



The Think Institute presents

Is There a Conflict Between Science & Christian Faith?

A Brief Guide

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Most Americans Think Science and Faith Are In Conflict

Is there a conflict between science and faith? According to a recent report from Pew Research, "Some 59% of Americans say science and religion are often in conflict, while 38% say the two are mostly compatible.

Is the majority correct? Are science and Christian faith in conflict? It's time to unpack this question. Along the way, We will also answer these questions:

- What are two kinds of invisible, immaterial laws that we must presuppose in order to engage in science?
- What are "induction" and "uniformity in nature," and how do they point to God?
- Where does the Bible teach that God designed the world in a way that points to Him?
- What is the evolutionary argument against naturalism?
- What is the problem of limited knowledge, and how does *it* point to God?

What we're going to see is that *science needs Jesus*. We'll discover this by looking at three things:

1. The invisible laws of math and logic
2. Uniformity in nature
3. The human mind itself.

Math and Logic

First, let us look at math and logic.

The practice of science begins with a belief (or we might say, with *faith*) that there are invisible laws governing the universe.

These are, the laws of logic, and the principles of mathematics. We must assume that these will be consistent over time. For example, a statement can never be both true and false at the same time (logic), and one plus one will always equal two (math).

These laws have attributes which make sense in the Christian worldview, but *not* in the non-Christian worldview.

They are non-physical (or immaterial), unchanging, universally true, and knowable.

Biblical Christianity teaches that God is all these things.¹ So it makes sense for a Christian, who believes in God, to believe in logic and math.

The atheist, however, has nothing in his universe which can "ground" (provide a basis or explanation for) logic and math. Atheists only have matter and energy to work with. And laws aren't made of matter and energy.

If you begin with believing God is there, you get math and logic. If you begin by presupposing that God is not there, you have no reason for expecting to find these things in nature, and no way to account for them.

¹ God is immaterial (John 4:24). God is unchanging (Malachi 3:6). God is universal (Psalm 139:7-10). God is knowable (Ezekiel 33:29).

Instead you must steal from the biblical system of thought to make sense of the world.

Now How Does All This Point to Jesus?

The cornerstone of the biblical system is Jesus Christ. He is the God-man bridging the immaterial and the material. He is the same yesterday, today and forever. He is Lord of all—He is universal! He is knowable—in fact, he came so that we would know God.

Colossians 1:17 says that, "...he is before all things, and in him all things hold together." And Hebrews 1:3 says that Jesus "upholds all things by the word of His power." These laws and principles require a lawgiver, and Jesus fits the description of the kind of lawgiver they need, to a T. In fact, if you start with biblical theology, with the Christian worldview, the invisible laws of math and logic are exactly what you would expect to find.

Science needs these laws, and these laws turn out to need Jesus.

Uniformity In Nature

In order to engage in science, we must presuppose that nature is uniform.

That means that the future will be like the past. So you can take the experiment you did today, and do it tomorrow under the same conditions, and get the same results. It also means that the conclusions you come to today will still be true tomorrow! The future will be like the past.

It also means that unobserved cases will be similar to observed cases. What does this mean? It means you don't have to test every single instance of something. If you drop a bowling ball off the top of 10 buildings, and it falls downward every time, you can reasonably assume that, if you drop it off of 10 more buildings, it's still going to fall.

Inductive Reasoning

We can draw conclusions about the whole world, based on studying a limited number of cases and facts. **This is called *induction, or inductive reasoning*.**

The Bible presents God as the one who "worketh all things according to the counsel of his will" according to Eph. 1:11 (excuse the KJV English) can we make sense of induction.

Why is the future like the past? Because God was God in the past, and God will be God in the future. And God is working everything out the way he wants, and one of the things he wants is for human beings to live in a world in which discovery is possible, which would not be the case in a world without induction.

Jesus Again

The Bible reveals all this. And yet, recall that the very same Bible also reveals that it is by Jesus Christ that God holds the world together and makes things happen the way he wants.

In him all things consist (Col. 1:17). So Jesus Christ is the ontological "glue" that keeps the cosmos from breaking apart and turning to dust, Thanos-style.

Jesus, who holds the cosmos together, is the same one who earned the right to do so, by dying on the cross and conquering death. In doing this he perfectly obeyed his Father and became heir of the world (Heb. 1:2), possessing all authority in the heavens and on the earth (Matt. 28:18).

So here's the point: the problem of induction is solved only by starting with Scripture and its teaching about God. In the same way, uniformity in nature makes sense in the Christian worldview, with Jesus at the helm of the cosmos.

Believing this means believing the Scriptures—the Bible—which also leads you inevitably to the Good News about Jesus—that he is both Lord and Savior. The same Jesus who holds the universe together also became a man to die for sinners like you and me. The wages of sin is death, but Jesus took that death for His people. He rose again on the third day, and ascended to Heaven. The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord (Rom. 6:23). Jesus forgives and gives eternal life to all who receive Him as Savior and Lord.

So scientific truths connect up to some much bigger theological issues. Science needs induction, and induction needs Jesus. So Science needs Jesus.

The Human Mind

Finally, let's talk about the human mind. Did you ever stop to think about how incredible it is to think? Your mind is capable of incredible thinking, and creativity, and design, and memory, and emotion. Your mind is amazing.

Moreover, your mind can think logically—it must, actually. I'm not saying that all your thoughts and mine are always perfectly consistent and logical. But you and I are hardwired to think in terms of things making sense. We seek logical order. When there is a contradiction—a violation of the laws of logic—it bothers us.

Our minds also can think mathematically. Remember how we talked about mathematical laws earlier? Your mind is designed in such a way that the mathematical principles which govern the world also correspond to the mathematical laws in your own mind and thought.

Your mind can also think empirically, scientifically. Your mind is capable of seeking truth by gathering data through your senses (eyes, ears, etc.) and synthesizing it to come to true conclusions about the world.

There is correspondence between your mind, the world, and the invisible laws governing the world.

Atheism?

Which system of thought accounts for this? Does atheism? There are two glaring problems for the atheistic position.

Problem 1: Evolution + atheism = ignorance

Let me tell you about the Evolutionary Argument Against Naturalism. I first learned about this in seminary, through a book by Alvin Plantinga. Others have expressed similar versions of this argument (e.g. C. S. Lewis), but Plantinga's is probably the best known. Here's what it says.

If Naturalism is true, then the strongest explanation for how humans came about is evolution by natural selection, whether as espoused by Darwin or some other, similar version.

As noted atheist scientist Richard Dawkins has said, Charles Darwin made it possible to be an intellectually fulfilled atheist.

However, without God, then all we're left with is chance. If evolution by natural selection was an unguided, un-designed, chance-driven process, then humans are essentially nothing more than self-aware apes. This leads to the problem of the reliability of any belief which homo sapiens may possess.

In other words, if God were not real, then we have no reason to think that our brains (which were not designed by God) are in any way "aimed" at truth. So we can't trust any of our conclusions. And this includes the conclusion that God does not exist.

Dawkins may believe that Darwin made atheism intellectually fulfilling, but Darwin himself had some terrible doubts about this. He called it his "horrid doubt." He said:

"But then with me the horrid doubt always arises whether the convictions of man's mind, which has been developed from the mind of the lower animals, are of any value or at all trustworthy. Would anyone trust in the convictions of a monkey's mind, if there are any convictions in such a mind?"

Vern Poythress highlights the problem of a scientific theory that relies on chance, when he says, "*If it were the case that Chance ruled, science would have irrationality as its foundation. Such is not a desirable platform from which to try to launch a rational claim that we can dispense with God.*"²

So much for intellectually fulfilling atheism!

Problem 2: The Problem of Limited knowledge.

It is simply a fact that we do not know everything there is to know.

This presents a problem for us. It means that, for every proposition we believe to be true, there could be a fact out there in the universe somewhere that contradicts that proposition.

We can never be sure. Which means we can never be certain about anything we know. Which means we can never have *certain* knowledge.

But the question arises: *are you certain about that?*

We are left facing the stark reality that it is impossible to have radical uncertainty about everything—we must have *some* certain knowledge—but how can we account for this? How is this possible, since we don't have all knowledge?

² Vern Poythress, *Chance and the Sovereignty of God* (Crossway, 2014), p. 129.

The only other way to have any certain knowledge is to have it revealed to you by someone who does know everything . In other words, we must receive some knowledge from God.

This brings us to the biblical worldview.

God Designed Our Minds

According to the Bible, God gives us knowledge. And He designed our minds in His image (Gen. 1:17).

He even wants us to use our minds and do science. We learn this from passages like Proverbs 25:2, which says, "It is the glory of God to conceal a matter, and it is the glory of a king to search out a matter."

As astronomer Galileo said, "I do not feel obliged to believe that the same God who has endowed us with senses, reason, and intellect has intended us to forego their use."

God Designed the World

The Bible teaches that God has designed the world such that it points to him. Where does the Bible teach this? Here are two passages: Psalm 111:2 says, "Great are the works of the Lord, studied by all who delight in them." And Psalm 19:1 says, "The heavens declare the glory of God."

Recognizing how creation points to God, Sir Isaac Newton (one of the fathers of science) said, "In the absence of any other proof, the thumb alone would convince me of God's existence."

God is the God of Science. He designed our minds for scientific inquiry, and He designed the world for us to explore scientifically.

The Christian Origin of Science

All this serves to explain why it was the Christian world that sparked the rise of modern science. Other cultures saw impressive mathematical advancements and inventions, but the actual Scientific Revolution happened as a result of Christianity. Christians stood on these biblical teachings and started exploring and testing their world.

Pioneers of science like Newton, Brahe and Kepler were men of Christian faith first, and scientists second.

The late Chuck Colson put it this way:

The belief of Christians in reason—the very meaning of Logos—also drove the scientific revolution. In fact, science itself might never have been invented if not for Christianity’s belief that all the world could be explored for God’s glory, thus initiating the inductive methods essential to scientific advance. It did not develop earlier where it might have, in the civilizations of China and Islam, which possessed sufficient wealth and technical expertise. These civilizations lacked the necessary faith; that human reason could discover the Reason in all things. The great figures of

the scientific revolution, Mendel, Copernicus, Kepler, Galileo, Newton, and Boyle, were all profound Christians.³

Have you ever seen those bumper stickers that say, “If you can read this, thank a teacher?” How about this: if you value science, thank a Christian. Or better yet, **thank Jesus Christ.**

Jesus Again

The same God who made us and made the world, also gave us the Bible. It was that Bible that contained the principles needed for the rise of modern science. But of course the Bible is not primarily a book about science. It teaches about God’s plan to save His people through His Son Jesus Christ. Jesus, the Son of God, features preeminently in the story of the Bible.

In fact, the Bible says in John 1:3 that it was through Jesus that God created everything—including us!

So when Jesus speaks, he speaks as author—meaning he has authority. When he makes a command, we need to listen. And he has commanded us to repent and believe the Gospel (Mark 1:15).

There is no way around it: science requires minds that are designed by God, and yet the same Bible that tells us this also tells us that man suppresses the truth in unrighteousness (Romans 1:18). We don’t interpret the world rightly, because of our sin.

Our sin has us trapped, but only Jesus can set us free.

When a sinner repents (turns from sin) and receives Jesus as Savior and Lord, he is set free to interpret the world rightly.

The Bible says that all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are hidden in Christ (Colossians 2:3). So then, Science needs properly-functioning minds, and minds need Jesus. Science needs Jesus.

Science is not the enemy of Christian faith. Instead, Christian faith is the presupposition that makes science make sense.

So let’s look back at where we’ve been.

- What are two kinds of invisible, immaterial laws that we must presuppose in order to engage in science?
Logic and math. They, like God, are immaterial, unchanging, universal, and knowable. This means they make sense in the Christian worldview, with God as their foundation. But take God out of the picture and replace Him with matter, energy and chance, and suddenly they have no adequate foundation.
- What does "uniformity in nature" mean?
That the future will be like the past. And that unobserved cases will be similar to observed cases. We must presuppose this in order to engage in science. This assumes

³ Chuck Colson, *The Faith* (Zondervan, 2008), p. 214.

that there is a faithfulness, or reliability to the cosmos, that is identical to what the Bible teaches. Take away that biblical teaching, and good luck trying to account for uniformity in nature.

- What is induction, or "inductive reasoning," and how does it point to God?
*Induction is the process of reasoning or drawing a conclusion from particular facts or individual cases*⁴ *It assumes that there is a kind of order to the universe that makes sense if the whole thing is superintended by the God of the Bible.*
- Where does the Bible teach that God designed the world in a way that points to Him?
Among other passages, we can read this in Psalm 111:2, which says, "Great are the works of the Lord, studied by all who delight in them," and Psalm 19:1, which reads, "The heavens declare the glory of God."
- What is the evolutionary argument against naturalism?
If the theory of evolution is true, and there is no God, there is no good reason to think that our minds evolved to know truth.

- What is the problem of limited knowledge?
Because our knowledge is limited. We can't know everything. There could be a fact out there that contradicts everything we think we know. This means we must have revelation from God that we can know some things for certain. This revelation is a foundation for knowledge.

Resources:

- Perception of Conflict Between Science and Religion (Pew Research):
<https://www.pewresearch.org/science/2015/10/22/perception-of-conflict-between-science-and-religion/>
- Science and God, with Lucas Giolas (podcast episode):
<https://thethink.institute/articles/science-and-god-with-lucas-giolas>
- Why Science Needs Jesus (podcast episode):
<https://thethink.institute/articles/why-science-needs-jesus>

Listen to this as a podcast episode at <https://link.chtbl.com/sciencefaith>.

⁴ Webster's New Universal Unabridged Dictionary, Deluxe 2nd ed. (Dorset & Baber, 1983), s.v. "induction."