

## HAS SCIENCE MADE BELIEF IN GOD OBSOLETE?

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**Faith and Reason: Believe Your Beliefs, Doubt Your Doubts**

*2009 Saddleback Apologetics Conference*

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Thank you very much! I'm going to close after that introduction! It's wonderful to be with you this evening.

I have a question: Has science somehow made belief in God obsolete? Has science in one way or the other shown that those of us who believe in God are like people who believe in Santa Claus? That at the end of the day belief in God is really a belief in a fairy tale. And it can only be sustained by people who are needy and emotional and can't withstand serious rigorous intellectual investigation.

Unfortunately a lot of movers and shakers in our culture today believe exactly that. That belief in God has been shown to be unneeded, false and silly by modern science.

For example, recently a professor of biological science at the Ivy League school of Cornell University made the following statement: "Let me summarize my views loudly and clearly. There are no gods. There are no purposes. There are no goal directed forces of any kind. There's no life after death. When I die I am absolutely certain that I am going to be dead and that's the end of me. There's no ultimate foundation for ethics. There is no ultimate meaning to life. And there's no freewill for humans either."

If there is no ultimate meaning of life it's odd that he would take the time to say so. Apparently he thought that that was a meaningful action. But in any case, this is a professor who speaks for a lot of people today who believe that science has somehow shown that belief in God is obsolete.

Unfortunately this is not limited to the upper echelons of the ivory tower, this attitude, and many of you have bumped up against this as you've tried to share your faith with people. This attitude has filtered down into the general culture.

A few years ago *Time* magazine featured a cover story on "How the Universe Will End." When you look at the story it basically says that for centuries and indeed millenniums human beings have wanted to know how all of this would end. But unfortunately the article goes on to say the only way the human beings have advanced in their questions was through philosophy and religion which basically amounts to nothing more than idle speculation. Now for the first time in the history of the human race," *Time* magazine tells us, "science has finally moved in to this area of investigation and for the first time in our history we have finally obtained real, solid answers to our questions about how the universe is going to end."

Do you understand the attitude that is expressed towards science vis-a-vis theology and philosophy in the *Time* magazine article? The idea is that science is the only guide we have to knowledge of reality. And religion and theology and philosophy really amount to nothing but

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idle speculation. In a world where more and more people believe that it will be very, very difficult for them to take the gospel seriously.

So I ask you: Is this true? Is it really the case that science has somehow made belief in God unreasonable and indeed obsolete? For those of us who profess belief in Jesus Christ and in the existence in a supreme being do so largely by an act of blind faith or expression of personal feeling. Is it really true that science has made belief in God obsolete?

It will come as no surprise to you that I profoundly disagree with this sentiment. I would like to give you four reasons why in the next few minutes that we have together. I want to share four reasons why I think it is not true that science has made belief in God obsolete.

1. The claim that science is the only way we can know reality as *Time* magazine put it cannot possibly be true because the claim is self refuting.

Let me say that again: The claim that science is the only way we can know reality cannot possibly be true in spite of what *Time* magazine says because the claim is self refuting.

You say, explain that. What does it mean for something to be self refuting? What does that mean? It means that it basically makes itself false.

For example the sentence, "There are no sentences in English longer than three words," is self refuting. The sentence itself is longer than three words. So the sentence refutes itself, the uttering of the sentence. The statement, "I do not exist," is self refuting. The statement, "I can't speak a word of English," is self refuting. The statement, "There are no truths," is self refuting. And the statement that "There can be no knowledge of reality outside of the hard sciences," is not something that can be known through the hard sciences.

In fact the statement, "We can't know reality outside the hard sciences," is not really the statement of science. It is a statement about science. It turns out it's actually a philosophical statement which says we can't know philosophical statements.

Let me illustrate this.

Years ago I was speaking at an evangelistic event in Baltimore, Maryland. I was told that there was a very vicious atheist who had gotten his PhD from Johns Hopkins University, been an engineer for thirty years, really hated Christianity. The person was going to bring his boss to this evangelistic gathering where I was going to be sharing my faith. I was at the hors d'oeuvre table before the event got going. I saw this gentleman walk in the door with his boss. Sure enough they made a beeline for the hors d'oeuvre table. This friend of mine introduced me to this gentleman.

No sooner did we exchange pleasantries when he said, "I understand that you're a philosopher and a theologian." I said, "I give it my best shot." He said, "Yeah, I used to be interested in that myself... when I was a teenager. But I've outgrown it now because I've realized now that if you can't test it and quantify your data and measure it in a laboratory, it's nothing but a bunch of idle speculation and hot air."

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Ever heard anybody express that attitude? A lot of people have that attitude. That's exactly what I'm talking about.

I let him go for about another two minutes. Then I interrupted and said, "Excuse me, but I have a question. I'm a little bit puzzled. If I understand you correctly, if you can't quantify something in the lab and test it scientifically then the assertion is nothing but idle speculation and a bunch of hot air." He said, "That's absolutely right. I've believed this for a long time." I said, "You've said thirty or forty sentences that have come out of your mouth in the last two minutes and of the thirty or forty things that you've said I can't think of a single thing that can be tested scientifically." I said "If I'm wrong would you show me which statement you've made that is scientifically testable? But if I'm right do you see my dilemma? What you've been saying for the last two minutes is nothing but a bunch of..." He changed the subject very quickly.

But the point is when people tell you that science is the only way we can know things or it's the only thing that's true, that statement can't be true and it can't be known to be true. So statements like this are false.

Science, ladies and gentlemen, is a wonderful gift from God. I'll say that before we close again. But it's only one way of knowing reality. It's important that there are many ways to know reality outside of science. The statement that science is the only way we can know reality is not itself something that can be known by science. And it is a self refuting claim.

That's point number one.

2. Ninety-five percent of science is completely irrelevant to Christianity and ninety-five percent of Christian doctrine is irrelevant to science.

The vast majority of what scientists do has no relevance whatsoever to the Christian religion. I could frankly care less whether water is H<sub>2</sub>O or H<sub>3</sub>O. It doesn't bother me insofar as I am a believer. The chemical composition of a methane molecule, the nature of igneous rock, these are areas of science that have little or nothing to do with Christian theology.

On the other hand debates about whether all the spiritual gifts are still available today or debates about how to understand the trinity or debates between Calvinists and non Calvinists of whether Christ died for just the elect or whether Christ died for everybody are matters of little interest as far as chemistry, physics and science and geology are concerned. You have to understand that the overwhelming percentage of the issues dealt with in theology and in science have little or nothing to do with one another. So ninety-five percent of science is just not of interest to a Christian theologian and conversely.

So not only is the claim that science is the only way of knowing reality self refuting. But the idea that somehow science is showing that the Christian religion is false or superstitious fails to appreciate the fact that virtually all of science has little or nothing to do with Christianity. This is a very, very important point to make. This is why those of you in this room that are engineers and scientists can go about most of your work without being too concerned about what you're doing as far as you're a Christian is concerned. If you're doing an acid based reaction in a

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chemical lab you're going to do it the same way a non-Christian scientist does it. And it won't make that much difference.

There is about five percent of what science claims that does interface directly with Christianity. Ninety-five percent of it doesn't. But there's about five percent, a small percentage, of the beliefs that scientists hold as scientists and the beliefs that thoughtful Christians hold that relate to one another.

What I want to suggest to you is that a large number of that five percent that we discover in science has actually lent support to belief in God. Far from undermining belief in God, a large percentage of this five percent has actually lent support to belief in God.

Let me give you some illustrations.

First of all we now know beyond reasonable doubt that the universe began to exist. By the universe I just mean the sum total of space, time and matter. We now know that the material universe, the sum total of space, time and matter, has not been here forever; that the universe began to exist. There are a lot of reasons why we know this. But let me give you one that I think might be the simplest for us to grasp here this evening.

It involves something called the second law of thermodynamics. The second law of thermodynamics says that in a closed system - that means that in a system that there is no energy and no mass that can come into it from the outside, that in a closed system, the amount of useful energy is constantly being used up. The amount of useful energy is constantly being used up.

For example, this would illustrate it. It's not an entirely accurate illustration but I think it would do for our purposes. If you came in here and you saw a coffee cup sitting up here and you came up and touched the coffee cup and it was still warm you would know that that coffee cup had not been sitting here for fifty years. As a matter of fact you would know that the coffee cup had not been sitting here probably for more than thirty minutes.

Why is that? Because if left to itself the coffee cup is going to cool off. It's going to use up all of its heat energy. All of that useful energy, the energy that can be used to do work, this is called entropy. This useful energy is going to dissipate and it's going to be used up.

Now the universe is like that coffee cup. As a matter of fact in the *Time* magazine article it basically says that a day is going to come far into the future when all the pockets of heat in the universe are going to be entirely cold, that all of the sources of light in the universe are going to burn up and there will no longer be any light that's generated anywhere in the universe. And that the universe is going to slow down to where it will be quiescent or motionless. And that the universe will use up all of its heat energy, all of its light energy and its motion.

Do you see what this implies? If the universe is using up its heat and its light and its motion and if the universe hasn't used that up yet it follows that the universe has not been here forever. Because if the universe had had an infinite past, if it had been here forever, what would have already happened to the heat and the light and the motion? It would have already been used up.

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Since it hasn't been used up yet, that means the universe could only have been running out of energy for a finite period of time. If this is the present moment right here then back here is the past. That means that there was a beginning to the whole show. From that point on the universe has been running out of energy. It is as though, as one scientist put it, it had the entropy or this useful energy put into it from the outside in the very beginning. Or as Ted Koppel said on *Nightline* once, "It looks to me that bangs have bangers." I think that's a reasonable thing to believe.

There's a lot more that can be said about this but I can remember when I first became a Christian having a lot of non Christians tell me that the universe has been here forever. It's always been here. Who created the universe? The answer was nobody. Why? Because it's always been here. It's never had a beginning.

That is not a reasonable thing to hold any longer because now we have a good reason to think that the universe has not been here forever. That it began to exist. One piece of evidence for that is the scientific discovery made years ago of the second law of thermodynamics. Indeed Kelvin and some of the early discoverers of entropy were quick to draw the conclusion that the past had to be finite or else the universe would have already used up all of its energy.

So the universe is like a car with gasoline in it. It's using up it fuel. Since it hasn't used up its fuel it couldn't have been running out of gas forever.

I may run out of gas before this is over with ladies and gentlemen, but hopefully the universe won't do that.

That's the first area of confirmation that science has lent support to belief in God - That the universe had a beginning.

Here's a second piece of evidence that science has lent support to belief in God. This was persuasive to the atheist Anthony Flew. Anthony Flew was probably the leading intellectual defender of atheism for something like for fifty years. No one would laugh at you if you said that he was the intellectual leader of the atheist movement, goes back a half of a century. A few years back he became a believer in God. He's not a Christian yet but he now believes in God. The piece of evidence I'm about to give you was one of the pieces of evidence that was persuasive to him.

I have a friend that I teach with who did his doctorate of philosophy at Oxford University. One day he was walking down a lecture hall at Oxford and he walked past the door of a famous British philosopher, Anthony Kenny. Kenny was actually lecturing on this piece of evidence. He heard Kenny, the famous atheist say, "Frankly I really don't know what to do with this evidence. This is tough for those of us who are atheists to deal with. It's called the fine tuning of the universe."

What scientists have discovered is that there are a number of physical factors that if they were slightly larger or slightly smaller by a billionth or millionth of a percentage point, no life could appear anywhere in the universe. Let me say that again. They've discovered a large number of

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physical factors such that if any one of them was a little larger or a little smaller on the order of a millionth and sometimes a billionth of a percentage point, there could be no life anywhere.

Let me illustrate this.

The charge on an electron. Scientists have been able to measure how much negative charge is on an electron. What they didn't know was if that charge was just a little bit larger or just a little bit smaller there could be no living things anywhere in the universe.

They've made the same discovery for the mass of the proton. They've made the same discovery for the strength of gravity in the universe. If the strength of gravity were just a little tiny bit weaker or just a little tiny bit stronger there could be no living things that were biological in the universe.

The same for the rate at which the galaxies are expanding away from one another. If they were a little bit slower or a little bit faster there could be no living things anywhere in the universe.

Think about it like this. Suppose if you were able to walk into a room and you knew that this room was, miracle of miracles, a universe generator; that this room generated universes. And you went into the room and you looked and there was a panel with thirty or forty dials on it. Each dial was so big. Each dial was covered black and had about five thousand settings but there was one sliver of a setting that was covered red, and the other four thousand nine hundred ninety nine settings were black. You looked at all thirty or forty of these dials and you noticed that every single dial was set to red. You also discovered that if any single one of those dials was in a black area, the universe that it generated would not be able to sustain life. It would only be if all of those dials were precisely set in the red area as opposed to the black area that life could be permissible in the universe that's going to be generated by this room.

That is what we have discovered. We have discovered that life creating universes or universes that would allow life to be present in that universe require the numbers to be very, very delicately selected. Such that if any one of them has been a little larger or a little smaller you get no living things whatsoever anywhere in the universe.

As one very British scientist said, "It looks like the dice were rigged ahead of time." I may be simplistic but I say again, it looks like rigged dice need a rigger.

There's a third area where science has lent support to belief in God. This involves discovery of biological information.

The first piece of evidence I gave was the discovery that the universe began to exist. As my evidence I cited the second law of thermodynamics. The second piece of evidence that I gave from science was the discovery that these factors of nature are very precisely, delicately tuned and balanced so that life could appear. The third factor which I'm going to cover right now is the discovery of biological information.

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How many of you saw the movie *Contact*? It was a movie featuring Jodie Foster. It was about SETI. Jodie Foster was a SETI researcher in that movie. SETI stands for Search for ExtraTerrestrial Intelligence. The search for intelligent life in outer space.

You would assume and this would be a correct assumption that if we were going to look for intelligent life in outer space we would have to have some way of knowing when we discovered it, would we not? What scientists have done is they've drawn a distinction among three things - randomness, simple order, and information.

Let me illustrate.

Suppose I had alphabet soup and I tossed it up in the area and suppose that this alphabet soup had English letters in it, had numbers in it. It scattered all over the podium here. And here was an upside down T, square root of minus one, a T lying on its side, and so on. This would be random.

If you want to tell a computer to generate a random sequence of letters you would give the computer two instructions. One, select any letter. And two, repeat. Do you notice how simple that is? How many instructions is that? Only two. Notice that you would tell the computer to select a specific letter? No. To select any old letter and repeat. So randomness is non specific and it's very simple. Very simple to produce.

Contrast that with simple order. Suppose that I had five hundred MEs in a row. ME, ME, ME and so on. This is not random is it? This is order. How would you tell a computer to generate this string of letters? You could give it three instructions. You'd have to tell it when to stop.

But you could say, Select an M, select an E and repeat. Notice, number one, this again is very simple. It would only take three instructions to tell a computer to generate this. Randomness was two. This is three. That's not very many.

Secondly, it's specific. You would tell a computer to take an M and then an E and then repeat. So it is specific.

Note: third, it is repetitive. You have a little unit that is repeated over and over and over and over again.

Number four, this is a little harder to grasp. But the parts are prior to the whole. Let each part be a ME. How many parts do we have? We have five hundred because I suggested that we have five hundred MEs in a row. So what we have is five hundred little parts where each part is an ME stuck together.

Which came first? Not the chicken or the egg. But which came first, the individual MEs or the entire string of MEs? Which came first? It's pretty obvious that the individual MEs came first. Because the whole is just a string of the individual parts. Does that make sense to you?

Note if we took an ME out. Suppose we came up and we took number seventy-five out so we had one to seventy-four, and seventy-six to five hundred. We just cut a little toothless gap right

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there. If we took number seventy-five out would ME number two hundred seventy-six sitting out here care? Would it make any difference to this ME whether seventy-five was there or not? No. It wouldn't because it would have no knowledge - I'm speaking figuratively here - but it would still be sitting there fine just as it was if we pulled one of these out.

That means that the parts are prior to the whole. If we could remove a part and it doesn't do anything to the rest of the whole that's essential, then the parts are prior to the whole.

The third kind of configuration would not be random and it wouldn't be simple order. But it would be information. An example of this would be "John Loves Mary." Notice to tell a computer to generate John Loves Mary we first of all have to get specific - print a J, print an O, print an H, print an N, print a space and so on. Number two, it's not simple but it's complicated. Instead of two or three instructions this would take fifteen. If it were the Gettysburg address or the book of Romans now we're getting up to a lot of instructions.

Number three, it's not repetitive. Notice in John loves Mary; you don't just have a little unit that's repeated over and over and over again.

And number four, the whole is prior to the part. There are different ways of expressing this but basically the whole would be a thought that I would have, that I would express in English, or in German, and once I have selected the right English sentence, that sentence is adequate if it expresses my meaning. Does that make sense to you?

What if I took a letter out of it and replaced it with another letter. Suppose I had John Loves Mary. Took the M out and put an H in there and have John loves Hary. What we have ladies and gentlemen is a completely different whole. An entirely different whole.

If I put the square root of minus one in there we'd have gibberish. We'd have noise. We wouldn't have a real sentence.

The important point about the SETI research is that they make the following assumption which I believe is a reasonable assumption. Here it is: information can only come from an intelligent mind. So that if they discovered a signal from outer space that was random or simple order as Jodi Foster did in the movie *Contact*, it would not cause any suspicion. But in the movie *Contact*, I believe that she discovered a signal that contained if I'm not mistaken the first twenty prime numbers in a row. That is not random. And it is not order. It is information. She immediately drew the conclusion that this signal was not produced by randomness or by the laws of nature but by an intelligent agent.

Why? Because information only comes from an intelligent mind.

What is sauce for the SETI goose ought to be sauce for the DNA gander. The single most important discovery that biologists have made for decades is that the bodies of living organisms - a frog's body is different from a crystal because a living organism is constituted by information. We talk about DNA and the genetic code and so on. If somebody were to say, Yes but given enough time and given millions and millions of years and given the laws of nature we could generate a DNA molecule. Then the same argument could be used to shut down the entire SETI

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project. Because anytime we discover a signal from outer space like the first twenty prime numbers in a row, someone could always respond by saying, "Don't draw the conclusion that that came from an intelligent agent. It's more reasonable to think that given millions and billions of years and the laws of nature that natural law and randomness would produce that." But no one would draw that conclusion would they? It's hard for me to believe that someone could draw the same conclusion when it comes to the information in a DNA molecule.

So the origin of the universe is backed by the second law of thermodynamics. The fine tuning of the universe I illustrated with the panel and the dials. And a rigged dice seemed to require a rigger. The third is the information that is found in DNA, and scientists themselves assume, and the SETI project. And the information comes from an intelligent agent. That's the most reasonable explanation of it.

Then finally the origin of mind or consciousness.

Consciousness and mind exist. Indeed, I would assume that there's a lot of consciousness going on in this room even as I'm speaking. At least this is my hope, ladies and gentlemen. Indeed my hope is there's as much going on now as was going on twenty-five minutes ago. But, in any case, consciousness is real. Consciousness is mental. Consciousness is disgustingly invisible. You can't see, touch, taste or hear a thought, a belief, a desire, a sensation like an emotion, or an act of will.

I remember years ago when my daughter was in elementary school we were having a little prayer time. She said, Daddy, if I could see God it would be easier to believe in him. I said, Honey the problem is not that you haven't seen God. The problem is you've never seen Mommy. She said what do you mean Dad? Because mom was sitting right there. I said, if we could take Mommy apart cell by cell without hurting her - there are times I've wanted to - don't look so pious out there. I said if we could take her apart cell by cell we could find pieces of mommy's brain. We could say, there's mom's heart or there's her lungs. But we would never run across anything in her brain or her body we could say, So that's what Mom really believes about the Kansas City Chiefs (my favorite team). Or Mom does like the color red better than the color blue. Or Mom's feelings - there's her sadness. And guess what honey? We would never come across any cell in Mommy's body here. We wouldn't run across her *I* or *herself*. Because Mommy's consciousness and her *I* or self are spirit. They're not matter. They're invisible.

So at least Mommy's small enough to have a body. God is too big. Let's pray.

I gave each of my children five thousand dollars worth of therapy their senior year at Biola precisely because of these kinds of incidents.

Here's the problem. If you start the universe with matter and all you do is you take matter which according to the description of matter since what is called the mechanical philosophy in the seventeenth century, since the original Atomus Law, Newton, Boyle and others, our scientific description of matter is that matter does not contain consciousness or the potential for consciousness.

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So if you start with matter, and all you do is rearrange it according to the laws of chemistry and physics guess what you're going to get? Rearranged matter. You're not going to get mind squirting into existence because that's to get something from nothing. That's to get something from materials that don't have the potential to generate it.

Because consciousness exists in us, the most reasonable explanation for the origin of consciousness is that the universe begins with a conscious being. If the universe begins with brute matter there will be no explanation for the origin of consciousness.

Why do I not believe what the scientist from Cornell said? Why do I not believe with *Time* magazine? That science has made belief in God obsolete and our only way of knowing reality is through the hard sciences

One, I think that is false because it's self refuting. The idea that we can only know reality through the sciences is itself something that can't be known through the sciences. It would have to be a mere assertion for which no reason could be given.

Two, most of science, thank God for it, has nothing whatsoever to do with religion. And most of theology has nothing to do with science. There is a small area of overlap. Is that area regularly and systematically hostile to the belief in God? Heavens no. I've just listed four areas where scientific discoveries have lent support to belief in God. Are there areas of difficulty? Yes there are. There's evidence for the theory of evolution. And it's hard to square some parts of the theory of evolution with the early chapters of Genesis. Again, there's evidence for an old universe. I happen to favor an old universe. But for those who hold to a recent universe and the days of Genesis are six twenty-four hour days of creation, that's problem. Again, we haven't found a lot of archeological evidence yet for a universal flood of Noah. And there are other archeological discoveries that have called into question certain teaching of the Bible. Though in my opinion the vast majority of the archeological discoveries have supported the Bible. But are there some that are problems? Yeah. My response is so what. What follows from that? That science as a whole is against a belief in God? No. What follows is we've just got more work to do, that's all.

So what I want to say is I want to set the record straight. Science is actually a friend of Christianity not a foe. And science came from within the framework of the Christian worldview that made sense out of the assumptions of science. Science cannot be the only way we can know reality because the claims that it is cannot itself be known by science. Most of science and most of theology have little or nothing to do with each other. In the small area where they overlap, are there problems? Yes. What follows from that is we just have more work to do, that's all.

But is it always in that small area against belief in God? No. There have been major discoveries and I've listed four of them for you that have actually lent support to belief in God as opposed to being contrary to belief in God.

If you're interested in more of this I've got a CD set called "The Case for Christianity" that's available. I would also encourage some of you to sign up for the Christian apologetics program at Biola University. It is an extremely good program if you would like some more training or you know somebody who would be interested in this kind of thing.

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But let me just say thank you again ladies and gentlemen this evening for inviting me to come and speak on the question of whether science has made belief in God obsolete.

Let's pray together.

Father, thank you that science is a wonderful, wonderful gift, that we don't need to be afraid of it. But indeed we need more believers to go into science. We thank you for it. We acknowledge that the vast majority of what science has discovered is not directly relevant to what we believe as Christians. We acknowledge in that small area of overlap while there are problems, there's a lot of room for rejoicing as well. So, Lord, help us in our work and help us to learn how to be more effective in setting the record straight. For Jesus' sake we ask it. Amen.