of God revealed in His creation and the scientific endeavor. (→ God)
- (2) To develop an understanding of science in terms of a Biblical, Christian worldview. (→ selves)
- (3) To have an answer to the following statement: “I could never be a Christian because Christianity is not scientific.” (→ world)

We noted that the objection to Christianity in (3) is a variation of one of the two main classes of objection that our cultures raises against Christianity: the objection from rationalism. The two main objections are:

- a) Rationalism – The only knowledge is scientific knowledge.
- b) Irrationalism – There is no knowledge; all religious claims are merely personal opinion.

We noted that these two classes of objection are fundamentally incompatible, but people often hold them inconsistently at the same time. This two-fold, or “dualistic” feature of unbelieving thought will arise again and again during our class, and we will have more opportunities to discuss this split in the consciousness of modern culture in future weeks.

II. Motivation for the class

(1) **I Peter 1:13** – Prepare your minds for action! This is a call to strenuous intellectual exertion on the part of *all* Christians.

(2) **II Cor. 10:4-5**

- a) Pulling down strongholds and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God. This is the destructive, or negative, aspect of our task: to show that science, which unbelievers envision as one of its chief strongholds against the claims of God and Christianity, is in fact the sole legitimate intellectual territory of Biblical Christianity.
- b) Taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ. This is the constructive, or positive, aspect of our task: to construct a consistent Biblical, Christian view of science.

III. Method

Our method will be *to examine the foundations of science itself*. We will not solve all of the individual problems that present themselves as challenges to Christian belief, such as evolution, the age of the earth, intelligent design, etc. We will instead seek to construct a broad intellectual framework from Biblical principles for the scientific endeavor as a whole. From that foundation, we will have the intellectual resources to thoughtfully address the specific challenges posed by science.

IV. Worldviews

What is a worldview, and why is it important? A worldview is a set of assumptions, beliefs and values that determines how we interpret and live in the world. Everyone has a worldview. These worldviews have consequences in our cultures and in how we live our day to day lives. They also affect how we view science. As Christians, we must prepare our minds for action by being extremely critical of the fundamental assumptions that go into our worldviews.

V. Words

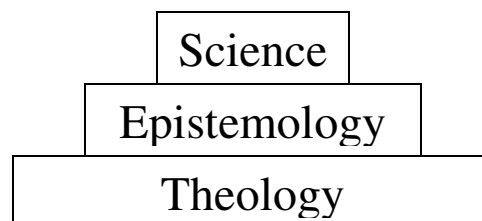
What good are words? The value we attach to words derives from our worldviews. Words are very important. They are vehicles for communicating ideas and meaning. God has revealed Himself in words. As Christians, we must prepare our minds for action by being extremely critical of the meanings and definitions of the words we use. We must not attempt to evade this intellectual responsibility by complaining that we're just "splitting hairs" (inconsequential differences) or that "it's just semantics" (*no* real differences). Words are of ultimate (eternal) importance. Examples were given of the Reformation v. the Roman Catholic definition of justification, "declared righteous" v. "made righteous" and of the historic orthodox v. neo-orthodox/liberal view of the Bible, "listen to the Word of God" v. "listen for the Word of God". In both of those examples, one little word can be the difference between heaven and hell. We noted that the culture in general is suspicious of words: they are primarily used to manipulate and control other people.

VI. Thesis of the class

It is impossible to make sense of science except on the basis of a Christian theistic worldview.

We will spend the next twelve weeks developing this thesis. We do not mean that non-Christians cannot do science and be very successful at it. We are simply claiming that their worldview does not provide the intellectual resources to make science intelligible. We showed the timeline of the Protestant Reformation and the Scientific Revolution, which shows striking historical parallels that will be developed and considered, along with many intellectual parallels, in the coming weeks.

How will we construct this thesis? Science is a human intellectual endeavor aimed at the understanding or knowing of created reality. As a branch of human knowing, it depends on our theory of knowledge, or "epistemology" as it is known formally. Our theory of knowledge in turn depends on our theology, which is the study of God, His Word and His Works. Thus our approach for developing a Biblical view of science will look like this:



VII. Outline for the class and recommended reading

Aug. 31	Week 1: Introduction
Sept. 7	Week 2: Theological Background: God, Man & Sin
Sept. 14	Week 3: Theological Framework
Sept. 21	Week 4: Animal Rights & Christianity (guest lecture by Dr. Mike Rand)
Sept. 28	Week 5: Introduction to Epistemology
Oct. 5	Week 6: A Biblical Foundation for Science
Oct. 12	Week 7: Ancient Science
Oct. 19	Week 8: The Birth of Science
Oct. 26	Week 9: The Scientific Revolution
Nov. 2	Week 10: The Death of Science
Nov. 9	Week 11: The Epistemological Crisis of the West
Nov. 16	Week 12: Historical Challenges to Christianity
Nov. 23	Week 13: 20 th Century Challenges

Recommended reading:

Title, Author	Notes
<i>Redeeming Science</i> , Poythress	Easy; available free at www.frame-poythress.org
<i>The Soul of Science</i> , Percy	Easy
<i>Idols for Destruction</i> , Schlossberg	Moderate; outstanding background to cultural issues
<i>Philosophy of Revelation</i> , Bavinck	Moderate/difficult; available free at books.google.com
<i>The Road of Science & the Ways to God</i> , Jaki	Difficult, but essential philosophical/historical material
<i>Religion and the Rise of Natural Science</i> , Hooykaas	Moderate; good historical material
<i>The Bible, Protestantism and the Rise of Natural Science</i> , Harrison	Moderate; first three chapters are a brilliant historical thesis